

The Matica and Beyond: Cultural Associations and Nationalism in Europe. Edited by Krisztina Lajosi and Andreas Stynen. Leiden: Brill, 2020. 367 pp.

Over the course of the last thirty years, we have seen a growing amount of research in the field of cultural nationalism in Central and Southeastern Europe. Most of these endeavors have aimed to examine, within multidisciplinary frameworks, the complex political, economic, and social roles of the various kinds of cultural activities in the area of great empires and “small nations.” *The Matica and Beyond* is indeed the twenty-first book in the National Cultivation of Culture series published by Brill.

The book is a collection of fifteen works written by cultural historians from all over Europe. The fifteen texts result in a surprisingly consistent volume, as the essays are methodologically and thematically very similar, and they draw on an array of exciting new sources and offer similarly engaging conclusions. The editors of the book, however, faced challenges in combining the essays to form a meaningful whole.

As far as the geographical range of the studies is concerned, the book consists of six manuscripts dealing with cultural organizations in the Habsburg Monarchy, whereas the rest of the papers deal with other European associations, though these organizations and associations all had the same essential purpose: to enhance national and ethnic awareness among members of a certain nation.

In the introduction, Joep Leerssen presents the structure of the book and explains the extent to which the phenomenon of *Matica* has been investigated or marginalized both politically and in the scholarship. Leerssen also calls attention to significant similarities and links in the national movements under discussion and the surprisingly important role of the *Maticas* in linguistic turns and geopolitical changes.

The first essay, Zsuzsanna Varga’s “The Buda University Press and National Awakenings in Habsburg Austria,” is about the roles of publishing in strengthening national consciousness and identity among Slavic peoples. Varga examines numerous books written in vernacular languages and spellings, especially works by Serbs, who played a leading role in the struggle of the Empire’s Slavic nations for autonomy and independence.

Magdalena Pokorna provides the first essay in the collection that offers insights into a *Matica*’s activity. Pokorna offers a detailed discussion of one of the crucial *Maticas* for the Slavs, the Czech one. It is nicely complemented by

“The Slovak *Matica*, Its Precursors and Its Legacy” by Benjamin Bossaert and Dagmar Kročanová. Due to the different political circumstances, these two *Maticas* did not have similar operational policies, but they did have the common aim of establishing stronger connections with the other Slavic nations (Croats, Poles, Serbs, Slovenians, Bulgarians, etc.) in order to achieve greater cultural and national independence in opposition to the dominant German culture. The fourth essay is a short overview by Miloš Řezník of actions taken by Lusatian Serbs, Ruthenians, and Czech Silesians. Řezník offers insights into the ways in which regionalism and nationalism often collided.

Marijan Dović offers an essay on the work of the Slovenian *Matica*, in which he explains how this organization was not just a place for book publishing, but also for self-education and common thinking about issues like the school system and the media culture.

Daniel Barić discusses the emergence of the Dalmatian *Matica* and how it later became part of the Croatian one. Barić claims that “the first maticas were founded in the South Slav area in a time of redefinition of the nation, hence there were competing terms in use” (p.119). He also states that “the multiple engagement of the Croatian maticas mirrors the efforts made to cultivate and celebrate a distinctiveness within a multicultural environment” (p.134). Ljiljana Guschevska’s essay on Macedonian societies details how intellectuals struggled to form a multilayered Macedonian identity.

The essay entitled “Language, Cultural Associations, and the Origins of Galician Nationalism, 1840–1918” deals with the strengthening of language identity, which was meant to be a source of power in boosting nationalism. Philippe Martel offers another example of a struggle for more powerful nationalism through language use in an essay focusing on the “Impossible Occitan Nation.” Martel foregrounds the absurdity of the idea of Occitania due to language and identity anachronisms.

In the Netherlands, in contrast, the rule was one language, two states, and many nations. The essay “Educational, Scholarly, and Literary Societies in Dutch-Speaking Regions, 1766–1886” by Jan Rock deals with three main types of organizations and clubs: philological, intermediating, and non-governmental. These clubs strengthened the language identity of different communities in Netherlands. The author also perceives the similarities with the model of governing the *Maticas*, although “one major difference lies in the political contexts and therefore in the nature of governmental support” (p.204).

The struggle for independence among the Welsh sought cultural and linguistic autonomy rather than political autonomy. Marion Loffler, in her contribution to the volume, presents a nuanced comparison of Welsh cultural nationalism with the aspirations of Slavic people and explains the major differences between pan-Slavism and pan-Celticism. Similarly, Roisín Higgins emphasizes the importance of newspapers in strengthening the Irish nation. She relates the Young Ireland movement with the Illyrian one which began to rise to prominence in the middle of the nineteenth century in Croatia.

Jörg Hackmann focuses in his essay on the roles of school associations in the rise of national consciousness. Through school associations and struggles for language rights in the gymnasiums in bigger, linguistically mixed cities such as Riga, Tartu, and Jeglava, the Estonians, Latvians, and Germans tried to resist the russification of their communities.

Iryna Orlevych presents the activities of a crucial organization which was responsible for cultivating a sense of national consciousness in Austrian Galicia. During almost a century of its existence, *Matica* was a very powerful pillar of the Church and an important element of Galicia's cultural identity. Later, it lost its fundamental role (to strengthen cultural identity) and became a political organization of the Russian Empire.

The last paper in the book deals with specific aspirations of Tatars, among the most marginalized people in the Russian Federation. The author of the paper, Usmanova, examines Tatarian cultural and educational opportunities in Russia, touching on all the obstacles to a possible strengthening of the Russian Tatars' identity.

In a slightly complex conclusion, Alexei Miller claims that "the *Maticas* and comparable organizations were part of the history of European peripheral nationalisms, but they were also a part of the history of Empires" (p.362). Therefore, as Dović formulates it, *Maticas* were the "heart in the body of the nation and [...] literature was its blood" (p.104).

The Matica and Beyond: Cultural Associations and Nationalism in Europe is definitely a unique and successful scientific project which has the novelty to give a detailed overview of the activities and roles of cultural organizations, such as the *Matica* itself, in Central and Southeastern Europe. It unquestionably constitutes a contribution to the secondary literature which will be of interest to historians, sociologists, and scholars of culture, since it concerns a very dynamically developing field and draws attention to an array of intriguing topics, such as the role of individuals in these organizations and the complex

relationship between regional and national identities. The volume is particularly interesting in part because of the way in which it treats key moments and the *Maticas*' key roles in the so-called national awakenings among Slavic nations. Some papers would definitely have been more interesting if they had been accompanied by explanatory figures. Overall, the book offers an overview of and insights into the ways in which the *Maticas* and many other associations, such as councils, clubs, cultural and art societies, and political parties, acted in order to strengthen regional and ethnic components of nations in Europe. The book successfully fulfills its ambition to emphasize in a multidisciplinary way the importance of cultural associations in the political and social histories of "small European nations."

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