Intervju s prof. Veronikom Čapská, izvanrednom profesoricom na Fakultetu humanističkih znanosti Karlova sveučilišta u Pragu i višom znanstvenom suradnicom u Institutu za filozofiju Češke akademije znanosti, te s prof. Jonathanom Singertonom, docentom na Sveučilištu u Amsterdamu / Interview with prof. Veronika Čapská, Associate Professor at the Charles University in Prague and a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, and prof. Jonathan Singerton, a Lecturer in European History at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands

U rujnu 2022. Poslijediplomski doktorski studij predmoderne povijesti Odsjeka za povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta u Zagrebu i projekt Hrvatske zaklade za znanost *Europski korijeni moderne Hrvatske: transfer ideja na političkom i kulturnom polju u 18. i 19. stoljeću* organizirali su 6. znanstveni kolokvij iz serije *Modeli i iskustva intelektualnog transfera u razdoblju (proto)modernizacije* pod nazivom Što je novo u ranomodernoj povijesti Habsburške *Monarhije?*. Uz domaću povjesničarku Teodoru Shek Brnardić (Hrvatski institut za povijest), koja je dio svojega dugogodišnjeg rada predstavila u izlaganju *Što je to katoličko prosvjetiteljstvo? Pristupi istraživanju na primjeru zagrebačkog kanonika Baltazara Adama Krčelića*, organizatori su pozvali i češku povjesničarku Veroniku Čapská (Karlovo sveučilište u Pragu), koja je svoj rad predstavila u temi *Textual practices and collaborative agency in Central Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, te britanskoga povjesničara Jonathana Singertona (tada University of Innsbruck, sada University of Amsterdam), koji je u izlaganju *Towards Global Histories of the Habsburg Lands, ca. 1500-1900* predstavio i dio rada na svojoj nedavno objavljenoj knjizi *The American Revolution and the Habsburg Monarchy* (2021.). Tim povodom razgovarala sam s gostima koje smo imali priliku slušati u Zagrebu. Osim o inspirativnoj istraživačkoj praksi, problemima s kojima se suočavaju istražujući transnacionalnu i transkulturalnu povijest, Veronika Čapská i Jonathan Singerton govorili su o teoriji u historiji te nužnosti bavljenja javnom poviješću. Naposljetku smo se osvrnuli na njihovu viziju ili želje za historiju i humanistiku u budućnosti.

T. K.: Dear professor Čapská and prof. Singerton, first of all, thank you both for agreeing to participate in this interview after your highly inspirational lectures at the scientific colloquium "What is new in the early modern history of Habsburg Monarchy" in Zagreb.

V. Č.: Thank you for this valuable opportunity to meet the community of historians in Zagreb.

J. S.: Thank you very much for the invitation to be here.

T. K. Professor Čapská, you have extensively researched textual practices and opened completely new horizons in our knowledge of production and consumption of the written word. And, prof. Singerton, you have admirably shed light on the early relations between the Habsburg Monarchy and the United States. Please tell us, what drove you to this research and what you find most intriguing and challenging about it.

V. Č.: I was inspired by cultural anthropology which tends to emphasise the voices of people on the margins. Certain established concepts, such as literature or literary practices, do not allow us to analyse the various forms in which "outsiders" or people without formal university education engaged with texts. Therefore, in my habilitation monograph "Between Texts and Textiles" (Mezi texty a textiliemi) I have elaborated the concept of textual practices which enable to study a broad spectrum of textual activities, such as reading, writing, translating, editing, textual patronage or exchanges of texts as gifts. Many early modern people who did not receive university education, including women, servants, artisans or adolescents, engaged in a number of these textual activities and combined them. In my habilitation monograph I have focused mainly on the textual practices of the (Swéerts-)Sporck women but I see this approach as a way to broaden the scope of historical actors whom we may study as textual practitioners and also as a way to better understand the processes of textual (re)production, dissemination and consumption. Currently, I analyse a corpus of correspondence by an early modern female housekeeper who had to deal with the economic and military challenges of the Thirty Years War. And I find it intriguing that often we can observe the empowerment and satisfaction that the early modern common people found in the more humble forms of textual practice.

The focus on textual practices also prompts us to move beyond the long established western ideal of single handed authorship which has long cast light mainly on canonical works of "big" (and often male) authors. I am particularly interested in the textual practices of correspondence and translating which can be regarded as shared or collaborative practices and help us understand how oftentimes there were multiple hands at play and the authors reacted to earlier stages of textual production. Moreover, historians frequently face the situation that the sources they

work with are preserved in a certain stage of textual production – as drafts, copies, fragments etc. This aspect should make us more sensitive to the ways we understand and conceptualise agency – as shared, collaborative and situated in the web of social relations, rather than as characteristics of strong individual actors.

J. S.: We should always seek to find something new in the past, especially about events that often seem already well known to us. My book approaches a familiar event, the American Revolution, from an entirely different angle; one that we might not imagine, and few have ventured to examine in any real depth. As I lived in Vienna years ago, I simply wondered what the American Revolution meant for people from this part of the world. My quest to find out led to this book and allowed me to rediscover many forgotten stories, individuals, and moments crucial to understanding the wider context of the United States' revolutionary founding.

A particularly memorable challenge of writing this book was the fact that early US-Habsburg relations were so multifaceted. The American Revolution represented an ideological moment for people in the Habsburg lands, but it was also a commercial opportunity as well as a diplomatic conundrum. Weaving together these strands posed a continual mental exercise in how to balance the various meanings and interpretations of an event too often reduced either to its wartime or rhetorical hallmarks.

T. K.: What connects both of your research are transnational and transcultural history. How can historians force themselves to go beyond the framework of national history and how did you personally manage to force yourself to think transnationally? What are the average obstacles you encounter in such research and do you have any advice for overcoming them?

V. Č.: While our colleagues who work in contemporary or modern history employ the label "transnational history", for the field of early modern and Central and Eastern European history, I prefer the term "transcultural history" and regard it as more suitable. I am sceptical that the modern category of nation should or could easily be transferred to pre-modern history because it has different characteristics and baggage it carries with itself. Moreover, in Central and Eastern European languages the semantic scope of "nation" and "nationalism" is more narrow and specific than in English. Martin Müller has recently voiced that Central and Eastern European history writing should not serve as a guinea pig for assessing the validity of western concepts and hypotheses but that specialists on these regions should be more ambitious in formulating their own research concepts and frameworks.

I think that today many historians turn to relational and comparative histories as they perceive the need to move beyond the national framework, so we do not

have to worry about how to force ourselves to practice transcultural histories. I believe, however, that we need intensive discussions on how to write more (dis) connected histories of (East-)Central Europe that take into account both the glocal connectivities/interactions and the obstacles to the processes of cultural transfers and exchanges.

J. S.: I believe scholars of the Habsburg Monarchy are inherently transnational practitioners because of the complex history of the Habsburg lands in central Europe and elsewhere. For me personally, it was clear that in writing a history of the Habsburg Monarchy and the American Revolution, one had to indeed include an expansive rather than restrictive view of the Monarchy and its composite parts. It was for this reason that I consciously set out to include details, stories, and angles from all corners of the former Habsburg lands from Trieste to Transylvania, from Brussels to Budapest. We must after all remember that these lands at the time of the Revolution included the Austrian Netherlands (mostly Belgium today), parts of Northern Italy, and Tuscany in addition to the more familiar landmass in the heart of Europe. While we already had many bilateral studies on various successor state connections to the American Revolution, the sum is greater than its parts and what occurred in certain regions of the Habsburg Monarchy could affect others. Given this, I embarked from the outset to include a holistic view of the Monarchy – not just centred upon the court's reaction in Vienna. Bringing together archival material from nearly fifty institutions across Europe and the United States demonstrated not only the wide geographic impact of this relationship but also the very institutions themselves, from private stately homes to national archives in capital cities, made me aware of how transnational history also requires one to travel physically beyond the ordinary archival locations. In some cases this proved challenging with other commitments, but it paid off in allowing me to discover wholly unexpected sources in local archives. Acquiring a new language (or brushing up on one) is an absolute necessity in this endeavour, and not just if you happen to be a scholar of the Habsburgs. History behoves us to expand our horizons and to learn beyond our comfort zones–even in the seemingly Anglophone world we inhabit today.

T. K.: Could you tell us a bit more about concepts that you use in your research or your new findings? How do these concepts and findings impact what we know about the past? And, how can historians use these concepts and findings in new research?

V. Č.: I believe that both Jonathan and I are concerned with various ways of dynamizing early modern Central European history and with studying it as connected and disconnected but certainly not enclosed in the compartments of national histories. I also build on my intimate familiarity with the challenges faced by scholars based at research institutions in the post-communist countries and

on the dialogues with fellow cultural anthropologists who often tell me that we should not torture ourselves over our limited possibilities to crisscross the globe in search of archival sources. Moreover, this academic practice has increasingly become seen as not very sustainable. Cultural anthropologists, just as historians, can do virtuoso work by revaluating the intersections of the local with the global and by focusing on internal frontiers and the Others that arrived at people´s doorsteps, such as, indeed, the Thirty Year War soldiers with their military sociolect, or travellers, refugees, members of the Jewish diaspora, Muslim converts etc. There are certain aspects of global history which I perceive as problematic (and not only myself). Global history sometimes gives an impression of an elitist project in its focus on cosmopolitan social strata (and lack of reflection of the problematic concept of cosmopolitanism, as cultural anthropologists would agree). Global histories can be more easily practised from privileged institutions than from epistemic (semi-)peripheries. They tend to neglect those left behind or not free to move, as we often found in pre-modern (East-)Central Europe, indeed.

I am therefore concerned with redefining relational histories and with broadening their scope, so that they would entail not only mobilities of people and objects but also other forms of transcultural interaction, such as translation, interpreting, exchange or mixed marriages, mixed possessions, interactions with local Others etc.

J. S.: The book begins with a favourite finding: the baptism of a young boy in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna who was named after three American revolutionaries. But it's a close call. Describing the moment when the Habsburg representative in the United States met with members of the Oneida Nation to scout out potential trade deals is a fascinating encounter. Runners-up include the British ambassador in Vienna leading his delegation to publicly pray for British victory when all seemed lost; American pirates stealing a ship and abandoning it in the main harbour of the Austrian Netherlands (but not without taking the liquor first); the scores of imperial courtiers who planned to emigrate to the United States after the war, and an Austrian monk who composed a play about the effects of the American Revolution. All these discoveries during my research, I hope, demonstrate not only the influence of a seemingly distant event such as the American Revolution had in the Habsburg lands, but also the varied ways in which revolutionary moments could impact a region. It reflects the increasingly expansive understanding of the American Revolution and the history of reception in general. I also hope it speaks to those interested in reimagining the Habsburg lands as a space of continual global interaction. After all, my work forms part of a wider push to reveal the ways in which worldwide events, ideas, and individuals could transfigure central Europe.

T. K.: Prof. Čapska, for six years you have served as an Editor-In-Chief of the peer-reviewed scholarly journal *Dejiny-Teorie-Kritika*. I think that self-reflection and self-criticism are the best signs of maturity and value in the field. In that direction, please tell us, why is theory important and can it somehow have a negative impact on historical work and historiography?

Prof. Singerton, I have the same question for you but regarding public history. Does every historian have to be a public historian and can public history have somehow a negative impact?

V. Č.: Leading the journal *Dejiny –- Teorie – Kritika/History – Theory – Criticism* between 2015 and 2021 was a responsible mission and I am grateful to my colleagues from the editorial board that they supported me as I navigated this Central European flagship of historical theory and critical reflection towards becoming a bilingual English-Czech journal and achieved its indexing in the Scopus database. Many wonderful colleagues, especially Martin Nodl, Ewa Domanska, Michal Kopeček, Lucie Storchová, Pavel Himl, Anton Tantner or Eugen Zeleňák have been indispensable in sharing their expertise and experiences in our regular editorial board meetings. The journal is very open to the international academic community and Charles University supports it as its display window (and we take pride in not having an automated/machine submission). I and other editorial board members see the theoretical reflection as an integral aspect of historian´s work. While the archival work is a matter of historian´s craft, the theoretical reflection brings us in the necessary dialogue with other disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy, cultural anthropology, literary science/textual scholarship and many other. It makes us realise that we can learn much from each other across disciplines as we, for example, study the moral panic connected with migration, stereotypes against the LGBT people or early modern witchcraft. In the good academic practice the theory is discussed and it is subject to the peer review check, so I would not overly worry about a negative impact on historiography if we cultivate high standards in the field.

J. S.: An excellent question for our times today! Personally, I have always regarded history first and foremost as the most innate subject within the humanities. Telling stories, questioning who we are, where we come from and where we are going forms the bedrock of what it means to be human. History is the story of humanity – past, present, and future – and so much more at the same time. It is only right then, that we should seek to share what we learn, discover, and think about the past with those who are interested in it – to those who would gather around the campfire of the mind as it were. When I was younger, I thought finishing a book would mean the final stage in a research project, but I came to realise that it is only the start and sharing what is now known is the real journey of a scholar's work. For this reason, I have always happily engaged with those who wish to bring the past alive via all media (sound, light or print), and even within

the last few months, I have talked to public audiences about my book as part of this effort. Yet, as you rightly question too, such actions can have a negative effect on society. The past, as we can witness in so many ways today, can be abused and misused for certain agendas. As history is fundamentally a reductionist act and limited by erosion of time, all choices before us remain subjective and we must be aware of them before we seek to publicise, explain, and debate openly.

T. K.: Finally, in your opinion what are the pressing problems of humanities and history today? What problems are we facing today and what problems are we not facing while we should be? Where do you see history and humanities in the future, in 20 years maybe?

V. Č.: I see the communication with other disciplines and the popularisation of research results as important tasks. Historians have clearly proven many times that their contribution is indispensable and that history is by far not an archaic, useless field of study (as it may sometimes be presented in the discussions on education reforms). In dialogue with other disciplines we can and should be able to historicize the phenomena of pressing interest. Historians, and especially historians of gender, body or economic historians, have for example, succeeded in exposing the myth of the so-called traditional family showing that "patchwork" families were very common in the pre-modern past as, for example, widowhood and orphanhood were common experiences. It was not rare to be an illegitimate child. In fact, just recently my husband Martin and I have inspected registers of births for the city of Plzeň/Pilsen and have found out that at the end of the Thirty Years War there were three types of registers kept: one for the children of burghers, the other for inhabitants without burgher status and the third for children of local mercenaries who were often born out of wedlock and for other illegitimate children. There were so many illegitimate children born at that time that the burghers increased exclusionary pressures and achieved a separate record keeping.

Similarly, gender and economic historians, along with cultural anthropologists, have shown that we should not presuppose any natural gender roles. From the historical perspective, when we look at the majority of the population, especially common rural people, all family members had to partake in economic production, agricultural and other, in order to sustain themselves. In other words, common women were not bound predominantly to the sphere of home, as it was of pressing importance to secure livelihood. These examples show that historians have much to contribute to other disciplines and can provide their answers to questions that resonate today.

In the future we may become more flexible in terms of specialised training. As many students come to history with less typical trajectories and paths than

before, we should be better prepared to allow them to acquire artisanal skills in paleography, diplomatics, Latin or digital humanities at various stages of their professional training and development. That is one of my dreams. But I dare not to predict whether that may become more common, although we see a tendency towards the support of micro-certificates and lifelong learning.

J. S.: In addition to the points we've raised above, I think we face an ever increasing challenge towards finding, defending, and prizing truth in our societies. We must remain vigilant that the safeguards protecting objectivity – whether it be in sciences or the arts – are always upheld even in the face of misinformation and those who would willingly wield historical knowledge for short-term gain. This issue is of course nothing new and has raged throughout humanity's long story, but each age – and every practitioner of the historical craft – must respond to this central duty at the heart of our discipline. Coming down closer to reality, there are so many current challenges within academia that we are simultaneously facing and perhaps unable to face directly. We can think of the decline of the humanities in terms of popularity compared to STEM or we can turn our minds to the stark precarity confronting so many academics today. In thinking of now and in the future, we must understand that lofty ideals about studying the past simply will not do; the day-to-day circumstances of actual practitioners also demands our attention and solving inherent insecurity within the research system will be one of the most pressing and urgent issues of our generation. Looking forward, then, I cannot predicate what we may be capable of solving or not solving. I am reminded with this question of that famous saying, historians should stick to the foreign country of the past and leave predicting tomorrow for the journalists, pundits, and philosophers.

Tihana Kušter