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MEETING REPORT

# CEHC Prize Citations

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In October 2024, the first call for papers was made public, inviting scholars from all stages in their career to apply to participate in the first CEHC to be held at the University of Vienna in July 2025. The deadline for submissions was set for 31 January 2025. In those four months between announcement and deadline, no one had any idea what was going to come of it all. What if no one applied? What if only certain branches of scholars applied? The what ifs were so many it's silly to relive them all. But what is pleasant to relive is seeing the enormous interest among all geographies, chronologies, and professional levels to participate in the convention. Almost 500 submissions were received and then the heart-wrenching work began to select participants. To ease the pain of it all, decisions were made to ask the more senior scholars who had applied to serve as discussants or chairs if possible. And, presto! The convention was regeared as a forum for bringing emerging scholars into the spotlight, with the more experienced scholars taking on the role of asking questions, providing advice or insight, and leading broader discussions to bridge the individual papers into ever bigger interventions. To include as many as possible, it was also decided to hold five parallel sessions for each time slot, excepting the keynotes and roundtable on Pieter Judson's work.

Part of this spotlighting of junior scholars was the creation of an infrastructure to help connect really exciting work of emerging scholars with journals that might be interested in pursuing publication. But there was one hitch in this scheme: how can you scout fifty-five, mostly parallel panels? The answer we devised was to enlist a diverse crew of senior scholars known for their experience in working with tier-1 journals to act as scouts during the convention. Twenty senior scholars were enlisted and given very simple instructions: go to as many panels as you can and then drop us a line if you heard anything "new" (not published yet) and particularly exciting that seemed like it could be converted into a first-tier article. About a week after the convention ended, the emails began flowing in. In the end, almost ninety papers were recommended. Peter Becker and Dominique Reill then compiled the list and sent it to dozens of journals known for publishing on topics linked to Central European History. Authors were also notified that they had been mentioned by the scouts that their papers had been particularly appreciated. They were also invited to submit their papers for consideration for a convention prize if they could confirm their submission fit the following conditions: (1) the author was within five years of completing their PhD and (2) the material of the paper had not yet been published.

In the end, close to forty prize submissions were received and a committee was put together made up of twelve members spanning nine time zones. All these members read and ranked the submissions and then met on Zoom to make the final selections. The conversation was long but incredibly jovial: though it was hard to choose winners, there was something so inspiring about reading so many fascinating papers in so many different fields by the next generations of scholars who would soon take the reins in Central European Studies. After much back and forth, a final group of winners was chosen, five to be precise. All of them posed an important research question, proved analytically

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interesting, and excited the prize committee to imagine what they would look like as articles in a top-tier journal. It was in light of that last element—the curiosity about what these papers would reveal as top-tier journal articles—that the contours of the prize were also decided. The prize would not just be symbolic (being bestowed the title "Prize Winner") or monetary (500 Euros); it would also be a mentorship prize. Peter Becker and Dominique Reill then sent off a flurry of emails to secure three well-respected and experienced mentors for each prize winner (outside their already established networks) to help guide and offer advice on how to convert the paper into something that would get published, ideally in the journal of the author's choosing. Winners were contacted in November and put in touch with their mentors. At the time of this writing, we hope the winners—Evelyn Knappitsch, Svit Komel, László Mika, Anna Molnár, and Ben Van Zee—are benefiting from the support of these mentors to help make their ambitions come true. We cannot wait to read the published versions to come. In fact, we cannot wait to read the published versions of all the submissions we received: they were all so good.

To learn more about the winners' projects, below are the abstracts the authors provided with citations provided by the committee on why these papers proved particularly worthy of note and support.

## On the Trail of Words. Censorship, "Human Intelligence" and Early "Data-Mining" during World War I

Evelyn Knappitsch
*University of Graz*

**Abstract:** During World War I, postal censorship took on unprecedented dimensions. Presumably for the first time in its history, the sheer volume of incoming prisoner-of-war correspondence enabled a form of mass surveillance, legalized through exceptional clauses, which in the Habsburg Empire went far beyond the persecution of individuals by collecting metadata on both the domestic population and that of the enemy. At the Vienna censorship office of the *Gemeinsames Zentralnachweisbüro*, intellectuals, scientists, and artists developed a data-mining system through interdisciplinary collaboration. Its "algorithms" were not yet designed for AI or machine learning, but in principle, they operated similarly, relying on the "human intelligence" of more than a thousand censors.

**Citation:** This brilliant presentation—both rhetorically sophisticated and impressively crafted—frames an information-technology argument with contemporary reflections on censorship practices. Particularly effective is how Knappitsch places the "blue pencil" of editing, commenting, and cutting at the center—a euphemism for surveillance and the suppression of free speech. Her argument offers a genuinely original perspective on censorship by focusing on the practices of information processing. These practices are examined from the vantage point of today's data-mining algorithms, revealing a fascinating convergence between traditional administrative tools—such as detailed instructions for as many as 1,000 multilingual censors—and modern information-management techniques developed in the sciences. In her conclusion, Knappitsch highlights the parallels and divergences with computer-assisted text analysis, demonstrating how the censorship office was able to combine hermeneutic reading with quantitative methods to striking effect.

## Surveys and Transformation of Property in the Habsburg Empire

Svit Komel
*University of Ljubljana*

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the particular form of governmental and scientific practice developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, called "the survey." The common object of such surveys was to produce systematic accounts of local phenomena, practices, and practical knowledge, like proprietary boundaries, customary rights, qualities of animals and lands, air pressure, and regional

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measurement units. These surveys were often, but not exclusively, directed by states and employed a mixture of experts, civil servants, military personnel, as well as local informants. This paper demonstrates how such surveys could be used as an effective technique of changing local social relations, habits, and daily life by considering the influence of the Franciscan cadastral survey (ca. 1817–43) on the "land relief" or *Grundentlastung* (1848–53)—the reform which abolished feudal land tenure in the Habsburg Empire and introduced a unitary and exclusive form of land property. Examining the work of cadastral surveyors illustrates how they prepared the ground for the later reform of property relations by mapping peasants' "knowledge of local land features, proprietary and municipal boundaries, agricultural routines, and staple products." Of particular focus is how cadastral surveyors divided and compartmentalized the landscape into parcels—geometrically demarcated and cartographically represented pieces of land surface. The parcel soon became the only form in which land could figure as an object of property rights, which facilitated the enactment of a unitary and exclusive notion of land property. This also favored the abolition of timber, pasture, and other communal land rights because resources could generally no longer constitute an independent object of property. Consequently, peasant rights were mostly redefined as easements, while ownership of forests and pastures was attributed exclusively to former manorial lords. This case shows how Habsburg administrators relied on a particular manner of producing knowledge about the local to materially transform both the environment and the social relations in which people reproduced their life.

**Citation:** This outstanding presentation offers a profoundly original conceptualization of the survey as a distinctive form of power and knowledge production in the Habsburg Empire. Rather than treating the Franciscan cadaster as a purely technical enterprise, it understands the survey as a practice of translation within a highly asymmetric setting, where local practices, property rights, and ways of knowledge are inventoried, classified, and, ultimately, changed. The presentation shows with exceptional analytical precision how surveyors relied on the collaboration of local actors to produce standardized representations making local realities legible to the central authorities. The discussion of parcellation is particularly compelling and reveals how the cadaster's seemingly neutral classification practices dissolved older forms of customary ownership and imposed a new, surface-based conception of property that would fundamentally reorder rural life. By revealing the survey as an ongoing negotiation between expert instructions, situated judgments, and regional understandings, the work significantly enriches our comprehension of how modern knowledge regimes are built, from top-down and bottom-up, with long-ranging consequences few understood at the time (or today).

## Competing Cis- and Transleithanian Historical Visions in the Kronprinzenwerk (1885–1902)

László Mika
*Humboldt University, Berlin*

**Abstract:** This paper investigates Austro-Hungarian dualism in practice, in a space where the cultural and the political intersect. Stakeholders in the post-1867 imperial state—foremost among them the ruling Habsburg dynasty—were in a constant hustle to keep pace with the myriads of *shifting group loyalties* its citizens could choose from based on linguistic, cultural, confessional, class, or ethnic heterogeneities. Against these centrifugal forces of difference, Crown Prince Rudolf (1858–89) and his working circle attempted to offer an alternative vision of imperial unity in diversity with the massive cultural project, the book series *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Images*, commonly known as the *Kronprinzenwerk*. Difference instead of unity crept in as the work's major feature from the earliest phases of the editorial process, when the two working offices in Vienna and Budapest presented competing understandings as to how the state and its history should be represented. Blending the methodologies of cultural and intellectual history, using archival sources and the under-researched Hungarian-language version of the *Kronprinzenwerk*, this paper asks: how did the Cis- and Transleithanian

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parts of the empire negotiate their contending state ideas and visions of history? To answer that question, special attention is given to "The Zeissberg-affair," the editorial conflict flaring up about the long historical essay on the Habsburg monarchy written for the *Kronprinzenwerk* by Heinrich von Zeissberg and translated/reworked into Hungarian by Ignác Acsády. By analyzing the internal sources of the dispute and providing a deep reading of the two versions of the published text, wider conclusions are drawn about what dualism meant for participants in the state-making process that help elucidate further why the Kingdom of Hungary seems such an "ill-fitting wheel" for newer master narratives on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

**Citation:** This outstanding presentation offers a fresh and conceptually incisive perspective on a classic problem of Habsburg historiography: the relationship between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the monarchy and the strategies through which Hungarian elites asserted sovereignty after the Ausgleich. Its original empirical point of departure is the *Kronprinzenwerk*, a publication initiated by Crown Prince Rudolf to promote an image of imperial unity rather than national division. Through a sophisticated comparative analysis of the German and Hungarian versions of this work, the presentation uncovers the coexistence of two distinct—and competing—historical narratives. In doing so, it provides a compelling insight into the political uses of history, whether in support of an Austrian Reich encompassing all Habsburg lands or in reinforcing claims to Hungarian sovereignty. The conceptual strength of the contribution lies in its understanding of dualism not as a fixed constitutional arrangement but as an ongoing process of political and intellectual negotiation. By illuminating the everyday mechanics of compromise in the late empire and the central role of historians in shaping them, the presentation makes a richly sourced, methodologically sophisticated, and incisively argued contribution to the study of Habsburg political culture and imperial knowledge production.

## Private Banking Activities of Female Religious Organizations in the Later Middle Ages

Anna Molnár
*King's College London*

**Abstract:** This paper explores the evolving financial role of female religious institutions in late medieval Vienna, focusing on their emergence as significant actors in the private credit market between 1367 and 1450. Drawing on a dataset of over 2,000 annuity contracts from the city's manuscript sources (*Grundbücher*), the study examines how convents transitioned from borrowers to active creditors, ultimately functioning as proto-banking institutions. The study also situates this development within the broader context of post-Black Death demographic recovery, shifting gender norms, and declining lay female financial agency. The analysis highlights the strategic adaptability of female religious organizations, their legal continuity, elite patronage, and spiritual services as key assets in building financial credibility. By tracing the rise of convents as lenders and their growing market share, the presentation challenges traditional narratives of female economic decline and offers new insights into the intersection of gender, faith, and finance in medieval urban economies.

**Citation:** This brilliant paper makes an outstanding and innovative contribution to the economic and gender history of the later Middle Ages by fundamentally rethinking the role of female religious institutions in urban credit markets. Drawing on an impressive and original dataset of over 2,000 annuity contracts from late medieval Vienna, it demonstrates with great clarity and methodological rigor that certain convents functioned as sophisticated institutional lenders—effectively operating as proto-banking organizations. Conceptually ambitious and empirically rich, the paper combines quantitative analysis with close qualitative readings to illuminate how the fusion of gender, faith, and finance enabled female religious communities to consolidate capital and provide credit at scale. Particularly striking is its demonstration of how convents filled the vacuum left by the expulsion of Jewish lenders in 1420, thereby

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stabilizing local financial systems while simultaneously offering spiritual returns. By integrating gender, finance, religion, and urban history into a single, coherent analytical framework, this work sets a new standard for the study of medieval economic institutions and exemplifies the very best of interdisciplinary historical scholarship.

## A New Galicia in Brazil: The Impact of Habsburg Federalism on Polish Colonial Thought

Ben Van Zee
*European University Institute*

**Abstract:** Around 1890, a handful of Galicia-based Polish nationalists began promoting the organized colonization of Brazil. By encouraging migrants to expand the Polish-speaking community in the state of Paraná, they proposed creating a "New Poland" in South America. However, around the turn of the century, Lviv's expansionists gave their *Nowa Polska* program a significant makeover. They jettisoned the aim to forge an independent settler polity, recasting their political designs as an effort to gain Polish cultural autonomy within Brazil's federal state system. This paper argues that the parallel rise of demands for national autonomy and federative reforms in late imperial Austria conditioned this federalist turn in Polish colonial thought. The pursuit of Galicia-style national autonomy both distinguished Polish colonial ambitions from contemporaneous German, Italian, and Japanese imperial projects in South America and remained a key current of Polish expansionist thinking into the interwar years. The history of Polish colonial thought thus reflects the Habsburg Empire's lasting imprint on the Polish political imaginary, both at home and abroad.

**Citation:** This is a brilliant paper that makes a compelling contribution to the currently vibrant field of "Global Austria": Rather than attributing the influence of the Habsburg monarchy on colonial expansion in South America merely to the growing presence of Habsburg subjects in Brazil, the paper convincingly identifies the formative impact of Habsburg political culture on Polish colonial thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moving decisively beyond established interpretations that privilege German or Wilsonian influences, it demonstrates with remarkable clarity how ideas of national autonomy and federalism—developed in the political laboratories of late imperial Austria—were transposed to the Brazilian context. Methodologically sophisticated and richly sourced, the paper excels in showing how Polish colonial activists mobilized Galician experiences—language politics, electoral strategies, and models of national coexistence—as both analytical frameworks and practical blueprints for political action in South America. In doing so, it opens new perspectives on the global afterlives of imperial political cultures and their capacity to shape political imaginaries far beyond Europe. This is an exemplary piece of scholarship that significantly advances debates in Central European history, global imperial history, and the study of nationalism.

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