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**Leo Valiani's *La Dissoluzione dell'Austria-Ungheria* in
Historiographical Context**

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It is a truism of the history of east-central and south-eastern Europe in the twentieth century that it was not necessary for somebody to leave their home to change their state citizenship. Indeed, for those lucky enough to survive untouched the vicissitudes of Europe's dark century, it was theoretically possible to stay living in the same city or village, but to switch citizenship more than once. Such of course was the fate for many citizens of Rijeka / Fiume too, as the city under Hungarian sovereignty within the Habsburg Monarchy changed hands after the end of the First World War (and subsequently too). As we have heard this morning, the young Leo Weiczen / Leo Valiani in some respects shared a fate typical of many in the region. His home-city eventually came under Italian rule in the 1920s and Valiani became an Italian citizen. Yet, as we also saw, his career differed from those who remained in the city, with the experience of exile and resistance being defining features of his life.

Needless to say, it was the outbreak and the consequences of the First World War that unleashed such far-reaching changes across Europe. But for Valiani and Rijeka in particular, it was the Italian intervention in World War One in May 1915 that dramatically altered the power political dynamics in the northern Adriatic. The so-called *intervento* of one hundred years ago has been the subject of much discussion in Italy this year, whilst in other countries, 2014 saw an enormous wave of publications and media interest in the centenary of the Sarajevo assassinations and the outbreak of war. Certainly, this discussion focused to a considerable extent on the war's outbreak, with the Australian historian Christopher Clark's book being the most successful on the international market. Yet, numerous general histories of World War One were published too. In short, even if we can expect another round of publications in a few years to mark the centenary of the war's end, now is an opportune moment to re-consider Leo Valiani's historical magnum opus, *La Dissoluzione dell'Austria-Ungheria*. It is a great pleasure for me to do so for two reasons: firstly, it is simply a very fine book, well-crafted and based on an impressive range of sources. Secondly, it is something of an unjustly neglected book. In this sense, I believe we should be very grateful to the organizers of this event for re-directing our attention towards it.

Accordingly, in the time available, I would like to do three main things. First, I want to sketch out the arguments that Valiani's book makes. What does it say and what are the main areas of interest? Second, I wish to assess

the book's contribution in relation to scholarship on the Habsburg Monarchy, particularly the Italian-language literature of which Valiani's book forms a part. Where does the book stand compared to other works and what did it offer that was new? Third, I will conclude by briefly assessing its lasting value in the light of recent trends in historical research on the Habsburg Monarchy. In particular, which insights are useful for current debates on the nationality question and the collapse of Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War? In brief, I wish to argue that Valiani's book still constitutes one of the best accounts of the Habsburg Monarchy's collapse from an international historical perspective. Valiani's astute analysis of the interplay between national independence movements and the diplomatic manoeuvres between the various European states had a pioneering quality for both its breadth and its sophistication. He offered a balanced and extremely well-informed account of these developments, and his own origins in the city of Rijeka / Fiume were certainly decisive for the perspective he provided.

1. *La Dissoluzione dell'Austria-Ungheria* was first published in Milan in 1966, and was reprinted in 1985; an English version appeared in London in 1973, but it was never translated into German. In this work, Valiani looks at the reasons for the collapse of the multinational Habsburg Empire, which – along with the end of other multinational empires around the same time – led to the formation of new states in east-central and south-eastern Europe. The overthrow of the Tsarist regime in Russia in 1917, the end of the Hohenzollern Empire in Germany in 1918, and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 together profoundly altered the map of Europe and the near East. Indeed, the long-term consequences of those changes are still being played out today, whether in Ukraine or in the crisis that has engulfed Syria and Iraq.

The historical significance of the collapse of these empires can hardly be underestimated and Valiani was fully conscious of this fact. Yet, he is careful to evaluate the collapse on its own terms, without indulging in too much speculation about what might have been had the Habsburg Monarchy not collapsed. This is a point we can return to briefly in the second part of my lecture. At the outset, though, what is worth noting is the focused, stringent nature of Valiani's analysis. From the beginning, he sets up the issue of the Habsburg Monarchy's survival in terms of a struggle between those arguing for or against its preservation as a European power. Right at the start, the author states firmly – in contrast to many previous authors – that the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy could not be taken for granted: 'Before the imperial government of A-H declared war on Serbia on 28 July, 1914, very few people were thinking about the dissolution of the Danubian Monarchy' (10). In a sense, therefore, the narrative drive of the book revolves around the demonstration of how national opposition against the Habsburg Monarchy developed during World War One, and why circumstances changed such that

the anti-Habsburg cause won out in 1918.

While Valiani does not assume that Austria-Hungary's collapse was inevitable, he nevertheless concentrates his attention primarily on the political actors and movements who asserted the cause of national independence. He does so by launching more or less straight into *medias res*, with no great methodological discussion and only a brief mention of sources used (these are then commented on more extensively in the substantial footnotes). Overall, the work is best described as an international history of the Monarchy's collapse, but one which was for its time admirably innovative. It might be far-fetched to suggest it was a kind of transnational history *avant la lettre*, but it was certainly the best form of international history: Valiani looks at the interplay between different states – primarily the European Great Powers and the USA – and the national independence movements within the Habsburg Monarchy, and above all, their representatives in exile. He follows individual historical actors rather than abstracting agency to the state level (he talks of Sonnino and Salandra, not Italy, or of Lord Grey and Lloyd George, not Britain, and so on). In short, he moves deftly from one sphere of historical action to another, crossing borders and switching focus according to the particular national question under discussion (be it Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovak or South Slav). In short, we have here a scholarly *tour de force* that analyses the politics of the nationality question in the international arena.

If that provides a general overview of Valiani's approach, let us discuss how he goes about tracing the Habsburg Monarchy's collapse. Obviously, there is not the space to re-capitulate the complex series of events unfolding between July 1914 and November 1918, but it is worth considering the book's basic structure and content in a little bit more detail. We can start by saying what the book does not do: it has very little to say about the military history of the war; nor is there much about the economic difficulties experienced by Austria-Hungary – though Valiani came from a leftist tradition, he does not approach the topic from a Marxist, materialist perspective. Finally, the history of the Home Front is not explored in any depth. In sum, Valiani refers to these three aspects of the war only in general terms and in so far as they inform the changing dynamics of the national question.

If we turn briefly to the six individual chapters, we can see how Valiani weaves together his analysis of internal and external political developments. Just over five hundred pages long, the book opens with a discussion of national movements in the Habsburg Monarchy from 1905 to 1914. 1905 constitutes a turning point for several reasons: the army crisis in Hungary in 1905, the intensification of the social democratic campaign for universal manhood suffrage, the influence of the first Russian Revolution and the resolution of Rijeka / Fiume in October 1905. The latter was particularly important for developments in the Monarchy's South Slav territories, to which Valiani devotes a large part of his attention. With their declaration of Rijeka, the Croatian deputies Frano Supilo and Ante Trumbić signalled their intention

to try and cooperate with the national movement in Hungary against the Habsburg government, so as jointly to attain their respective goals. Valiani thus accords his home-town an important place in the historical narrative. Overall, Valiani emphasizes the rigid nature of the political system in Austria-Hungary, especially in the Hungarian half of the state. He identifies the unwillingness to contemplate meaningful structural reforms as a major weakness in the political system, and in this respect he is careful not to overestimate the reformist intentions of heir to the throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand (here Valiani differs from other historians at the time, such as Robert Kann).

Having also assessed the international and internal political consequences of the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, Valiani moves in his second chapter to the international consequences of the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war against Serbia at the end of July 1914. To be more precise, he focuses primarily on what he sees as a crucial question for Austria-Hungary's survival: the intervention in the war by the latter's former ally, Italy. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the book has much to say about the Italian side of the story and the interplay between Italian interests and the nationalities question. Clearly, we do not need now to rehearse the intricate negotiations and strategic gambling undertaken between August 1914 and May 1915. The important point is that Valiani finds here a number of problems caused for Austria-Hungary because of the political implications of possible territorial concessions. Moving deftly between the Italian political scene, nationalist lobbies within Austria-Hungary, and the international stage, Valiani again makes clear how the Dualist structure of the Habsburg state impeded firm action; both the court and Hungarian government were reluctant to envisage the cession of territory to Italy because of the precedent it might set for the situation in Transylvania. At the same time, Valiani makes it clear that – despite the Secret Treaty of London promising territories to Italy – allied policy did not at this stage aim for dismemberment of Austria-Hungary.

With the failure to prevent Italian intervention, Valiani implies, the war profoundly altered for Austria-Hungary in much more than military terms. It now became an overtly ideological conflict, in which the politics of the nationalities took centre stage. This theme dominates the rest of the book, particularly the lengthy third and fourth chapters. It is here that Valiani's skills come strongly to the fore, as he simultaneously takes account of developments among nationalist pressure groups, politicians who moved into exile, the machinations of allied governments, and the reactions by Austro-Hungarian politicians. In doing so, he distinguishes between the Polish national movement in Galicia, with its strong anti-Russian leanings and orientation towards the Central Powers, and those elsewhere. Prominent among the figures Valiani looks at are the Croat politician Frano Supilo, the leader of the Czechoslovak cause, Tomáš Masaryk, and the proponent of the cause of Hungarian independence, Mihály Károlyi. The lobbying work undertaken by such figures in London, Rome, St. Petersburg and elsewhere

established a series of arguments and a network of contacts which, for Valiani, was potentially able to undermine the Habsburg state.

Valiani next explores the consolidation of Yugoslav, Czechoslovak and Hungarian independence movements' during the years 1915 and 1916. In this phase, contacts between the exile politicians and allied governments become more fluid, while meetings and congresses about national issues are also organized. To be sure, the author points to tensions and contradictions, including differences of opinion between, say, the Italian government and the Yugoslav movement about the potential boundaries of a new Yugoslav state. Moreover, he is cautious not to overstress the immediate impact of these developments: contacts and activities were most intense with British publicists such as Henry Wickham Steed or Robert Seton-Watson. While allied governments showed increasing interest in the potential usefulness of the nationalities question, they were still a long way from making the support of national independence a war aim and openly declaring it as a policy goal.

The shift towards such a position took place in two steps. The first of these is covered in chapter five, where Valiani explores various proposals and negotiations for peace, which reached particular intensity among the weary belligerents during 1917. In short, the idea of peace began to be taken much more seriously than before. Valiani identifies the interventionist Italian Socialist Leonida Bissolati as the first member of an allied government to call publically for the dissolution of Austria-Hungary in October 1916. Moved by the execution of his colleague Cesare Battisti, the Socialist from Trentino who had been captured and executed by the Austro-Hungarians in July that year, Bissolati called for a peace based on the principle of nationality. Above all, he called for a territorial settlement respecting the national affiliation of the majority of inhabitants in a given area. Valiani admires Bissolati's consistency on this point, but immediately makes clear the problems involved in actually reaching agreement on peace terms. In the Italian case, for example, Bissolati's viewpoint clashed with those who adhered to the provisions of the secret Treaty of London, which foresaw much of Dalmatia as part of Italy. Valiani points also to further contradictions: the key Italian negotiator, Foreign Minister Soninno, advocated the London terms, yet at the same time expected to keep Austria-Hungary intact, as a break on German and Russian power. In sum, the author identifies a series of obstacles to peace, chiefly the German unwillingness to contemplate a compromise peace, but also the reluctance on the part of the Allies to advocate publically the destruction of A-H. Britain and France were interested in the idea of detaching A-H from Germany and reaching a separate peace, especially after death of Emperor Franz Joseph at the end of November 1916 and the advent of his successor, the young Emperor Karl. At the same time, the dynamics of the situation reduced the willingness of the Central Powers to compromise when they scented outright victory after the Russian revolution in October 1917 and the victory over Italy at Caporetto. That battle bought Austria-Hungary time, even though internal pressures for change and

reform were intensifying after the recall of the Austrian parliament in May 1917, while the economic situation was also becoming increasingly desperate.

If the failure of the peace initiatives showed that it was easier to start a war than to end one, they also sealed Austria-Hungary's fate, as Valiani's final chapter demonstrates. Russia's exit from the war and the lack of concrete reform proposals meant that both the allies and the national movements were prepared to concentrate alternatives to the continued existence of the Dual Monarchy. The intervention of the USA in the war crystallised these developments in decisive fashion, as a minimum demand of substantial national reform within A-H was placed on the international agenda. Increasingly, Valiani suggests, the people of the Habsburg Monarchy took the decisions away from the political elite, even if several politicians continued to profess loyalty to the Habsburg state for tactical reasons. As the military situation deteriorated for the Central Powers in the summer of 1918, the Austro-Hungarian leaders were bypassed by the national movements.

In summary, we can state that Valiani does not wilfully foster any black legends about Austro-Hungarian rule, but he is certainly not one to gloss over its faults. Ultimately, he leaves no doubt that the dynasty and government bore responsibility for the state's dissolution. With this – hopefully not too exhaustive – overview of Valiani's work complete, we can now move on to the next part of my talk and consider its importance within the context of historical writing on the Habsburg Monarchy, both in terms of its contribution at the time and its value for contemporary debates:

2. We are probably all familiar with the famously misunderstood response given by Zhou Enlai to a question about the French Revolution, when U.S. president Richard Nixon was visiting China in 1972. Asked what he thought were the long-term consequences of the French Revolution, Zhou Enlai suggested that 'it was too early to say'. As historians now think, Zhou seems to have understood the question in relation to the disturbances of 1968, rather than the original revolution of 1789. Either way, the story reminds us that it is often difficult to assess the long-term significance of major historical events. Moreover, how we interpret those events often alters in the light of subsequent developments and the passing of time. This is, I think, an important consideration when exploring Valiani's interpretation of Austria-Hungary's collapse. For us, it may still be 'too early' to assess the full consequences of the Habsburg Monarchy's collapse, but we do now have the benefit of almost a century's distance. Valiani had about half that amount of chronological distance. Yet – and this is an important, if obvious point – Valiani also lived through these events himself. He was a young child when the collapse occurred and the narrative is obviously informed by his subsequent experiences in Fascist Italy and in exile, as well as his observations on developments in Italy and Yugoslavia after 1945. At the end of the book, for

example, Valiani critically remarks upon the tendency already evident upon some commentators – particularly in the USA – who suggested that perhaps it would have been better if the Habsburg Monarchy had survived, given the terrible events of the Second World War and the imposition of communist regimes in many of the successor states. Valiani's lucid, objective evaluation of the collapse on its own terms is all the more impressive seen from this perspective. Where exile historiography in the US was sometimes prone to a form of Habsburg nostalgia, the firm republican Valiani assessed the faults of the Austro-Hungarian ruling elite with an unswerving gaze.

To understand where Valiani's history fits into the broader picture, we need to step back a moment from his work and consider briefly the different strands of historiography on Austria-Hungary. Over the long term, we can identify four traditions of writing about the Habsburg Monarchy. First of all, there is a strong dynastic-centralist tradition, which emerged through the Habsburg court and the education system in the Habsburg state. Within this tradition, the central place in the historical narrative was occupied by the Habsburg dynasty itself. The history of the diverse Habsburg territories was viewed through the prism of the ruling dynasty. In short, this was 'official history' – as embodied in the founding of the *Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* in 1854, and as taught in schools across the Habsburg state. In effect, the history of the Habsburg Monarchy was that of the ruling house and was viewed from the political centre.

Secondly, we can identify a strong tradition of provincial history (*Landesgeschichtsschreibung*) and of local or municipal history (particularly, in the Adriatic towns). In essence, this means the writing of the history of a particular province or city that belonged to the territorial conglomeration under Habsburg rule (e.g. the history of Carinthia or Trieste). The main terms of reference for this 'federalist' kind of writing were provided by the boundaries of the particular province in question. Often beginning with the formation of a territory in the medieval period, this historiographical tradition mainly considers the history of the Habsburg state in terms of its impact on a specific province. For example, reforming measures by the central state are frequently depicted as unwanted or inappropriate interference in provincial affairs. To be sure, the old-style provincial history has increasingly given way to a new, comparative regional history, but nevertheless traces of it remain, and this is a point we can come back to when looking at Italian-language historiography on the Habsburg Monarchy.

Third, from the late eighteenth-century onwards, but above all in the second half of the nineteenth-century, a new tradition emerged: that of national historiography. As we know, the emergence of history as a scientific discipline was closely linked to the consolidation of national states in much of Europe. In countries such as France or Italy, this meant writing history as the development of the nation-state and as constitutional history. Within the context of the multi-ethnic Habsburg Monarchy, the writing of national

history necessarily assumed another form: representatives of particular ethnic groups instead wrote history as the story of national re-awakening and as a means of laying claim to a particular territory. Czechs in Bohemia wrote about Bohemia as a Czech land, concentrating on the medieval period and downplaying connections to the history of the Holy Roman Empire. In short, the focus was neither on the Habsburg Monarchy nor the province as a whole, but almost solely on the history of one national group (a national group whose history may or may not have been linked to that of co-nationals outside the Habsburg state).

Fourth and last, we can identify a further tradition of writing the history of the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole (a history of the entire state, *Gesamtstaatsgeschichte*). This tradition has a common feature with the dynastic-centralist tradition in that it considers all the territories under Habsburg rule, but adopts a non-dynastic perspective. Since the publication of Bishop William Coxe's *History of Austria* at the start of the nineteenth century, English-language historiography of the Habsburg Empire has been especially noticeable in this area. One thinks of classic works by the American historian Robert Kann or by Robert Evans in Great Britain. However, French historiography is notably present as well, from Louis Eisenmann's 1904 history of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise to Jean Béranger's large-scale overview of the history of the Habsburg Monarchy. Works such as these seek to take account of the different perspectives and interests of the different components of the territorial complex under Habsburg rule.

Certainly, there are overlaps between these different traditions, but this simplified overview allows us to assess more accurately the place of Valiani's work in terms of Habsburg historiography in general and the Italian-language literature in particular. Quite simply, Valiani's work stands out because it broke with prevailing traditions such as those I have just outlined. It adopts an 'outsider' view of the Habsburg Monarchy in the tradition of *Gesamtstaatsgeschichte*, but with the knowledge and language skills of an 'insider'. This is what makes it such a fascinating, perhaps unique work. And it is in this latter respect that we see the specific legacy of his origins in Rijeka / Fiume: Valiani analyses confidently developments across different areas of the Monarchy and accesses secondary literature, memoirs and sources from the four key language groups for the study of the Habsburg Monarchy: German, Hungarian, Slavic (above all South Slav languages) and Romance (the Italian language). Such a combination is a comparatively rare phenomenon.

Above all – and this is the crucial point – Valiani's work sets itself apart from other Italian-language historiography and provides an 'Italian' voice in a wider international debate that has tended to be dominated by works in English and German. To begin with, Valiani's was more or less the first substantial contribution in the Italian language to look at the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole. Indeed, as far as I can tell, it was for a long time the only substantial contribution of its kind, until Marco Bellabarba published

his synthesis, *L'impero asburgico* with Il Mulino in 2014. If we place Valiani's book within the particular context of Italian historiography on the Habsburg Monarchy, we can state that the majority of the Italian histories for a long time followed a combination of the second and third traditions just outlined. In other words, they focused on particular provinces or cities, while writing in a national key.

Italian historiography of the Habsburg Monarchy was long influenced by traditional narratives of the Italian *Risorgimento*, which depicted a struggle between two 'hereditary enemies', Austria and Italy, with the process of Italian unification in 1859-61 stemming from the fight for independence from Austrian rule. If such a framework is now regarded as obsolete, substantial traces of it nonetheless remain, primarily in terms of the territorial focus of the Italian literature. In the last couple of decades, there have been a number of important contributions on the Habsburgs' Italian possessions, particularly on regional elites, politics, and administration (e.g. by Marco Meriggi on L-V or Michele Gottardi and Eurigio Tonetti on Venice). However, such works remain 'provincial' in focus, not in a methodological sense, but because they concentrate on areas that later became part of the Italian state. It is fair to say that this is a not uncommon trait amongst the historiography of the so-called 'successor states', where historians have focused on their own territory and have not written the story of the Monarchy as a whole. So, it is in this sense that the influence of the earlier national historiography remains.

By contrast, Valiani stands even today as a vital exception to this pattern, given his willingness to engage with the history of the Habsburg state as a whole. Italian publishers have diligently translated works of synthesis by Anglo-American historians such as Carlile Macartney, Robert Kann, Arthur May and Alan Sked, not least due to the absence of similar books written by Italian authors. In giving his view of Austria-Hungary's collapse, Valiani thus joins those authors who are able to view the state as an entirety, and with a degree of distance and objectivity. Doubtless, it was on the one hand his opposition to the Fascist regime that helped him adopt a different position to that of the *Risorgimento*-inspired tradition of Italian historical writing, as well as his experience of exile on the other hand. Yet, given his personal background in Rijeka and linguistic skills, he was able to provide a more intricate, refined picture than other representatives of this historical tradition. Moreover, he provides a much fuller account of events in the Hungarian half of the state than can be found in most general histories of Austria-Hungary. This, together with the objective balance that Valiani offers, marks the book out as a major contribution to the scholarly discussion.

3. Recognition of this critical stance allows us, finally, to turn now to a brief assessment of the work's lasting value. Which arguments have been modified in the light of subsequent research, but which insights does it still

offer? There are many points we might want to discuss, but allow me to offer three thoughts by way of conclusion.

Firstly, I believe we have to see Valiani's work in relation to that of former Hungarian liberal politician and sociologist, Oscar Jászi. Jászi established the famous paradigm of opposing 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces in Austria-Hungary. Among the former, Jászi placed nationalism first and foremost, together with the awkward 'dual-state' character of Austria-Hungary, and the 'exploitative' economic relationship between its two halves. Jászi juxtaposed these factors undermining the unity of the state with centripetal forces such as the dynasty, the church, the army and bureaucracy, as well as specific social groups (Jewish communities) and political forces (socialism). Valiani – like other scholars – largely accepted Jászi's centrifugal / centripetal opposition and focused his attention on those forces militating against state cohesion. In short, he often assumes the power of nationalism among the peoples of the Monarchy, without always demonstrating this. Second, following on, recent research has begun on the one hand to examine more of the centripetal forces, looking at mechanisms of loyalty within the Habsburg state. Valiani acknowledges the existence of these, but does not fully explore quite why this might have been so, other than to imply that it was much by default as anything else. Work on prisoners of war (Rachamimov), soldiers' letters and the home front have all modified assumptions about the role of nationalism in creating disillusionment with the Habsburg regime, as well as about the effectiveness of anti-Habsburg propaganda. Equally, some historians (Pieter Judson, Tara Zahra, and Jeremy King) have questioned the wider resonance of national ideas among the population before 1914 and subsequently. They suggest that 'national indifference' may be more prevalent.

These are issues we can discuss, but let me end on a third and final point. Whatever weight one gives to arguments about the spread and depth of national sentiment among the populations of the Habsburg Monarchy, the great value of Valiani's book is twofold. It warns us firstly, against too favourable an interpretation of the Habsburg Monarchy – such as in the book by Helmut Rumpler on nineteenth-century Austria history, which sees the Habsburg Monarchy as a 'chance or opportunity for Central Europe'. Valian's emphasis on the political responsibility of the Austro-Hungarian elite remains a timely insight, even if his work is not cited that frequently by recent studies (e.g. among English-language literature). Secondly, Valiani's wide-reaching analysis of the international arena reminds us of the need to always integrate power politics into the study of nationalism in the Habsburg Monarchy. That is something which, to my mind, is often missing in current discussions about different layers of national identity and national indifference.

In short, Valiani's great work on the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy very much repays a re-reading almost fifty years after its first appearance. It is an unjustly neglected classic of the scholarly literature on the Habsburg Monarchy.