

Father State: Poor Relief in the Habsburg Monarchy during the Long Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

Poverty was, and remains, an everyday phenomenon. This book analyses the measures taken by the state to combat it. In the Habsburg Monarchy, responses to poverty were highly heterogeneous: responsibility for poor relief rested with the individual crown lands and placed a considerable burden on municipal budgets, while the state itself confined its role to establishing the legal framework within which poor relief was organised. The book deals exclusively with the statutory poor relief prescribed by the state, rather than with the voluntary and unsystematic charitable activities undertaken by a range of other actors. It examines a number of interrelated issues, including child labour, the requirement of official permission to marry as an instrument for limiting poverty, and stations providing food and lodging as a means of maintaining habits of regular work. A notable parallel development was the emergence of poor-relief institutes [Armeninstitute], legally constituted bodies that originated in southern Bohemia during the Enlightenment and which also had the effect of curbing begging. The author shows how the Cisleithanian half of the Habsburg Monarchy gradually moved towards a unified welfare-state model—a model whose realisation was prevented by the collapse of the Monarchy.