Aaslestad, Katherine B.: *Place and Politics. Local Identity, Civic Culture and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers 2005. ISBN: 0-391-04228-9; 397 S.

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Exhaustively researched, Katherine Aaslestad's monograph marks a significant addition to the literature on Hamburg, Germany, and the revolutionary era, particularly in English. The book draws together strands of social and cultural as well as diplomatic history to provide a richly textured account of Hamburg's experiences and civic culture from the late eighteenth century through the Napoleonic epoch and on into the nineteenth century.

The volume's title, it must be said, is somewhat misleading. While politicians and publicists from Bremen and Lübeck do feature at times, the focus remains very much on Hamburg, with occasional reference to its near-neighbor Altona. The book is not a history of North Germany, or of the Hanseatic towns more narrowly.

Aaslestad's work is divided into four sections, and deals with two main themes. Following the introduction, she offers a lengthy background depiction of Hamburg's eighteenth-century civic culture, including its social and economic context, its republican beliefs and mores, and its press and associational life. The second part of the book then provides an original thematic investigation of changing conceptions of Patriotismus and republican identities during the 1790s and 1800s, while the third is essentially a narrative history (solid and colorful) of Hamburg's domestic, diplomatic, and military fortunes during the Napoleonic period. Fourthly and finally, the „Epilogue" examines the subsequent commemorations of Hamburg's liberation in 1813 during the anniversary years 1838, 1863, and 1913.

In terms of themes and theses, the book focuses on two primary areas. The first concerns the balance of local, regional, and national identity in Hamburg. Here Aaslestad strongly contests any notion that an upsurge of German nationalism contributed to the anti-Napoleonic Wars of Liberation. Even in the 1980s it was common to argue that understanding the Wars of Liberation as a nationalist uprising was itself a nationalist myth, in that German national sentiment remained the possession of a narrow intellectual elite and had not taken root farther down the social scale. More recent work by Matthew Levinger, Abigail Green, Karen Hagemann, and others has gone even farther and emphasized the predominance in this period of territorial identities and dynastic loyalties, even among the elites, though German nationalism was significant as a minority phenomenon.[1] Aaslestad however goes farther still, attempting to demonstrate the almost complete absence of German nationalism in the city during these years, and in the Epilogue tracing the paths by which the nationalist invention of the Wars of Liberation was woven into Hamburg's collective memory in the course of the nineteenth century. The commemorative festivities of 1838 still celebrated the autonomy and freedom of the city itself as distinct from any nascent German nation, yet by 1913 they highlighted the experience of Hamburg as harbinger of and metonym for the birth of the German nation in the struggles against Napoleon, part of the foundation myth of the Prussian-led German Empire. Such a radical reversal of opinion on German nationalism probably does work better in the case of Hamburg than for some other regions, though even here Aaslestad may underestimate the German nationalist commitment of figures such as Friedrich Perthes or C. F. Wurm. Aaslestad also argues convincingly that the Napoleonic period saw the development of a lasting Hanseatic regionalism which would increasingly come to mediate between local and national identities (along the lines of Alon Confino's work on Württemberg).[2]

The most original and compelling portion

[1] Levinger, Matthew, Enlightened Nationalism. The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806-1848, Oxford 2000; Green, Abigail, Fatherlands. State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany, Cambridge, 2001; Hagemann, Karen, „Männlicher Muth und Teutsche Ehre". Nation, Militär und Geschlecht zur Zeit der Antinapoleonischen Kriege Preussens, Paderborn 2002.

[2] Confino, Alon, The Nation as a Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918, Chapel Hill 1997.

of the work is that dealing with Hamburgers' changing conceptions of republican values and Patriotismus, particularly Chapter Four's treatment of the debate over „Luxus" and „Egoismus" during the 1790s and 1800s. Here Aaslestad engages with the literature on Atlantic classical republicanism and Central European „Stadtrepublikanismus" in order to understand the strains in Hamburg's contemporary public discourse. Aaslestad suggests in her introduction that she will challenge the standard dichotomous narrative of a simple shift from republicanism to liberalism, depicting instead an emerging fusion of the two political languages. In the event, however, the fusion of liberal and republican themes seems to have pertained to the more stable years of the eighteenth century, where individual wealth and prosperity were seen as congruent with the good of the community rather than as conflicting with it. During the unsettled years following the French Revolution, and associated with the temporary economic upswing of the 1790s, on the other hand, Hamburg's political culture seems to have resolved itself into the more traditional split between republican communalism and liberal individualism, as republican publicists lamented the decline in civic „morality" and commitment attendant upon mushrooming materialism, luxury, and self-interest. This standoff then gave way to the triumph of liberal, laissez-faire ideology in the years after the French occupation of 1811-1814 (partly the result of exposure to French ideas, but also to economic hardship during that period of exploitation).

There are some potential problems with Aaslestad's account. We tend for example to hear only one side of the debate, namely, those critical of the alleged new materialistic individualism. Given that liberalism is supposed to have won the day within a very few years, one is left wondering where its defenders were to be found, unless liberal dominance is meant to imply the level of lifestyle and mores rather than of ideology.

There may also be some difficulties with the analytical framework employed to dissect the relationships between republicanism and liberalism. In general the conceptions of „virtue" that Aaslestad finds in the case of Hamburg already seem more like a liberal, Protestant, commercial „Tugend" of honesty and frugality than a classically republican „virtú" of civic activism and military commitment. In this sense, it could have been useful to have looked more intensively at the debates and practices surrounding the civic militia in Hamburg, as Ralf Pröve has done for Prussia and Hessen, in one of the few relevant works not cited in this so well-researched volume.[3] Militia controversies are mentioned, both in the 1790s and in the period of the failed uprising and the Wars of Liberation in 1813, but they are not subjected to much sustained analysis, which might have helped in untangling the ideological or cultural relationships and trends within the discursive matrices of „luxury and egoism" or „commerce and virtue."

Aaslestad shows particular balance in her analysis of gender, where against the backdrop of a separate spheres framework, the public roles of women are also acknowledged, up to and including the services of Anna Lühring, who disguised herself as a man and fought during the Wars of Liberation, only to be publicly celebrated for these transgressive acts after the victory. The discussion of fashion magazines within the context of the luxury-egoism debates is particularly nuanced and insightful, as Aaslestad reveals the ways in which plates and texts „produced contradictory images of gender and projected an unfixed notion of femininity and masculinity as old and new conceptions coexisted within its pages." (p. 200) The potential tensions between text and image in public discourse are often not dealt with sufficiently, and it is to the author's credit that they receive keen attention here.

It must be said that the editing of the volume could have been much tighter, even in the text but above all in the footnotes. Wolfgang Kaschuba for example appears as „Kushaba," Quentin Skinner as „Quenton" and „Skinners," Jost Dülffer multiple times as „Düffler," and Jean Quataert as „Quartet" (among several other such mistakes).

[3] Pröve, Ralf, Stadtgemeindlicher Republikanismus und die „Macht des Volkes" civile Ordnungsformationen und kommunale Leitbilder politischer Partizipation in den deutschen Staaten vom Ende des 18. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts, Göttingen 2000.

On balance, Katherine Aaslestad's new work will certainly provide a prime point of reference and of departure for students of the history of Hamburg, Germany, and the revolutionary era for some time to come.

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