

Lehmann, Hartmut; Van Horn Melton, James (Hrsg.): *Paths of Continuity. Central European Historiography from the 1930s through the 1950s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994. ISBN: 0-521-45199-X; 406 S.

Rezensiert von: Gordon R. Mork

This volume in the series published by the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C. will be welcomed by scholars in the field, though it is unlikely to appeal to a broader readership. It is based directly on the papers and comments of twenty-two American and European scholars delivered at a conference at Emory University in the spring of 1990. As such it is a parallel volume to *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Cambridge 1991), edited by Lehmann and James J. Sheehan, which had been based on a similar conference in 1988. The scholarship of these volumes is of a very high quality, meticulously documented, and argued with great sophistication. Though some of it would be relatively unintelligible to the uninitiated, the readers of H-German are doubtless in a fine position to benefit from it.

In structure, the book presents essays on ten historians who remained in Germany after 1933 and Austria after 1938, survived the war, and resumed their careers in West Germany or Austria after 1945. Each of these essays prompts a more or less critical „Comment“ by another scholar to add breadth and balance to the treatment. The names of subjects of these essays (Meinecke, Ritter, Rothfels, Schnabel, von Srbik, Freyer, Aubin, Brunner, Conze, and Schieder), and the presenters (Schulze, Iggers, Breisach, Schwabe, Brady, von Klemperer, Unfug, Gall, Lehmann, Fellner, Boyer, Muller, Chickering, Raeff, Edgar Melton, James Melton, Rowan, Veit-Brause, Reill, Ruesen, and Maier), indicates the breadth and depth of the discourse.

The book presents a picture of remarkable continuity in the historical profession in Germany from the pre-Nazi to the immediate post-Nazi period. The Nazis did not purge the professoriate after the *Machtergreifung*, nor did the West Germans and the Austrians systematically purge it after the war.

The examples cited here provide ample evidence for the generalization that the professional establishment in history was deeply conservative prior to 1933, that it did not challenge the Nazis openly during the „twelve-year Reich,“ and that it argued with some success that its basic conservatism had insulated it from complicity in Nazi crimes in the post-war world.

Yet, within this generalization, there were many significant variations. One was generational. Men (there were no women among these professors) of the nineteenth century, like Friedrich Meinecke (b. 1862), retained much of their integrity by going into retirement during the Nazi period. The youngest generation, like Werner Conze (b. 1910) and Theodore Schieder (b. 1908), were sheltered in at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy (or in military service), to emerge more or less untainted after 1945. Those who were at the height of their careers, and therefore at the height of their visibility and vulnerability during the Nazi years, are in certain respects the most interesting. This group included Franz Schnabel (b. 1887) and Hans Rothfels (b. 1891) who lost their positions, and Otto Brunner (b. 1898) who thrived under the Nazis but lost his position for six years after 1945. While one must express the gratitude of the profession for the excellence of the discussions of the ten historians, one could also raise some questions about the selection.

Rothfels, who went into exile, may be somewhat out of place in this group, while it is regrettable that Fritz Fischer was not included.

A reviewer must be careful, however, to avoid giving the impression that these essays are merely exercises in biography. Indeed, they are profoundly historiographical, and the personal details are added only to inform the analysis. Each of the presenters has immersed himself or herself in the corpus of their historian's works, and has put it into the academic context of the intellectual and geistesgeschichtliche developments of the time period. So familiar are they with the work of the authors they are analyzing, that occasionally their insights are meaningful only to readers who have a similar intimacy with those works.

For example, Roger Chickering's comment

that „Meinecke’s great book, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, did to the Burckhardian element in Lamprecht’s *Kulturgeschichte* what Below’s assumption of the editorship of the *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* did to its Roscherian element“ (233-4) as part of his response to Jerry Muller’s essay on Hans Freyer, may even send some members of H-German retiring to their libraries to refresh their understandings of the issues involved.

One of most important insights presented in the volume, and discussed by several of the presenters, is the link between the „new“ social history and the *Volksgeschichte* of the pre-Nazi and even the Nazi period. Usually, and quite correctly, social history is linked to the French *Annales* school. The authors of this volume, however, show that German historians were simultaneously developing a methodology which dealt quite creatively with the lives of the common people in German-speaking Europe with comparable methodologies. To be sure, this *Volksgeschichte* was often tainted by *volkisch* and antisemitic ideologies during the 1920s and 1930s, which understandably led to its demise after World War II. When resurrected, in large part due to the efforts of Werner Conze, it was cleansed of its ideology and rechristened „structural“ history. This insight is important to our emerging understanding of the historiographical developments of the second half of the twentieth century.

The German Historical Institute is to be commended for its support of conferences like the one upon which this volume is based, and for the publication of the work which emerges from them. In these days of diminishing resources for high quality research in the humanities, it is encouraging to see that there is still a place for highly demanding and rigorous historical and historiographical scholarship.

Gordon R. Mork, Purdue University

Gordon R. Mork über Lehmann, Hartmut; Van Horn Melton, James (Hrsg.): *Paths of Continuity. Central European Historiography from the 1930s through the 1950s*. Cambridge 1994, in: H-Soz-Kult 25.07.1997.