

Franziska Metzger, *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdenken im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, UTB, Stuttgart 2011, 313 S., kart., 19,90 €.

This book is intended as a textbook for students to introduce them to main currents of historical thought and writing in the past two centuries. However, it should be of interest also to other readers. My review will be mixed. The book consists of two very separate parts, a first one which deals with the present status of historical theory as it affects historical writing; a second which is a survey of historical writing from the early nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. The first part proceeds analytically, the second historically and chronologically. I find the first part very good, but see serious limitations in the second historiographical part as a result of the author's express decision to limit herself to German-language writings (p. 9), although occasionally, where necessary she does refer to non-German literature.

The first part proceeds from the assumption that the aim of historical writing is the reconstruction of a real past, to understand "vergangene Wirklichkeit" (p. 17). She thus distances herself from the radical epistemological relativism of the linguistic turn. Yet at the same time she recognizes, as does much of contemporary historical theory, the complexity of reconstructing past reality. She discusses two key aspects of dealing with the problem, the role of memory as a distinct form of historical inquiry, and history committed to factual evidence focused on sources. She further examines the discussions on the relation of history and literature, the recognition of the narrative, hence literary character of all historical writing, which raises the problem of the border between history and fiction. She sees three points at which conceptions of and approaches to history underwent a fundamental reorientation ("Sattelzeiten"), one at the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century with what she calls historicism ("Historismus"), for the first time seeing the human past in historical rather than static terms, and creating a narrative of history moving in a unified linear direction. The second reorientation took place around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century with a move away from the focus on events and great political personalities to a new emphasis on society. Finally a third reorientation occurred in the late 1960s and the 1970s with a challenge to the idea of objectivity, which was fundamental to the historiography of the two previous periods, and a repudiation of the linear conception of history and its master narratives. She stresses that these reorientations of approaches to history were not ruptures but rather transformations of historical thought.

The second part of the book presents a chronological account of the development of historical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet it does not fulfill her promise of a comprehensive introduction to historiography in this period but excludes a good deal of very important writing outside of Germany and for that matter also within the German speaking countries. To say it frankly, the book is not only exclusively Eurocentric in an increasingly global world, except for a few lines on Edward Said and post-colonialism (p. 261), but also largely germanocentric. Although she has discussed the relation of literature and history in the first part of the book, in the second part she deals exclusively with academic historians. There is no mention of history written by nonprofessional historians, although, as Martin Nissen in "Populäre Geschichtsschreibung"¹ recently demonstrated statistically, that Germans in the nineteenth century, and probably in the twentieth century, read many more works by non-academic historians than by academic historians, and many of those read by the German public were foreign authors, particularly French ones, and here the borderline between history and literature becomes fluid. But even someone like Leo-

¹ *Martin Nissen, Populäre Geschichtsschreibung. Historiker, Verleger und die deutsche Öffentlichkeit (1848–1900)*, Köln/Weimar etc. 2009.

pold von Ranke was read by a non-academic public as great literature and Theodor Mommsen received the Nobel Prize for Literature; but there is no mention of him. It is only in the late nineteenth century, when historical research and writing increasingly becomes specialized and historians wrote for specialists rather than for a general educated public, that a clearer line was drawn between professional and literary historians.

But there are also definite limitations in her discussion of academic historiography in these two centuries, she fits the German historians she discusses into a common national master narrative which shaped historical writing throughout this period. To an extent she is right that the concept of the nation dominated historiography until well into the last third of the twentieth century. But, of course, there were some historians who did not fit this pattern, like Jacob Burckhardt, to whom she devoted space, who not only rejected the centrality of the nation in his writings but also that of a linear history. But her national narrative restricts itself essentially to the Prussian School of Leopold von Ranke, Johann Gustav Droysen, Heinrich von Sybel, and Heinrich von Treitschke, basically historians who supported an authoritarian regime, but with no mention of critical historians who represented a democratic orientation like Georg Gervinus, who were critical of the direction in which Germany was going, or Theodor Mommsen, who broke with this authoritarian direction. In the post-World War I era she devotes a great deal of space to the racist oriented "Volksgeschichte" (pp. 209–219), who played an important role in the Third Reich. Only one sentence (p. 212) is devoted to the historians like Eckhart Kehr, Hajo Holborn, and Hans Rosenberg who represented a democratic orientation and were forced into emigration; nothing is said about the important contributions which exile historians made to the critical reexamination of the German past. Some space is given to Catholic historians and there is a very superficial paragraph on Jewish historiography (p. 162) in the nineteenth century, fitting them into the national narrative with no understanding or even mention of Heinrich Graetz, the most important nineteenth-century historian of Jewish history. A good deal of space is given to German-language Swiss historians, but almost none to Austrian historians, except for Heinrich Ritter von Srbik (pp. 213–214), who advocated a Greater Germany and joined the Nazi Party in 1938 when Hitler annexed Austria. This is not to imply that the author has any sympathy for Srbik or for the authoritarian Prussian tradition which after all dominated the German historical profession until it was finally replaced by a new generation of democratically oriented historians in the 1960s, but that she offers a very limited, slanted view of historiography. Although she lists several books on global history (pp. 262–263), she totally neglects the global setting of historical thought and writing in the twenty-first century.

However in the final section of the book where she deals with the reorientations of historical writing she takes French and to a limited extent English and North American writing into account, particularly the French "Annales" (pp. 230–235) and very briefly Edward P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm (p. 233). Yet there is no discussion of feminist historiography nor of the role which gender, ethnicity, and class occupy in much of historical writing today.

Georg G. Iggers, Buffalo

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