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Manuel Schramm. *Konsum und regionale Identität in Sachsen 1880-2000: Die Regionalisierung von Konsumgütern im Spannungsfeld von Nationalisierung und Globalisierung.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003. 329 S. 00 (leinen), ISBN 978-3-515-08169-6.

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Few branches of recent historiography have developed so quickly as that of on consumption. Taking their cue from sociologists and theorists, historians have produced some fascinatingly insightful works on the role of consumption and, to borrow from Arjun Appadurai, the "social life of things" in the broader scope of history. Many of the best histories have focused on specific products or materials as "nodes" through which to read new intersections of economic, cultural, political, and economic history. Works by Ina Merkel, Victoria de Grazia, and Katherine Pence have untangled the web of consumption, gender, and political power. If any one categorization applies to this new field, however, it is the disjointed quality of much of the work. This is not entirely surprising; after all, goods and materials cross borders, last beyond eras, and can be the repositories of contested constructions of gender, nationality, and class. Consequently it is difficult to write the history of consumption in any kind of synthesized way, as one could write a biography, or the history of a movement, war, or party.

Especially in regards to the history of consumption in Germany, relatively little work has been done on the picture of consumption over a longer time period. Excellent studies by Annette Kaminsky and Ina Merkel have attempted to provide synthetic conclusions about the period 1949-1989 in East Germany. Still, these studies fail to explore the meaning of consumption in German history before 1949. Not only do the praxes of consumption resist periodization according to political history in a chronological sense–the production of fashion or plastics in the GDR obviously rests on similar modes of production and consumption in the Third Reich–but moreover, consumption resists political periodization because of the resistance of the sources for its study to the influence of top-down politics. While National Socialism or Communism or the post-war politics of the FRG affected the meaning of consumption in those respective eras, political actors ended up adapting to, rather than shaping, practices of consumption. Somehow, the ways that toys are made and bought retains a continuity that holds childhood together across generations and through different historical periods. Focusing on consumption in the GDR, or the Third Reich, or the *Kaiserreich* exclusively, then, may not be the wisest treatment for revealing the true importance of the subject.

As a response to these dilemmas, Manuel Schramm's beautifully and meticulously researched monograph is a unique and largely successful attempt to understand the role of consumption throughout a longer period. The continuity of consumption in his particular region, Saxony, is a key to understanding the continuity of Saxony's

regional identity through the vast pendulum swings of political history it has undergone in the previous 120 years. Schramm takes us through the history of several categories of consumer goods that have come to be associated with the regional identity of Saxony since the late-nineteenth century. First, he looks at the role of public arenas in the discourse on consumption and Saxon identity, focusing on industry exhibitions, *Volksfeste*, *StreizlmÃ¤rkte*, and the "*Tag der Sachsen*." His third chapter focuses on food and drinks associated with Saxony, above all the particular penchant of Saxons for a weakened kind of coffee, originally parodied as "*Kaffeesachsen*" as well as other foods such as *Stollen* and potato dumplings (*KlÃ¶Ãe*). Chapter 4 considers the role of "folk art" with special emphasis on toys and embroidery from Saxony, and his final chapter leads through a history of "quality products" from Saxony, including MeiÃen porcelain and automobiles, especially the Trabant, from Zwickau.

Schramm wisely situates his study in the current debate over the effects of globalized markets on local and regional identities. He aims to provide empirical underpinning to a range of current theories over the impact of globalization, from those of Robert Redfield and Benjamin Barber, who see growing homogenization and disappearance of folk societies, to Ronald Robertson's theory of "glocalization" in which local identities survive insofar as their products can be marketed to the broader international market ("Columbian coffee" or "Czech crystal") or Ulf Hannerz's concept of the creolization of regional and local culture. By incorporating these contemporary debates into a historical study, Schramm provides an important intervention into contemporary debates on globalization, specifically the reminder that globalization has been shaping regional cultures since the interaction of consumer society and traditional culture began in the 1890s and earlier.

One aspect of Schramm's work is the role played by specific agents in constructing this fusion of certain consumer goods and Saxon identity. This issue resurfaces throughout the book as a tension between what certain groups in Saxony wanted "Saxony" to mean in terms of objects and symbols, and what Saxons themselves really experienced on an everyday level. The example that Schramm begins with, the Leipzig Fair of 1897, illustrates this conflict well. The idea of an exhibition that focused on Saxony specifically came from a group of hoteliers and restaurateurs inspired by the success of Saxon products at the Chicago World's Fair. A number of groups co-opted the idea, including the city council and the Saxon King Albert, who took over sponsorship of the event, coupling it with the 400th anniversary of the old Leipzig trade fair. What began as an attempt to showcase up-and-coming factories and businesses from Saxony developed into a full-blown celebration of Saxon heritage, replete with vendors required to wear sixteenth-century costumes while pedaling traditional folk wares from a reconstructed historic fair zone. Over one million people attended, and the most popular branches of the fair were the historical throwbacks. The traditional Leipzig drink, the *Gose*, was not particularly enjoyed, however, especially by visitors from Saxony.

The fair was not repeated because it created a major financial loss for the city, although other exhibitions did take place there later. Throughout different periods, Saxons and visitors to the exhibitions showed remarkable consistency in their desire for traditional themes. Most attempts to modernize goods or the venues met with resistance, as did Werkbund architect Heinrich Tessenow's use of the progressive, modern WerkstÃ¤tten Hellerau to construct the display for Saxony's furniture industry at the 1925 Dresden exhibition of German handicrafts, which drew several complaints for not being sufficiently traditional. The NSDAP attempted to highlight *Volkstum* and *Heimat*, although their influence was largely superficial. Under the Soviet Military Administration and later the GDR, exhibitions of industrial and handicraft goods in Saxony were cast in a more modern light, emphasizing mass production. Although the sale of traditional handicrafts, such as gnomes, angels, advent calendars, and other sentimental figurines and trinkets was reduced, and although, as Schramm says, the fairs and Christmas markets became events more heavily featuring entertainment, food, and drink, a strong desire among Saxons for the traditional goods and atmosphere of the market persisted. After reunification, the original "Saxon Day" which had debuted in 1914 was resurrected in 1992. Again, the festival showcased a number of new businesses and corporations, especially large national and multinational ones attempting to dive into the newly opened market, and also helped gain recognition for new local companies. Gone were the overdetermined trappings of Saxon identity, such as the figures of the long departed King Albert and the Saxon coat of arms. Nonetheless the festival still had to take place in a traditional venue, and had to be mediated through the idea of a Saxon identity: it featured a long display documenting the history of Saxony from Slavic settlement to the present, and even though the scale and technique of commerce had changed, the fair was still the one public means outside forces (whether the Werkbund, the NS-

DAP, the GDR, or multinational corporations) had to enter Saxony on Saxon terms.

Schramm's discussion of Saxon food and drink will likely bring more than a few smiles to anyone familiar with Saxony. This example more than any other in his book demonstrates the degree to which something as basic as "regional cuisine" is the product of a discourse between those outside the region and those in it, and the degree to which the stereotypes of certain foods as identifiers of a region do not always correspond with everyday experiences. The style of brewing coffee in Saxony, known as *Kaffeesachse*, was parodied from the nineteenth century as being indicative of poor quality, but was expertly turned around during the 1960s and 1970s by Saxon writers who launched a campaign to present *Kaffeesachse* as a mark of quality. Potato dishes, such as *KlÃ¶Ãe* and *Quarkkeulchen*, were also repeatedly attached to Saxon identity by writers, cookbook editors, and restauranteurs outside of Saxony. The construction of this association is important here, but more decisive in my view is Schramm's pursuit of various traces of evidence concerning the real importance of foods like *Quarkkeulchen* among ordinary Saxons. In reality, the little cheesy potato balls were not particularly loved by Saxons in Saxony, who could take them or leave them.

This nagging divergence is consistently the most interesting aspect of the construction of Saxon identity through the praxes and objects of consumption. The legend of Saxon potato dumplings lived on outside Saxony as a nostalgia for a Saxony removed both in time and in distance. For some writers, advertisers, and other "tastemakers," potato dumplings represented a preindustrial idyll, and for many Saxon exiles in the FRG, they were "real" Saxon food that served as their connection with a promised land to which they could not return. This pattern was repeated consistently. For Saxons inside Saxony the consumption of particularly "Saxon" goods, especially folk handicrafts such as Christmas angels and nutcrackers, persisted as the expression of sentimental longing for an imagined past, especially as a reaction against the modern demands of both twentieth-century capitalism and post-Stalinist socialism's forced modernization. In other words, Schramm's work here calls into question how much of the palimpsest of "Saxony as understood through its things" is real in any meaningful way. Surely, there is some reality to it. Advertisers, writers, businessmen, and exhibition organizers did not invent *Quarkkeulchen* or nutcrackers or Christmas markets–these things existed in Saxony and in a pre-industrial past–but the idea that they were so integral to the identity of Saxony, that, as one Saxon *Heimat* book said concerning traditional toys from Seiffen "which Saxon child has not once in his life discovered the soul of Seiffener toys," appears an increasingly artificial construction. Nostalgia, then, is no mere phenomenon of the 1990s transition from socialism to capitalism; it has existed since consumer goods were presented to outsiders and to Saxons as something more than they were, something over-determined.

So how does Schramm's book contribute to the debates on globalization? It is clear that the fusion of a regional identity–"Saxon"–with a constellation of consumer goods and praxes was an artificial affair. At times the image of Saxony as represented through Christmas markets, coffee, or toys resonated with real Saxons, though just as often many Saxons viewed these supposedly "Saxon" things as a fairy tale. Whether it resonated or not, the promotion of porcelain or embroidery was a conscious effort by specific historical agents. At times these agents were individual writers, *Heimat* museums, local town councils, or business interests, at times they were larger corporations or political regimes, from the NSDAP to the GDR government. In all cases this promotion was a response to challenges from market forces beyond the borders of Saxony, a relationship seen perhaps most clearly in the repackaging of the Saxon toy industry after competition from the USA and Japan for the British market at the turn of the century. At times regional identity receded as more local identities came to the fore, as in the case of Seiffener toys, and at times national identities dominated, as when the Trabant came to be synonymous with East Germany as a whole. These phenomena make clear that there are overlapping layers of identity affected by globalization. It also seems clear that asking whether modern global consumerism helps or hurts local culture may be a misguided question. Local or regional identity has never been authentically represented by consumer goods. If the Saxony understood through its set of goods may never have existed in the first place, so its destruction or reaffirmation in the years to come might very well be a moot question.

If I have one reservation about Schramm's book, it is that I wished it were more situated in the debate over consumption as a cultural phenomenon, not merely globalization, which is mostly a contemporary debate. As a consequence of the decision to contextualize the consumption of "Saxony" as an example of globalization, I think Schramm confines himself rather too narrowly to picking among what may be a false set of questions: "homogeneity" vs "glocalization," for example. Thus the

book does not address matters like the question of how creation of a Saxon identity through consumer symbols (despite its inauthenticity) played into the question of political support for certain regimes. In the GDR, for example, the Institute of Applied Art pushed for a more functional porcelain, more suited to the needs of working East Germans. Such a move would have forced an aesthetic change in the famous MeiÃen porcelain, eliminating the trademark blue onions and elaborate shaping, but making the porcelain more suited to everyday use–while also proving that Saxony could produce quality, tasteful modern dinnerware suitable for mass production. Despite some attempts at changing its products, however, MeiÃen continued to produce its trademark seventeenth-century patterns, largely because of the expectation of western consumers. The old MeiÃen style was considered to be a "quality" product, and the more modern designs trumpeted by the magazine *Kultur im Heim* and the Institute for Applied Art were not.

Such developments raise questions about the factors determining notions of quality and taste. In the 1920s toy manufacturers set out to "educate" consumers about why Saxon toys were tasteful, so that consumers did not purchase other, cheaper toys. In the 1970s, the once-ridiculed *Kaffeesachse* was morphed into a notion of "quality." One of the most important aspects of associating a good with a regional identity is pride in quality. Yet this influence of taste and perception of quality operates like a mystery in Schramm's book. Why did shoppers gravitate toward wooden Christmas angels and nutcrackers and not the mass-produced plastic toys the GDR attempted to emphasize? Why did porcelain collectors fixate on blue onions and not the modernist patterns of the Office of Industrial Design? These factors become very important in light of Schramm's conclusion that although globalization strengthens local culture, this process depends on the conscious actions of historical actors. His book suggests the need for further research on how these actors operate, what determines their success or failure, and whether these processes strengthen or weaken certain ruling ideologies.

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