



Karl Haushofer. *An English Translation of Major General Karl Ernst Haushofer's Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean and Studies in the Relationship Between Geography and History.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002. 444 pp. \$129.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7734-7122-1.



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A striking figure in the history of Weimar German scholarship is Major General Karl Ernst Haushofer (1869-1946). A translation of his *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans*, published in 1924, could be of great value for historians who are interested in the academic climate in an era framed by the loss of the Great War and by the seemingly imposed struggle to get accustomed to the new political constitution. Haushofer's concepts "enriched" the later "Lingua Tertii Imperii," as Viktor Klemperer called the language of the Third Reich, and fostered the political, military, and strategic thinking of the National Socialists. He is an important father of the concept "Lebensraum," one of the mantras of Nazi ideology.

His star had already been rising in the twenties, long before the National Socialists gained power. Haushofer's student Rudolf He introduced his teacher to Adolf Hitler at Munich's Landsberg prison after the failed 1923 putsch. Considering his later positions in Nazi Germany—Haushofer served as President of both the Deutsche Akademie (1934-1937) and the Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland (1938-1941)—one would expect Hitler to have followed the recommendations of the Major General, but it was not to happen. After the flight of his pupil He to England, Haushofer's position became vulnerable. His son was jailed and murdered by the SS after the July 20, 1944, assault on Hitler, and he himself

was incarcerated at Dachau briefly. Finally, Haushofer was acquitted by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg but committed suicide on March 10, 1946, together with his half-Jewish spouse Martha Mayer-Do.

His work, as that of many other geographers in this era, could be a goldmine for postmodernist interpreters of spatiality and discourse, so often practiced in colonial studies. Surprisingly, this approach to German National Socialist literary and academic sources did not find response, probably because of the ponderous, unreadable style of many authors—not a favorite source for literary historians—and of the complexity and ambiguity of the subject matter, such as the geopolitical studies of the Munich Major General.

Paradoxically, the holistic Haushofer could be considered a descendant of the Enlightenment: it was his ultimate objective to educate his political masters and to conceive geopolitics as at the service of humankind. He saw the discipline as the scholarly basis of practical state politics, which establishes circles of living forms (*Lebensformen*) and of living space (*Lebensraum*) on earth. For him, the main goal of nations was self-realization in correspondence with the fundamental inorganic and biogeographical conditions of the country: Every artist, all doing and acting, could only be effective in time and space, and the margins of political artists were, more than

any other, influenced by these laws. Geopolitics was a new concept of geography and history, based on an organic understanding of the links between nature and humankind. In the footsteps of Friedrich Ratzel, Haushofer and others sought to analyze the influence of location, situation, and space, and of physical and historical circumstances on human kind, and to develop organic laws of behavior for sovereign states.

By studying the geopolitics of the Pacific, Haushofer created a mirror image of Germany: the vast centripetal, often autarkic oceanic world, with its many island coasts, the endless blue waves, white foaming surf, and roaring round deep-green atolls, inhabited by children of bliss and sunny worlds, versus the continental climate of central Europe. As another exponent of reactionary modernism, Haushofer analyzed the history, anthropology, trade routes, infrastructure, property accumulation, imperial relations, and military power of the sea area, and came to highly speculative conclusions. According to him, the outstanding geopolitical mark of the Pacific realm is found in the aversion to extreme, purely violent, solutions and in a supposed inclination to punish violations of a conciliatory nature, which is over a longer period expanded by larger wave lengths (!). Also, in his Darwinist way of thinking, he sensed in the Pacific realm a merciless absorptive power of the smaller and weaker individuals, taken up by the bigger and more powerful ones.

Two political lessons for Germany could be learned from his findings. First, the lamented loss of German island territories in the Pacific, as determined at Versailles, could, however painful it was, be seen as a blessing in disguise, since the Pacific island kingdom did not add to German self-realization. Second, following the views of Haushofer, Germany should be aligned with geopolitically consonant countries, which have a corresponding continental climate: a German transcontinental railroad policy could solve the gigantic space problem of both Germany and Russia. As Lewis Tambs states in his introduction, Haushofer advocated an alliance of Germany, Russia, China, India, and Japan against the colonial maritime powers England, France, and the United States. This Eurasian alliance should run from the Rhine River to the Amur and the Yangtze.

One may ask what Haushofer's influence was on world affairs. In Weimar Germany, as David Thomas Murphy states in *The Heroic Earth*, the widespread geopolitical ideas played an important role in preparing the Germans to reject the Republic as a political form un-

suited to Germany's "organic needs." In general, however, Murphy observes a considerable gap between geopolitical doctrine and National Socialist practice.[1] Klaus Hildebrand called Hitler a poorly educated adept of the Munich professor. He confirms that it will remain unclear if, in his spatial thinking, the Fhrer was either directly influenced by Haushofer, or misunderstood him.[2] Ian Kershaw indicates that Haushofer's influence was probably greater than the Munich professor was later prepared to acknowledge.[3] Conceptually, the Fhrer understood the Major General pretty well. In line with Haushofer and contrary to his official revision policy of the Versailles Treaty, Hitler did not make a fuss of regaining Pacific colonies. But his ideas on the historical necessity of "living space" for the Germans brought the Fhrer to different conclusions. The Major General was only briefly pleased after the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, assuming that Russia and Germany would never again endanger the geopolitical foundations of their adjustable spaces. Barbarossa brought an end to his illusions.

A translation of Haushofer's seminal work into modern English is not the easiest of jobs. Not only could one simply miss the more or less subtle references that unveil the language and the thinking of the time, it is also extremely difficult to translate Haushofer's vague and opaque literary style. It is a pity that translator Ernst J. Brehm misses the antenna. He probably saw it as his job to spirit away all ponderous and byzantine phrases and make the text readable for contemporary readers. For example, the title of chapter 3, "Eigenwchsige Wesenszge im pazifischen Lebensraum," is translated as "Autochthonous Indigenous Characteristic Features of the Pacific Ocean Basin." And the title of chapter eight, "Der Einbruch der weien Rasse" is translated as "The European Intrusion."

Lewis Tambs's introduction makes such translation choices unsurprising. Tambs underlines the value of geopolitics for present-day scholars in international relations. He positions Haushofer's work in a longer international tradition of geopolitical scholars—the German spiritual father of the discipline, Friedrich Ratzel, but also the Englishmen Sir Halford J. Mackinder and James Fairgrieve, the American Ellen Churchill Semple, and the Argentine Frigate Captain Segundo R. Storni—and he concludes that Haushofer's book still forecasts the future of the "global balance"! The English translation is less useful for historians who are interested in the interdependencies between scholarly and National Socialist thinking. Yet indeed, it might be of importance for the history

of geopolitical thought. Historians often have to cope with this problem. To understand the language of the time, it is of great importance to historicize concepts, but to understand these concepts, others appropriate, revive, and often also revise the same.

Notes

[1]. David Thomas Murphy, *The Heroic Earth: Geopo-*

litical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933 (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997), pp. 241, 246.

[2]. Klaus Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich: Hitler, NSDAP und koloniale Frage, 1919-1945* (Munich: Fink, 1969), p. 77.

[3]. See also Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936, Hubris* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 248-249.

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