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Rainer Paetau, ed. *Die Protokolle des Preußischen Staatsministeriums 1817-1934/38–1. November 1858 bis 28. Dezember 1866.* Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2001. ix + 451 pp. EUR 99.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-487-11002-8.

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It has been observed that while not all roads in modern German history lead to the Prussian state, a large number of them go to or through it. The treatment given the Prussian state has varied enormously over the past century and a half—including teleological valorization by some nineteenth-century nationalist scholars and near-vilification by some twentieth-century historians critiquing the supposed *Sonderweg* of Germany, to name only two approaches—but few have disputed the vital role played by the Prussian state in German (and European) history. Given the state’s historical importance, it is truly remarkable that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century protocols of one of its central institutions, the State Ministry (*Staatsministerium*), have not been previously made accessible in a complete and systematic fashion (p. i).

Fortunately, however, the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften has sponsored a project to redress this problem, commissioning a set of twelve catalogs (*Regesten-Bände*) of the protocols of the Prussian State Ministry from 1817 to 1934/38. This fifth volume, put together by a team led by Rainer Paetau, covers the period from November 10, 1858 to December 28, 1866, or the eventful years that started with the promise of liberal reforms in the New Era under Regent Wilhelm I, spanned an extensive state crisis partly solved and partly exacerbated by the appointment of Bismarck as Chancellor, and concluded with Prussia’s ascendancy over its Austrian rival. This volume therefore affords researchers access to events of profound importance for Prussian, German, and European history. Indeed, the protocols of the Prussian State Ministry offer researchers an invaluable aid in the ongoing re-evaluation of Prussian history in general and of the New Era in particular. Such an aid is particularly welcome given the thorough re-evaluation

of Prussian and German history undertaken by scholars over the last three decades. Researchers will also rejoice to learn that in addition to the twelve printed volumes, microfiche copies of the corresponding protocols held in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz have also been sponsored.

The book is comprised of three parts: an extensive introduction, the protocols themselves, and various user-friendly guides, including three registries for selected topics, people, and places. All three sections are intelligently organized and well designed to facilitate research. The introduction does a particularly fine job of explaining the place and function of the State Ministry within the Prussian state and of articulating the extent to which the State Ministry shaped, responded to, and was overtaken by events between 1858 and 1866. The State Ministry lay at the administrative nerve center of Prussia. Its meetings were principally attended by members of the royal family (and/or their advisors) as well as by the various ministries’ chiefs. Because they discussed such a wide range of issues, their meetings serve a useful guide to understanding the dialectical relationship between those who exercised power and those over whom they exercised it. The introduction leads the reader through a series of important issues (thirty-six by my count, each helpfully highlighted in bold print) which the State Ministry had to contend with. These ranged from foreign affairs (the Italian wars of unification, the Polish uprising of 1863, Prussia’s own wars with Denmark and Austria, etc.) to various inter-German developments (the German Question, the proposed reforms of the German Confederation, etc.) to issues that affected primarily Prussian domestic politics (Prussia’s constitutional conflict, marriage law reform, Jewish emancipation, etc.) to more purely in-

ternal bureaucratic policies.

Despite the complex ways in which such events in the New Era interconnected and overlapped, the introduction effectively treats the individual strands tangled in such a thicket of topics. For example, the debates about army reform, contests over the army, and the constitutional conflict are treated separately, but with frequent reference to each other. Better still, Paetau also explains the implications of such interconnected topics for multiple arenas of analysis in Prussian, German, and European history. In some rare instances, information is repeated in the introduction. We are told three times, for instance, that Wilhelm became king in 1861. However, such repetition hardly poses a problem. The introduction also provides valuable references to key works that review the scholarly literature on given topics without re-hashing old debates.

Researchers may also be grateful that Paetau points out what the protocols are not useful for. Those researching the origins of the Indemnity Law that ended the constitutional conflict, for example, will be spared much time by reading the warning that the protocols shed little light on them. Such a detailed account of the files' usefulness, and of their limits, is extremely helpful. The introduction additionally gives a concise description of the central institutions of the Prussian state, an understanding of the major individuals involved, and a sense of how these institutions and personal relationships changed over time. The introduction also provides a useful explanation of the different kinds of meetings the State Ministry held—meetings of the State Ministry, the *Kronrat*, and various other (usually ad hoc) meetings of officials—and the different kinds of written protocols represented in the files.

The protocols themselves are “not stenographic meeting records,” but they do provide an overview of the topics discussed and in many cases (since many files are *Beschlu  protokolle*) the decisions taken (p. 36). The editors have reconstructed a list of the members present in and absent from the meetings. The original formulation of the hand-written records is reproduced, and it has been augmented by the editors (in italics) when the formulation was unclear or obscure, following the stan-

dard guidelines originally laid down by Johann Schultze (p. vii).[1] Particularly helpful is the cross-referencing of the various documents mentioned in the protocols. Readers are provided with the precise references for the documents in other holdings of the archive at Berlin-Dahlem, and/or in other archives, or of copies of the documents in scholarly literature. Likewise, readers are given both the microfiche and archival reference numbers for the protocols.[2]

The various indexes and lists that conclude the book are also extremely helpful. In addition to three extensive indexes of topics, persons, and places, the book also gives the reader a list of the various government ministers in the period concerned, a comprehensive index of the archival holdings cited throughout the text and an index of the secondary literature most frequently cited in the text.

In short, this text is invaluable for researchers. It not only fills an important gap in scholarly resources on an important institution of the Prussian state, but also (because of the nature of the State Ministry's activities) eases access to a plethora of other institutions and issues. It is difficult to imagine how the volume might be made still more user-friendly than it is. The well-written introduction makes readily comprehensible both the complex structure of a central state institution and the complicated and overlapping issues of an era of rapid change. The editors' various cross-referencing techniques described above will likely spare researchers weeks or months of drudge-work, enabling them to swiftly locate the sources they need and to weave a rich network of connections between sources.

Notes

[1]. Johannes Schultze, “Richtlinien f  r die   u  ere Textgestaltung bei Herausgabe von Quellen zur neueren deutschen Geschichte,” *Bl  tter f  r deutsche Landesgeschichte* 98 (1962): pp. 1-11.

[2]. James M. Brophy described a very similar set of advantages for vol. 3 in this series in *Central European History* 35 no. 3 (2002): pp. 426-428.

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