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Mary Fulbrook. *A Concise History of Germany.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xviii + 277 pp. $23.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-54071-1; $54.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-36283-2.

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German History like *Landbrot*, Straightforward and Satisfying

"A book such as this is infinitely easier to criticise than to write," warns Mary Fulbrook with disarming candor in the preface to her latest edition of *A Concise History of Germany* (p. xv). Indeed, an author must possess a fair amount of learning and temerity to compress almost two millennia of national history within three hundred pages. Fulbrook exhibits a felicitous blend of each.

She divides her history into eight chapters according to recognized dates and themes. The first chapter opens with Goethe and Schiller's famous quote about the perennial indeterminacy of Germany's borders ("Deutschland? Aber wo liegt es? Ich weiss das Land nicht zu finden") and an introductory topography of the modern nation. Fulbrook then proceeds at a hearty clip through chapters on the Middle Ages, confessionalism to the end of the Thirty Years War (1648), absolutism to the end of the Holy Roman Empire (1815), industrialism to the end of the First World War (1918), the Weimar Republic and the end of the Second World War (1945), and the two Germanies between 1945 and 1990. Along the way the familiar actors of German history make cameo appearances: Tacitus, Charlemagne, Luther, assorted Kings Frederick, Hegel, Marx, Hindenburg, Hitler, Adenauer, Honecker, guest workers, Kohl, Schroeder.

Despite her employment of this well-established partition, Fulbrook avoids ideological strictures through her balanced selection of material. Where historians disagree on the interpretation of an event, she offers their different perspectives. Where she perceives a longstanding bias, she interjects a counteropinion. For example, in the last chapter Fulbrook questions the traditional view that Germany has taken a *Sonderweg* to nationhood. She attributes the prevailing interpretation to historians' imposition of "modern categories and assumptions about the normality of the nation state as the obvious political unit" (p. 260). She also sidesteps the teleological trap of identifying the Holocaust as the ignominious end toward which all of pre-WWII German history tends. Finally, she calls scholars to task for their insistence upon trying to locate a breaking point in German history, a "Stunde Null," whether in 1848, 1945, or 1990.

Fulbrook's concern for balance even extends to her

choice of illustrations. She substitutes oft-used images of great personalities and locales with ones that represent "broader themes and more remote periods or places" (p. xvii). Those expecting to see Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Martin Luther* (1529) or J. H. W. Tischbein's *Goethe in the Roman Campagna* (1787) will have to look elsewhere, but then so will readers seeking Sir John Tenniel's famous caricature of Bismarck, "Der Lotse verlsst das Schiff" (1890), referred to but not reproduced (p. 135). Fulbrook instead offers several broadsheets, posters, and political cartoons, among many different kinds of images. Not all readers will appreciate the strategy, whatever the good intentions. Those not initiated into the German language will find incomprehensible large amounts of untranslated explanatory text. Others who can read German but suffer from the slightest myopia will probably not be able to decipher the reduced print. The author fills an entire page with fifteen political cartoons of Bismarck, for example, without translating the captions or explaining the various poses in which the artist places the subject (p. 136). (Teachers of German history and culture should prepare themselves for the inevitable student inquiry as to why the Iron Chancellor, made up in a tutu, dances a ballet among large eggs.)

And in fairness to others plowing the same vast field, one slight point of contention: The back cover of the paperback edition describes Fulbrook's as the "only single-volume history of Germany in English which offers a broad, general coverage." While this may have been true of the 1991 version, the claim no longer holds since the English translation of Hagen Schulze's *Kleine Deutsche Geschichte* (1998) and the publication of Steven Ozment's *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* (2004). Schulze's material covers the same ground as Fulbrook's and, though nine years old, remains relevant, especially the concluding chapter on German post-unification national identity.

Still, like an airplane window that affords a panorama, Fulbrook's survey provides a broad overview of the layout and contours of the chosen terrain. Readers who wish to touch down in particular historical eras may pursue further research with help of the comprehensive "Suggestions for Further Reading" in the back. Although the author fears that "a brief volume will inevitably provoke squeals of protest from countless specialists" (p. xv), her heart need not be troubled. The intended audience of students, businessmen and businesswomen, travelers, and even non-Germanist scholars looking for a brisk and readable introduction to German history may profitably take her book in hand.

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