



Konrad Krause. *Alma mater Lipsiensis: Geschichte der Universität Leipzig - von der Gründung 1409 bis zur Gegenwart.* Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2003. 647 S. EUR 39.00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-936522-65-5.



Reviewed by Gordon Cooper (Department of History, University of Sydney)

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Since the late 1960s, historical interest in universities as sites symbolic of cultural and elite reproduction has escalated considerably, resulting in an increasingly nuanced understanding of the academy in the social, political, cultural, and economic life of local and national communities. This heightened interest is no doubt partly a response to the Bourdieuan understanding of the university's role in reproducing societal elites, and partly the result of a broadened desire amongst scholars to examine the nature of the state's interaction with important socio-cultural institutions. In the context of the German university, a considerable body of research has since explored a range of historical dilemmas relating to higher education and its part in the schisms of the body politic.[1] Yet while much of this literature ably and appropriately highlights the centrality of the academy in the scientific and scholarly life of the nation, the university's role in its immediate locale tends to be either marginalized or overlooked entirely. Case studies of individual universities generally appear only on significant anniversaries and then languish in obscurity in the dustier recesses of public libraries. As Charles McClelland has recently noted, these "coffee table" *Jubiläumsschriften*—typically produced not by professional historians but by faculty members with an intricate understanding of the university's internal machinations—have proven a reliable launching

pad for the academy's "positive and reinforcing rituals of image polishing." [2] In 2003, Konrad Krause's 647-page *Alma mater Lipsiensis: Geschichte der Universität Leipzig von 1409 bis zur Gegenwart* joined the ranks of this literary-historical tradition of institutional image polishing, providing a colorful and accessible narrative that is ultimately of no intrinsic value to historians of German higher education.

Alma mater Lipsiensis is divided into two principle sections, with a final division chronicling the university's political narrative and personalities in a neat timeline. Section 1, "Zeitabschnitte zur Geschichte der Universität Leipzig," plots a chronological course from the university's foundation in 1409, through the Reformation, the modernizing trends of the nineteenth century, and the radical schisms in the higher education sector during the twentieth century. The second section, "Akademische Lehre, Forschung und Studium—Personen und Institutionen," redirects the narrative towards some of the University's notable figures and secondary institutions, most particularly Leipzig's Nobel Prize winners and other famous alumni, the recently restored Bibliotheca Albertina, the Saxon Academy of Sciences and the university's museums. By drawing attention to the importance of individuals and institutions as well as the high politics of the university, this structure is designed

to demonstrate the centrality of the university in the life of its host city.

Yet while Professor Krause is to be applauded for his attempt to locate the university within the context of the city of Leipzig, this book suffers from serious deficiencies that diminish its claim to present an appropriate historical overview of Leipzig University. In many respects, this tome has fallen into the trap identified by McClelland: an acute overemphasis on the university's achievements and only a limited acknowledgement of the darker chapters of the institution's past. This tendency is particularly notable in Krause's handling of the university under National Socialism and its post-war transformation into a *Kaderschmiede* for the East German "antifascist-democratic" order.[3] Only 32 of the book's 647 pages are devoted to the Nazi period and the author uses a mere two archival sources to underpin this overview, despite a wealth of material at the Saxon State Archives and the University Archives. Furthermore, his discussion fails to appropriately identify or engage with the sizeable historiography on universities under National Socialism, and perhaps for this reason, *Alma mater Lipsiensis* merely reinforces the dated post-war narratives of academic exultation that sought to distance scholarship from the crimes of the Nazi state. While Krause concedes that more than two hundred university representatives signed the infamous "Bekanntnis der Professoren an den deutschen Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und den nationalsozialistischen Staat" (p. 277), the remainder of the chapter emphasizes the apparent passivity of the academy in the face of the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* of 1933-34. Such an uncritical position is particularly troubling in light of recent research that has so ably demonstrated the role of academia—both before and after the rise of Hitler—in providing a scientific and philosophical buttress for National Socialist dogma and both producing and reproducing Nazi elites.

Admittedly, Krause acknowledges that his study does not aim to meet the more exacting criteria of historical scholarship. In a pre-emptive broadside against professional historians, the author dismisses academic history as an inherently elitist field because such scholars "hide behind a standpoint, which postulates that 'genuine' historical interpretations are those whose deepest meaning may only be grasped by experts and in which every sentence bursts with thought-provoking new insights" (p. 11). While Krause's criticism of the "elitism" of professional history is almost self-evidently problematic and seems to imply the inability of a general readership to comprehend well-researched history, such an evaluation

does bear a degree of validity. Those academic histories that have engaged with a single case study institution inevitably focus upon a specific period or theme in the university's past, weaving a historiographical patchwork of institutional minutiae that addresses an academic audience rather than a general readership. But this problem should not excuse the manifest research failings of Krause's book, which pays mere lip service to archival research and prefers to cite the SED-sponsored title *Karl Marx Universität Leipzig 1409-1959* over the scholarship of historians like Rüdiger vom Bruch and Ilko-Sasche Kowalczyk.

For those readers searching for a relatively compact and accessible summary of Leipzig University's history, *Alma mater Lipsiensis* is a sufficient compendium that comes accompanied by a detailed index of personalities and a range of color plates. But this book will yield little for scholars seeking a more nuanced discussion of the historical relationship between the university, the city of Leipzig, and the German university tradition. Rather, historians can expect this book to adorn the University's coffee tables in its 600th-anniversary year (in 2009), after which time it will no doubt retire to the relative obscurity of those few muted library shelves dedicated to the history of individual universities.

Notes

[1]. Pierre Boudieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1984). A few key English-language examples of the diversity and development of university histories are: Lawrence Stone, ed., *The University and Society*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Fritz K. Ringer, *Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Alice Gallin, *Midwives to Nazism: University Professors in Weimar Germany, 1925-1933* (Macer: Mercon, 1986); John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[2]. Charles McClelland, "Modern German universities and their historians since the fall of the wall," *Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005): p. 140.

[3]. I borrow this term from Carlo Jordan, *Kaderschmiede Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Aufbegehren, Säuberungen und Militarisierung 1945-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2001).

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