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Grit Hartmann. *Richard Wagner gepfändet: Ein Leipziger Denkmal in Dokumenten 1931-1955.* Leipzig: Forum Verlag Leizig, 2003. 264 S.; 36 Abb. EUR 14.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-931801-35-9.

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The Curious History of Leipzig's Richard Wagner Monument

This slim collection of primary documents presents the interesting story of the decades-long, though ultimately fruitless, efforts of Leipzig municipal administrations and citizens to build a monument to honor one of the city's most famous sons, Richard Wagner. Consisting primarily of correspondence that passed through the Leipzig city government, the volume begins with the genesis of the monument in the early 1930s and ends with the ignominious partial destruction of the unfinished monument and the dispersal of fragments to several West German private collectors in the 1950s. Essays written by editor Grit Hartmann introducing each of the four chronologically divided groups of documents both provide the reader with the historical context needed to make sense of the individuals and institutions involved in the monument project and also help situate the documents into the larger story of the reception of Wagner and his music by Germans, specifically Leipzigers. The documents and the editor's essays touch upon a number of important issues regarding culture and commemoration in the Nazi and East German dictatorships, including an especially effective demonstration of the considerable difficulties the National Socialist state and party encountered in their efforts to transform German society and culture. However, the book's usefulness would be greater if the author had foregrounded these themes.

The first group of documents focuses on the monument's genesis in the early 1930s. At a July 1931 meeting of a special commission that included Leipzig's Lord Mayor, Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, and several members of the city's cultural elite, commission members resolved to hold a design competition for a possible Richard Wagner monument in Leipzig. Significantly, the commission members also formulated a backup plan, one far less grand and much less expensive: should a monument not be possible, Leipzig would display in a new location an already extant plinth, designed by Max Klinger and intended to be the base of a 17.5-foot statue of Richard Wagner. Already at the commission's initial meeting one of the central issues of the entire work emerged: the widespread and well-founded concerns on the part of city officials regarding the means of funding the monument in light of the city's current financial difficulties. The other documents in the section illustrate these concerns as city officials and concerned citizens consider differ-

ent types of monuments and different schemes for their realization. The announcement for the design competition confidently, though erroneously, informed the public that the total cost of the monument would not exceed 100,000 Marks. On the eve of Hitler's appointment as chancellor, the supporters of the monument had cause for celebration, since it appeared that sufficient, though still fragile, progress had been made in resolving some of the most important issues, such as the location of the proposed monument and its means of financing.

The second collection of documents, the most voluminous in the work, covers the prewar years of the Third Reich. They illustrate not only the unfounded early optimism of city officials and supporters but, more importantly, the history and legacy of Adolf Hitler and other Nazi leaders' growing interest in the monument. Since his youth, Hitler had a boundless admiration and respect for Wagner, whom he considered one of the greatest Germans in history.[1] Not surprisingly, Hitler attended in February 1933 the Leipzig ceremony marking the fiftieth anniversary of Wagner's death, signaling both his interest in the project and his desire to see the National Socialist state and party play a much greater role in the monument's realization. Two months later, officials purged some Leipzig commission members and replaced them with local Nazis. Hitler was involved in various stages of the moment: he donated money to the project; he approved of the sculptor Emil Hipp as the commission's choice for the winner of the monument design contest; and in March 1934 he laid the foundation stone of what had now become the "Richard Wagner National Monument in Leipzig." Such interventions were partly responsible for the repeated delays in construction and the not unrelated explosion in costs as the scale of the monument grew dramatically. The Nazis were willing to act quickly and decisively, however, regarding Leipzig's monument to the "Jewish" composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy; Hartmann effectively juxtaposes the Nazi removal and destruction of this bronze monument with the repeated delays and difficulties regarding the Wagner monument.

Covering the war years, the third group of documents builds on an underdeveloped thematic thread from the previous section–the growing difficulties in constructing the monument as a result of preparations for the coming war–to show the considerable and rapidly growing impact of the war on the project. Not only did the project continue to be plagued with problems such as a shortage of raw materials, but wartime conditions like the dearth of available manpower and the effects of Allied bombings also impeded the work of Hipp and his associates. An October 1941 report by the city official supervising the monument's construction noted that the project lacked the "urgency level" (*Dringlichkeitsstufe*) of war-related programs such as munitions production. Nevertheless, the official called for the use of forced labor to help move the project along, though, in typical Nazi fashion, he categorically prohibited the use of Russians. The reader is left to wonder what aspect of the project–its assumed significance in the German cultural landscape, possibly–convinced the official, desperately seeking additional manpower, to exclude such a large group of available workers. The section's documents also show that despite the demands of the war, men such as Hitler and Gauleiter Martin Mutschmann found the time to involve themselves in a dispute regarding Hipp's artistic depiction of the mythical German character Siegfried. In an almost comical exchange among city officials, the sculptor and party elites, the issue of whether Hipp's Siegfried appeared overly feminine or bloated was earnestly debated. Ultimately, Leipzig's mayor appealed to Hitler, who sent as his trusted representatives Albert Speer and sculptor Arno Breker, both of whom, after viewing the sculpture, approved of Hipp's depiction of Siegfried.

In the period 1945 to 1955, the focus of the fourth and final group of documents, the monument experienced its embarrassing demise, as various parties like the Leipzig administration and the Bavarian marble supplier squabbled over the monument. Questions regarding storages costs and labor quickly mushroomed into a discussion of what, if anything, was to be done with the monument, including those parts of it already completed. Particularly interesting are documents that depict the slight change in attitude on the part of the postwar communist municipal administration, from an initially total rejection of the entire project on political grounds that precluded any further involvement ("Hiernach bedarf es wohl kaum noch des Hinweises, dass wir beim Neuaufbau unserer Stadt Leipzig zur Vollendung nationalsozialistischer Propaganda- und WahnsinnsplÃ¤ne weder Zeit noch Mittel zur VerfÃ¼gung haben," p. 194) to a willingness to find some kind of solution acceptable to the artist and the marble supplier. Negotiations continued for years, even reaching in fall 1951 the highest level of the East German cultural affairs administration. Berlin finally instructed Leipzig to settle the matter under the most financially favorable terms. Having already invested more than 3.6 million Marks–considerably more than the 100,000 originally projected–Leipzig officials agreed to allow the marble supplier to impound and sell at auction the monument pieces in its possession. Hart-

mann's final essay chronicles the repeated failed efforts of the sculptor to interest various West German authorities in buying the reliefs from the marble supplier and the eventual sale of several pieces to individual art collectors.

Having generally enjoyed the story told by the government reports and correspondence, I was nonetheless struck by how much better the collection could have been had the editor searched deeper and wider for relevant sources. It is not clear, for example, why party documents were not examined and included, especially in the case of the postwar Socialist Unity Party. The inclusion of such sources would have added a welcome texture and depth to the otherwise largely bureaucratic story. Lost is what individuals–among the various pre-1933 Leipzig political factions, for example, or among the city populace at any time in the period 1931-55–thought about the project. Moreover, there are several substantial chronological "gaps" in the documentary record presented here; given the generally frequent correspondence regarding the monument in the period examined here, breaks in the paper trail, for instance from September 1942 to December 1944 and from May 1949 to September 1951, at the very least need to be explained. Finally, the paucity and poor quality of the photographs, as well as the lack of sketches or drawings, of both the planned monument and the completed pieces fails to convey to the reader a sense of the monument's appearance and scale.

Despite these criticisms, the slim collection of documents is of not inconsiderable value to scholars of twentieth-century Germany. Although no single issue is explored in any great depth, the collection nevertheless touches upon a wide range of issues, including the still open-ended nature of politics within the occupation zones in the early postwar period, the differences between the professed and the actual role of culture in the Third Reich and the possibility of continuities in attitudes and activities in cultural matters from the late Weimar Republic to the early German Democratic Republic.

Note

[1]. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 21, 84.