



Werner Buchholz. *Das Ende der Frühen Neuzeit im 'Dritten Deutschland'.* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003. 196 S. EUR 39.80 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-486-64437-1.



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Das Ende, oder der Anfang?

Landesgeschichte in Germany (or *Deutsche Landesgeschichte*) has a long history. The journal *Die Blätter für Deutsche Landesgeschichte* was founded in 1852 (appearing from 1852 to 1934 as *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der Geschichts- und Alterthumsvereine* and since 1937 as the *Blätter*). It thus boasts a seniority even to the premier German historical journal, *Historische Zeitschrift* (1859). Virtually every German university has a *Fachabteilung* for *Landesgeschichte* and a *Lehrstuhl* for the same. Intellectually, *Landesgeschichte* has been one of the liveliest and most productive fields of German historiography, if also a quite contentious one. In his introduction, Josef Matzerath refers to the rather cacophonous debate (not only within the historical profession) concerning decisions about the proper level at which local or regional history should be written. Should it strive to build regional or national identities? Move toward a “denationalized” European-wide history? Or become a *Mittelding* between the micro- and macro-historical levels? Matzerath and the authors represented in this volume accept the program of an “offene Landesgeschichte” whose characteristics Reinhard Stauber defined as: “Offenheit der methodischen Grundlegung, Reflexion der

möglichen Vielfalt von Forschungszugriffen und ihrer erkenntnistheoretischen Voraussetzungen, Nutzung interdisziplinärer Dialogangebote und der Vielfalt analytischer Instrumentarien” (p. 1).[1] The work focuses on the question of how the experiences of the states and the peoples living in the “Third Germany,” in the period often referred to as the “Sattelzeit” (the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century), should be understood. Was it “als Anhängsel der vorangegangenen Epoche bzw. als Vorläufer der herausziehenden Moderne,” or did the “Ständeverammlung, vormoderne Bürokratie, eingeschränkte Wirtschaft und ständisch stratifizierte Gesellschaft” actually determine “spezifische Epochenqualitäten” for which the phrase “Ende der Frühen Neuzeit” is more useful and precise (p. 3) than that of “appendage”?

Each essay takes up the history of one area from the Third Germany and addresses the eight programmatic points the introduction outlines. Six of these revolve around particular topics: territorial politics and identity; international relations (including those with the German “great powers” and with the Holy Roman Empire); eco-

nomics; social inequalities; political participation; education, religion and culture more broadly. The final two raise issues of interpretation: Did each state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries inherit from the “old” European system more benefits (*Vorteile*) or more costs (*Kosten*)? How did the timing of change differ? What does “Das Ende der Frühen Neuzeit” actually mean?[2] (This question never receives a clear answer, however). Each author examines these points for one territory, and thereby delivers the concrete information that Werner Buchholz gathers and deploys in composing the “Vergleichende Analyse und Synthese” that ends the volume. This strategy generates materials that allow for a comparison of apples with apples, although it does have the disadvantage of making individual contributions seem a bit mechanical and somewhat unoriginal. Nonetheless, each essay contains a great deal of information about the individual territories based on the author’s own extensive research as well as reflecting a great familiarity with the relevant secondary literature (and not only for the place concerned). This holds especially true for the longer essay on Pomerania; the lack of modern work on the area compared to the other territories justifies its unusual length.

While each article could itself form the subject of an individual review, it is the work as a whole—and especially the closing synthesis and the comparative approach—that deserves most commentary. The purpose of the final section (and of the volume in its entirety) is experimental and theoretical. Buchholz sketches out a tentative interpretation that *may* pertain to all the states of the Third Germany, but he (and his co-authors) are actually more interested in crafting a hypothesis that future investigations will (surely) modify. Here, they seek to facilitate “die Suche nach Kriterien, mit denen die Frühe Neuzeit als eine eigenständige Epoche gegenüber der Moderne abgegrenzt werden kann” (p. 167). Buchholz proposes a three-phase shift from the early modern to the modern period that is basically ordered chronologically (he then includes a fourth, complementary or supplementary, section on cultural politics in the new or reconstituted states of the early nineteenth century). In each state treated here, one can identify a spectrum of roughly similar pre-existing conditions in the mid-eighteenth century. With the exception of Mecklenburg, a phase of enlightened reform then set in during the second half of the eighteenth century that significantly affected all states of the Third Germany. A subsequent second phase, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, restructured constitutions and administration. (One should

also mention that Buchholz acknowledges the critical influence of the French on these states, especially in this phase.) The result was that in all the states (again with the exception of Mecklenburg and occurring later in Saxony), we observe the unraveling of the older fabric of the *landeständische Verfassung*. These changes then opened the way for economic and social alterations, which had already begun, to develop fully in the eighteenth century. None of these changes moved in lock-step and each of the territories demonstrated significant differences in their previous histories and in their progress through these transformations, as well as variations in which motors of change mattered the most. One of the especially attractive features of the analysis is the attempt (generally successful) to avoid political or economic determinism and to stress the *Wechselwirkung* of factors, although political-administrative reforms are seen as fundamental. Culture as a force for change comes up a bit short in this analysis and is, moreover, treated more briefly and with less sophistication throughout than the other factors. A strong emphasis on institutions, such as universities and established churches, plays a greater role than broader cultural phenomena. While sometimes the theoretical and methodological underpinnings seem rather more convoluted and even pained than necessary, the outlines of the argument and the examples chosen to support them function quite well within the general framework. The flexibility built into the model from the outset allows for the development of an interpretation that is rigorous, yet also able to assimilate anomalies without needing to dismiss them as insignificant.

Even specialists in German early modern and early-nineteenth-century history will benefit from reading this volume. Indeed, each individual contribution serves as a short, yet substantive, primer on the history of a particular territory whose purview often reaches well beyond the chronological boundaries of the *Sattelzeit*. Just as valuable, however, is the contribution the book makes in terms of how historians should think about an important and often neglected stage in German history. Not the least of the work’s accomplishments is that it presents a new view of the period as a process (a series of *konkrete Vorgänge*)—and not merely a group of ideas and their definitions—driven by actual historical events. What results puts forward no surprisingly new insights but rather underscores and fortifies a series of interpretations and findings that have been, for a while now, shifting how scholars look at these decades—and not only in the Third Germany or in the specific territories examined here. Yet the fresh perspective opened here on how

to conceptualize “periods of transition” more generally makes the volume as stimulating for historians in general as for German historians in particular.

Notes

[1]. Reinhard Stauber, “Regionalgeschichte versus Landesgeschichte? Entwicklung und Bewertung von

Konzepten der Erforschung von ‘Geschichte in kleinen Räumen’,” *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione* 3 (1994), p. 250.

[2]. I have simplified the list here in the interest of brevity and clarity. Matzerath describes them at considerably greater length and in more ramified forms in his introduction, pp. 3-4.

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