



Barbara Stambolis, ed. *Frauen in Paderborn: Weibliche Handlungsräume und Erinnerungsorte.* Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2005. 494 pp. EUR 39.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-89498-154-9.

Reviewed by Ann Allen (Department of History, University of Louisville)

Published on H-German (July, 2007)

Restoring Paderborn's Women to History

"The history of all ages, and especially that of the present," wrote the feminist activist Louise Otto-Peters in 1849, "teaches us that those who do not think of themselves are forgotten" (quoted on p. 8). In her introductory remarks, Petra Hensel-Scholz, the head of the *Gleichstellungsstelle* (affirmative action office) of the city of Paderborn, cites Otto's prophetic words as a justification for this volume of essays on the history of women in this medium-sized city in central Germany. The volume's editor, Barbara Stambolis, who teaches history at the University of Paderborn, remarks in her introductory chapter that only two women—the nineteenth-century nun and philanthropist Pauline von Mallinckrodt, and the romantic poet Luise Hensel—have been acknowledged for their contribution to the city's history. The many others who lived and worked in Paderborn have been overlooked by most historians. To restore these women to history is the purpose of the project—supported by various local organizations and by the Paderborn city government—which resulted in this handsomely produced volume. It contains twenty articles, each by a different author, recounting various aspects of women's lives and activities in Paderborn during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Most of these articles focus on women in public life—in organizations, education, the arts, and politics. As Paderborn is a city with strong Catholic traditions, most female organizational activity was church-related. Several authors recount the history of Catholic schools and organizations, including a school for girls in the

Augustinian convent, the local branch of the Catholic Women's League (Katholischer Frauenbund), Catholic youth groups, and social welfare agencies. These authors revise the conventional picture of the devout, submissive Catholic woman and stress the progressive, even emancipatory aspects of these women's work. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, religious organizations and institutions provided opportunities for work outside the home—including both teaching and social work—not yet available to women in the secular realm. Catholic schools were among the first to educate girls, and religious youth organizations often encouraged self-reliance along with piety.

Another group of articles is devoted to secular women's organizations, which were often branches of national bodies such as the Vaterländische Frauenvereine (Patriotic Women's Leagues). This group popularized German nationalism among women and encouraged them to work for the nation, especially as nurses in times of war. The authors give a nuanced assessment of these groups and their members. Even explicitly anti-feminist conservative organizations did a great deal to bring women out of the home, to encourage them to assume leadership positions, and to integrate them into the nation as productive and important citizens.

Some outstanding individuals receive well-deserved recognition. A moving article by Hartmut Steinecke, professor of German literature at the University of Paderborn, details the life and work of Jenny Aloni. Born Jenny

Rosenbaum in 1917, Aloni grew up and attended school in Paderborn. In 1935, the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi government forced her to leave her native city for Palestine. The members of her family who remained in the city were forced to give up their property and move to a "Jewish house," from which they were deported to Auschwitz in 1942. Aloni, who became an Israeli citizen, was the author of several novels and volumes of poetry, and also of unpublished diaries and letters that chronicle her experience of persecution, flight, and resettlement in Israel. The Jenny Aloni Archive at the University of Paderborn now provides a center for the study of her life and work, and is part of a broader effort to memorialize the city's Jewish community.

Another important female citizen of Paderborn was the politician Käthe Sander Wietfelds, whose career is assessed by Judith Lückewitte and Monika Blazy. Sander-Wietfelds was elected to the city council in 1956 and served as Acting Mayor from 1971 until 1974. This conservative, self-effacing woman cited Catholic religious teachings to justify her political career. She asserted that women had distinctive gifts for cooperation and compassion, and that these qualities were especially needed in a nation corrupted by totalitarianism and destroyed by war. Believing the revival of art and cultural life as important as physical reconstruction to the re-birth of her city and nation, Sander-Wietfelds worked tirelessly to support theater, music, and the arts in Paderborn.

As its introduction states, the aim of this volume is to remember and to honor the achievements of Paderborn's women. This objective is certainly worthwhile. The women whose lives are chronicled here are precisely those who are overlooked by most historians. Even today's historians of women and gender tend to ignore women such as Sander-Wietfelds, whose conservative views of women's nature and duties they find unsympathetic. For the most part, the articles are based on sound, diligent research and take a balanced approach to their subjects, who are portrayed and assessed in the context

of their period and culture.

An anthology such as this does not offer a comprehensive history and makes no claim to completeness. And yet one cannot fail to notice what the volume leaves out as well as what it covers. Apart from the very interesting article by Michael Drewniok on women's labor unions, little coverage of poor and working-class women is included. None of the chapters deals with social issues such as domestic violence, prostitution, or single motherhood. Steinecke's article on Jenny Aloni is the only chapter centered on Paderborn's Jewish population. Rolf-Dietrich Müller's chapter on memorials to women notes that a street is named for nineteenth-century Jewish philanthropist Fanny Nathan, but tells us little about the Jewish community to which Nathan belonged.

An excellent article by Christa Mertens tells the story of the laborers forcibly transported to Paderborn from eastern Europe during the Second World War. Apart from this article and the one on Aloni, the Nazi period receives little coverage. Chapters on women who lived during the National Socialist era usually portray their protagonists as opponents or victims of the regime. The women who applauded Hitler and his government—and there must have been many in Paderborn—are almost never mentioned. After the war, Paderborn's women emerge as heroes who (as an article by Antje Telgenbösch recounts) rebuilt their bombed-out city brick by brick. But this inspiring picture overlooks the responsibility that these and many other women may have borne for supporting the war that destroyed their homes and those of many others. There is also no coverage of the women's movement of the 1970s and its impact on the city's conservative, Catholic culture.

By rescuing some outstanding women from obscurity, this volume makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the history of women in Paderborn and in Germany as a whole. But it is just a beginning. We still await a more balanced and complex story—one that includes women's crimes, prejudices, and failure as well as their positive achievements.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Ann Allen. Review of Stambolis, Barbara, ed., *Frauen in Paderborn: Weibliche Handlungsräume und Erinnerungsorte*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. July, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13439>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.