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Krijn Thijs. *Drei Geschichten, eine Stadt: die Berliner Stadtjubiläen von 1937 und 1987.* Cologne: Böhlau, 2008. 378 pp. EUR 44.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-412-14406-7.

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The Politics of History in Berlin

Most of us have forgotten that, at the time, 1987 was supposed to be a particularly significant year in Berlin's history, as two entrenched regimes commemorated its 750th birthday by staking rival claims to the city's past. Long after the events of 1989 buried that rivalry, it may also be difficult to imagine why anyone would write (or read) a book about those nearly forgotten celebrations. Yet Krijn Thijs's book is anything but an antiquarian exercise. He takes advantage of our historical distance from 1987, and from the previous anniversary in 1937, to offer a judicious analysis of the politics and rhetoric of historical writing. Since 1989, events, sites, and scholar-activists in Berlin have to a great extent set the agenda (certainly in Germany, and even beyond) for efforts to reconcile scholarship on local history with politically charged claims to local places and local stories. Thijs reminds us that many of these attempts to fashion post-fascist, post-nationalist, and post-communist local histories began before the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Thijs has found a rich lode of material in the behind-the-scenes wrangling that accompanied official interpretations of the city's history by three of Berlin's regimes. The book examines various forms of commemoration offered in 1937 and 1987–parades, for example: because the National Socialists had held one, West Berlin decided it could not, whereas the GDR had no such *BerÃ¼hrungsÃ¤ngste*. However, the bulk of the book is devoted to an analysis of the official written histories that accompanied each commemoration, comparing the final products to ideas and projects that were discarded along the way.

The briefest of the three cases studies is the first, reflecting the relative insignificance of Berlin's earliest birthday celebration. Berlin had not previously celebrated its anniversary, since the story of its birth was shrouded in darkness. By the early twentieth century, local historians concluded that the city had been founded around 1230, prompting some to propose a 700th anniversary celebration to be held in 1930. That plan came to nothing, in part because the oldest known document mentioning the city dated only to 1237. This date sug-

gested the possibility of a commemoration in 1937, by which time the city was in Nazi hands. The celebration became the pet project of Berlin's Nazi mayor, Julius Lippert, a figure of no great significance in the Third Reich. For all their obsessions with German national history, more powerful Nazis cared little about Berlin's local history, and in fact Hitler did not bother to show his face at the official ceremonies, while Gauleiter Joseph Goebbels barely put in an appearance. Lippert, however, presided over a minor spectacle that propounded a history calling attention to Berlin's putative role as a medieval bridgehead for the Germanization of central and eastern Europe, a story that not only suited Nazi purposes but also was largely compatible with the views of most experts in local history. The focus on early Berlin also reflected a growing nostalgia for an imagined Old Berlin that was being swamped by the tide of modernity.

Half a century later, in a West Berlin struggling with the hereditary taint of Nazism, plans for a new celebration were automatically suspect in view of the fact that the Nazis had at least arguably been responsible for enshrining 1237 as the year of Berlin's foundation. Doubters were, however, reassured by evidence that plans for the 700th anniversary predated the Nazis and, more dubiously, by the claim that the whole idea had been the brainchild of the city archivist, Ernst Kaeber. Thijn argues that the liberal Kaeber was given too much posthumous credit because he had been the one prominent local historian least tainted by the Nazis: although he lost his job, most other local historians found that their conservative and nationalist interpretations of the past were largely acceptable in the Third Reich.

West Berlin's plans for 1987 were shaped in part by the Federal Republic's broad but politically charged revival of history, which focused on Berlin, as was apparent in a major exhibition on Prussian history in 1981 and in Chancellor Helmut Kohl's plans for a new German history museum in Berlin. Thijs shows how the West Berlin Senate steered a careful path between conservative nationalists and the various leftists and radicals who were enacting a new "history from below." The official plans called for a pluralistic celebration, with many events offering a variety of perspectives. There was, however, an official line of sorts, one that culminated in a central historical exhibition held in the restored museum called the Gropius-Bau. Its celebration of Berlin as the metropolis of modernity parted ways with the conservative Berlin-Brandenburg tradition embodied in the Historische Kommission zu Berlin, which was largely left by the wayside, while, on the other side, the leftist Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt also received modest funding for its research and exhibitions calling attention to the industrial working class and the dark side of modernity. An incidental but important product of this official pluralism was the exhibition "Topographie des Terrors," opened in 1987 on the desolate site of Gestapo and SS headquarters, which happened to adjoin the Gropius-Bau. The Senate quietly tolerated this effort to (literally) uncover an unpleasant Nazi history; the exhibition was such a success that it was permitted to continue its somewhat awkward existence for years (and arguably it still remains an unhappy stepchild of official Berlin).

Meanwhile, the GDR, too, had rediscovered local history and its leaders were determined not to let the West trump their claim to the heritage of "Berlin, capital of the German Democratic Republic," as they officially and invariably called East Berlin. Here, unlike in either Nazi Germany or West Berlin, the city's birthday became a celebration of the state–and, Thijs argues, a measure of the state's sclerosis. Attempts to produce an official Marxist-Leninist commemorative history became mired in crisis. Since the crisis played out behind closed doors, this section of the book reflects prodigious archival research and a fresh exposition of GDR history writing. The decade preceding the anniversary had seen a renaissance of local history, as the GDR embraced its "heritage and tradition." It proved relatively easy to produce serious work on earlier periods without running afoul of party ideologues, but histories of the twentieth century, and especially of the GDR period, turned into minefields, and in the end the promised official accounts were not completed. To produce a history that unquestionably legitimated its claim to power, the Politburo had to make the proletariat vanish into the communist party, and then the city shrink to its eastern half, tasks that demanded hopeless contortions of the historical record–or hollow affirmations of party orthodoxy.

An introduction and a lengthy concluding section (a quarter of the book–perhaps more than necessary) are devoted to an analysis of the "discursive practices" that produced these "master narratives" of Berlin history. Here Thijs tries to make the case that these competing histories of Berlin offer general lessons about the writing of history in the twentieth century. Leaving aside the bureaucratic tussles and historical contingencies that shaped the official histories, Thijs analyzes texts that were in fact produced under official auspices in 1937 and 1987. Drawing on Northrop Frye and Hayden White, he analyzes their rhetorical and plot elements. He classifies their "narrative structures" as romance for

the Nazis, comedy for East Berlin, and satire for West Berlin, and he describes their "horizontal" and "vertical" intertextuality–that is, their shared themes and the connections between local and national narratives. Each commemorative history, he observes, offered its own Golden Age: myth-shrouded "Old Berlin," for the Nazis; the bustling metropolis, for West Berlin; and the GDR itself, for East Berlin.

Some of us who spent 1987 in Berlin might be tempted to comb through the book in search of errors in tone or nuance. However, Thijs's careful assessment of personalities and conflicts rings true–with one exception. He intimates that the GDR's absurd quarrels over historiography foretold the imminent demise of the Marxist regime. In hindsight, his argument seems plausible, but at the time, for all the absurdities apparent to any observer in East or West, hardly anyone thought the regime was in its death throes. Although it would be nice to think that every state faces limits to the scholarly contortions it can demand of its historians, it is far from clear how much the intellectual bankruptcy of 1987 tells us about the political bankruptcy of 1989. Nevertheless, if we think that attempts to shape official history reveal something about the narrative underpinnings of political power, Thijs's book has a good deal to teach us.

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