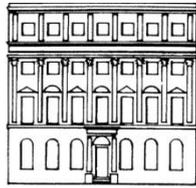


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*Micro Views of National History: Local and Regional Dimensions
of the End of the Old Reich in 1806*

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REVIEW ARTICLES

MICRO VIEWS OF NATIONAL HISTORY: LOCAL AND REGIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE END OF THE OLD REICH IN 1806

Torsten Riotte

ERICH-OLIVER MADER, *Die letzten 'Priester der Gerechtigkeit': Die Auseinandersetzung der letzten Generation von Richtern des Reichskammergerichts mit der Auflösung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation*, Colloquium Augustana, 20 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 458 pp. ISBN 3 05 004090 4. €59.80

WOLFGANG BURGDORF, *Ein Weltbild verliert seine Welt: Der Untergang des Alten Reiches und die Generation 1806*, Bibliothek altes Reich, 2 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006), viii + 390 pp. ISBN 3 486 58110 4. €49.80

ANDREAS KLINGER, HANS-WERNER HAHN, and GEORG SCHMIDT (eds.), *Das Jahr 1806 im europäischen Kontext: Balance, Hegemonie und politische Kulturen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 394 pp. ISBN 978 3 412 19206 8. €39.90

Historians have long debated about how to best approach a topic in historical research. Those investigating small social units, individual experiences, or local communities faced criticism that their findings could not be generalized. Interpretations by others who discuss structural changes in society, political developments at national and international level, or broad economic changes have been attacked for a lack of real-world experiences and human intercourse. Structure and agency have for some time now been competing as key concepts of historical analysis. Embedded in the discussion is the debate about the importance of national events and regional experiences. The anniversary of 1806 produced a number of interesting books that contribute to the question of personal experiences and historical legacies. The three publications reviewed in this article examine the

Review Articles

major German and European political and military events of 1806 with a specific local or geographical focus. The dissolution of the Old Reich and the defeat of Prussia at Jena and Auerstedt are discussed for a city, locality, or region; hence the personal or local dimension of national or international history is analysed.

The three publications also contribute to the debate about 1806 as a turning point in German and European history. The dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in August 1806, the formation of the Confederation of the Rhine (*Rheinbund*) in the same month, and Prussia's military defeat at the battles of Jena and Auerstedt have long competed as reference points for historians and contemporaries. In traditional historical narratives Napoleon's military victory over the Prussian forces has received the widest attention. Two of the authors reviewed here, however, argue that the end of the Old Reich months before the military conflict proved just as crucial to contemporaries. The third volume under review examines how the battles at Jena and Auerstedt and the successive changes affected the political, social, and economic spheres of Germany and the Saxon region in particular. As the studies demonstrate, specific historical events gained importance both from their relevance to individuals and their broader implications for society as a whole.

Erich-Oliver Mader's study of the city of Wetzlar discusses the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in August 1806. Mader's account focuses less on the town itself than on the Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*) situated there. Although the author discusses the importance of the Chamber Court to the local community, he is more interested in the responses of the judges at Wetzlar to the dissolution of their 'work place'. His study consists of an introduction, four parts, and a conclusion. After a discussion of the historiography of the end of the Old Reich in 1806, the first part shows that the highest judicial representatives shared a common identity based on an imperial ideology and originating in similarities in their education and the importance of professional and social networks. The Imperial Chamber Court at Wetzlar, where imperial law was taught and practised in its strictest form in a place to some extent significantly removed from the political realities of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, responded to the changes which occurred around 1800 differently from the politicians and sovereigns in the large capitals of the Imperial Estates. This makes the Court and its

personnel predestined for a revisionist interpretation. However, the strength of Mader's study lies in its well-balanced analysis of old and new. He is aware of the changes that occurred at Wetzlar from the early 1780s and during the subsequent revolutionary era. A trend towards increasing professionalization and, partly resulting from this, new social dynamics, caused a change in recruitment patterns, not least because a career at the highest court of the Old Reich had to compete with the prospect of a professional future in the growing regional administration of the Imperial Estates. Despite these dynamics, as Mader illustrates, the judges at Wetzlar can still be characterized as a group with a common mindset and values closely connected with the existence of the Holy Roman Empire.

The importance of the Reich to the judges was not based on a political creed alone. In the second part, entitled 'Momentaufnahmen des Jahres 1806' (Snapshots of the Year 1806), Mader presents the dissolution of the Old Reich as a severe ideological and professional crisis for the judges of the Imperial Chamber Court. Mader's interpretation is especially persuasive as it combines the more theoretical question of the importance of the Reich with a discussion of financial compensation. On the one hand, the judges' emoluments depended on the Reich and the readiness of the Imperial Estates to accept its financial obligations. Hence in their publications, most of the judges never tired of justifying the Reich's existence and denying the legality of the dissolution of its political structures. On the other hand, the judges at Wetzlar appear to have had few reservations about attacking attempts by their colleague attorneys working at the Imperial Chamber Court to secure financial compensation from the estates. As the clash between judges and attorneys illustrates, professional survival competed with political convictions in the crisis of 1806.

This point is pursued further in the third part, where Mader shows how the judges gave up their united position in the aftermath of the Empire's dissolution. While the overall approach stresses the unity of the group, increasing political pressure and changing political and military circumstances caused the majority of the judges to divert their energies and ambitions to an alternative future. Increasingly relying on support from outside the imperial system, differences emerged in how strongly they fought the Court's case. Hence those well connected beyond the Wetzlar elite would find a position in an estate's administration, while social newcomers were left with

Review Articles

little but their claim for compensation, and/or withdrawal from the profession.

Finally, the author discusses the judges' subsequent careers and stresses their influence on the political structures of the German Confederation. Part four follows the biographies of the twenty-four judges beyond the Napoleonic Wars and right up to the middle of the nineteenth century. Two conclusions are particularly striking. Mader convincingly shows that a specific late eighteenth-century interpretation of natural law theory dominated the world view of most of the judges. Secondly, understanding of justice and jurisdiction continued to be personally and ideologically influenced by the dissolution of the Old Reich in general, and the Imperial Chamber Court in particular. As most of the judges succeeded in re-launching their careers after 1806, some even gaining influential positions in the bureaucracies and ministries of the new states, this linked the emerging political structures of the sovereign states of the German Confederation with the legal tradition of the Old Reich. Constitutional ideas were still coloured by the political culture of the Old Reich, a fact that has been overlooked by historiography so far.

Thus, as Mader concludes in his final chapter, discussion of a small elite group can help to trace the legacy of the Old Reich beyond 1806 and right up to 1848. The fact that not all judges were lucky enough to find a new career underlines that the change from old to new proved more difficult than is often assumed by historians. Mader's study elegantly masters the difficulties which arise when evaluating the importance of a turning point to contemporary society. Wetzlar and the Imperial Chamber Court did not represent the centre of military conflict or political negotiation, but were crucial for the discussion of the constitutional and legal dimensions of the past and future. While the first part of Mader's book was able to benefit from published literature, the second part is based on his own new and important empirical findings.

Like Mader, Wolfgang Burgdorf examines a group of Reich representatives, in this case the representatives at the Diet in Regensburg during the crucial months of the summer of 1806. Although both publications originated in a research project in Munich, the two are very different in language and content. Burgdorf aims higher than Mader. His hypothesis is that the end of the Old Reich caused a deep crisis, not only for the personnel involved in the Reich administra-

tion, but for the majority of the Germans (or, to be more precise, those living in the estates of the Old Reich). Burgdorf identifies 1806 as a national disaster which can be compared to the events of the Thirty Years War and the major military conflicts of the twentieth century. In his attempts to combine individual experiences with collective remembering, he particularly stresses analogies with the year 1945.

The book is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter offers a brief theoretical introduction. Burgdorf takes an approach in which 'generation' becomes a key methodological concept. Those socialized in the Old Reich experienced the dissolution of the Empire as a major turning point which those born later failed to understand. The brief methodological introduction is followed by an account of a journey undertaken by Johann Friedrich Hach, representative from Lübeck, in March 1806. Entitled 'The Old World', the second chapter's length shows that the book is aimed at a more popular market. While the theoretical reflections are brief, Hach's journey from his home town to the Diet in Regensburg is described in minute detail, and covers his means of travel, communications, the weather, and climate. The third chapter, in which Burgdorf examines the responses at Regensburg to the dissolution of the diet, is more challenging in scholarly terms. Based on his masterly knowledge of the sources—his bibliography lists fourteen archives and vast amounts of printed material—Burgdorf explains why so little happened at Regensburg despite the severity of the crisis. Deserted throughout the summer recess, there was no political representative present who could have adequately responded to the political events. Those who had remained at Regensburg were overwhelmingly subordinate clerks who perceived the situation as going beyond their authority. Additionally, as the diet was not sitting, no platform was available to discuss or decide a response to the threat of dissolution.

The fourth chapter, entitled 'Perception', seems the most innovative. Like Mader, Burgdorf argues that the absence of source material indicates the importance of events. As the consequences of the situation remained unclear, few felt entitled to comment on what had happened. Although such argument invites some criticism, the author persuasively demonstrates how much there is to say about why people did not put on paper what they thought about the events of 1806. Throughout his book Burgdorf works with analogies comparing the changes of 1806 to other turning points that have been bet-

Review Articles

ter researched. This is particularly striking in his fifth chapter on how contemporaries recounted the loss of the former world order. Drawing on a wide range of sources Burgdorf convincingly describes how the memory of August 1806 disappeared or, to use his own terminology, how it was compensated for by other ideas of a German nation and a German nation-state.

This is a highly readable book for anyone interested in the Diet at Regensburg. The responses by the diplomatic representatives who did not disappear from the city after the summer of 1806 explain the dynamics of German federalism in the context of the Napoleonic Wars. The questions Burgdorf raises are intellectually highly stimulating. The broad generalization of a 'generation 1806', however, proves difficult to establish empirically. In a similar sense, the broader transformations caused by the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars are in some cases difficult to link to the dissolution of the Reich. The hypothesis that 1806 was a fulcrum for the changes which took place from 1780 to 1830 will remain controversial.

In part, this has to do with the dominance of the narrative of the Prussian defeat at Jena and Auerstedt as the birthplaces of the German nation-state. If we accept Mader's and Burgdorf's hypothesis, much seems to speak against an interpretation exclusively focused on Prussian dominance in the emergence of a national idea in Germany. These two historians are following a trend in the historiography of the Old Reich in arguing against a Borusso-centred understanding of German history and in attempting a reevaluation of what happened outside Prussia. As such, it is particularly interesting to read these two accounts against the contributions in the volume edited by Andreas Klinger, Hans-Werner Hahn, and Georg Schmidt. Based on a conference held in Jena commemorating the anniversary of the battles at Jena and Auerstedt in October 1806, this publication posits the centrality of the military events. Subtitled *Balance, Hegemonie und politische Kulturen* (Balance, Hegemony, and Political Cultures), the volume consists of twenty essays divided into four sections. The first section, entitled 'Internationale Beziehungen und Diplomatie um 1800' (International Relations and Diplomacy around 1800), offers a discussion of legitimacy and power. Heinhard Steiger and Volker Sellin, both historians with a strong interest in the history of law and jurisdiction, demonstrate that much of what happened in 1806 could not be explained in contemporary legal terms and

hence had to break with ideas of justice and legitimacy. Neither Napoleon nor his adversaries could claim to be fighting a just cause and many of their political and military decisions violated international law. The second section discusses Europe and Napoleonic hegemony. It provides four narratives by some of the greatest experts in the field. Etienne François writing on the Napoleonic system, Dieter Langewiesche on the federal tradition in German history, and Michael North on the continental blockade provide good surveys of traditional narratives and recent discussions. Tim Blanning's contribution stands out as a case study that examines the nexus between politics and art. Known for his expertise on the culture of power, Blanning offers a reading of an Italian painting and a German composition that illustrates the need for sovereignty to be present and represented.

The third section discusses the turning point of 1806 in the context of political culture. Jörn Leonhard's essay stresses the importance of the public sphere to the political changes around 1800. His hypothesis that changes in the justification of war were intertwined with the idea of a nation-state in the modern sense sees Jena and Auerstedt as the last time that war remained a monarchical prerogative. Subsequent military conflicts would include the 'nation' to a much greater degree than before. Horst Carl further draws the reader's attention to the monarchical element of the Napoleonic era. Contrary to the paradigm of a decline in the influence of monarchical culture, Carl points to the renewed importance of dynastic representation, though coloured in a specific Napoleonic sense. Thomas Biskup's account of Napoleonic propaganda and the Emperor's efforts to utilize the Prussian defeat in 1806 to legitimize his position as a European monarch, illustrates an additional aspect of Napoleon's awareness that power needs visualization. The third part is completed by contributions on universal monarchy (Andreas Klinger) and the position of women under the Napoleonic Code (Siegrid Westphal). While Klinger stresses that contemporary attempts to resolve the dichotomy between French occupation and German nationalism in the concept of universal monarchy failed, Westphal illustrates the survival of judicial procedure as opposed to judicial codification. Both essays examine how Napoleonic hegemony was actually lived, an approach that seems particularly useful for grasping the importance of the events of 1806.

Review Articles

However, in the context of this article, the last section on 1806 and the region around Weimar and Jena ('1806 und der Ereignisraum Weimar-Jena') seems the most original. Six essays examine whether Napoleonic hegemony actually reached the regional and local communities. Gerhard Müller suggests that it was less the Napoleonic Code that caused constitutional reform in the smaller Thuringian states than the financial and political obligations of the member states of the Confederation of the Rhine. Hence incentives for change were less ideological than strategic. Social or societal changes sufficiently influential to alter the constitution were, for once, rooted in longer traditions and, furthermore, took much longer to succeed than might be concluded from existing interpretations. Klaus Ries identifies 'the professor as politician' as a central character for the period after 1806. While education and politics were still relatively separated during the 1790s, lectures, publications, and the biographies of the most famous university professors in the humanities are good indications that politics entered several German universities thereafter. Ries stresses the importance of the University of Jena as a place where these developments were as strong as in Berlin. Of course, both Weimar and Jena had long traditions of scholarly education, which is discussed in a further essay. Temilo van Zantwijk offers a reading of Fichte and Hegel that similarly stresses the immediate impact of scholarly debate on everyday life. In this view, the character of German idealism contrasted strongly with traditional philosophical convictions. Marco Kreutzmann, on the other hand, illustrates the continuities that existed in personnel and political etiquette in the Saxon region. His interpretation of the Saxon aristocracy's role in the debate about a German nation-state explains why the nobility in Saxony participated in the liberal national discourse – not because of its political convictions, but because of its dominant role in politics. Network analysis and political discourse show that some proved to have a more flexible political imagination than others. Werner Greiling questions the traditional view that Weimar represented a centre of freethinking and liberal thought. He is particularly critical of Duke Carl August, who, unlike the duke's biographers, he sees less as idealistic than as pursuing *Realpolitik*. Finally, Alexander Schmidt examines the political survival of the small states in the context of international relations and illustrates that a link remains between centre and periphery, regional interests and European politics.

He argues that international relations should also be read from the perspective of a minor state. His account of the political decisions and foreign policy strategies of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach suggests that political change reached the periphery in different forms from the capitals of Europe. Many of the essays provide brief accounts of more substantial research yet to appear or already published.

Like the publications by Mader and Burgdorf, this volume convincingly argues that it is worth changing perspective and examining the local and regional outcomes of national events (and vice versa). The year 1806 and its legacy invite competing analyses. The dynamic transformations that started before the French Revolution and went on beyond 1815 are now traditionally seen as a period of change. By linking these longer traditions to specific events historians are not necessarily reducing historical reality. Instead, they are demonstrating how much is overlooked by arguing for the primacy of one view over another.

TORSTEN RIOTTE, a former Research Fellow of the GHIL, teaches modern history at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe university in Frankfurt. Among his publications are *Hannover in der britischen Politik (1792–1815): Dynastische Verbindung als Element außenpolitischer Entscheidungsfindung* (2005) and a number of edited volumes: with Markus Mößlang and Hagen Schulze, *British Envoys to Germany, 1816–1914*, iii. *1848–1850* (2006); with Brendan Simms, *The Hanoverian Dimension in British History, 1714–1837* (2007); and with Markus Mößlang, *The Diplomats' World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815–1914* (2008). At present he is preparing a study of monarchies in exile.