

Peter Claus Hartmann. *Das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation in der Neuzeit 1486-1806.* Ditzingen: Reclam, 2005. 179 S. EUR 5.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-15-017045-8.



Reviewed by Erik M. Thomson

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This little book, in the familiar yellow covers of Reclam's Universal Library, reflects a certain amount of audacity. Doubtless it is of value for the general reader to gain a passing knowledge of the history, institutions, social order, economic developments, culture, and politics of the Holy Roman Empire during the early modern period; it seems nearly impossible to discuss all these subjects in a meaningful way in less than two hundred pages. Yet Peter Claus Hartmann, Professor at the Johannes-Gutenberg University in Mainz, seems a likely author to succeed with such a project. In addition to many books reflecting his detailed study of various aspects of the Empire, he has recently written a number of concise surveys.

Hartmann's approach reflects the more positive appraisal of the empire of recent decades, when the strongly centralized national state no longer appears to be an unequivocal sign of historical progress. Indeed, Hartmann explicitly discusses on two occasions whether the empire might serve as a model for a future Europe of regions, concluding that Europeans would do well to examine its political institutions when consid-

ering how to preserve confessional, ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Political institutions occupy the first, and largest, section of the book. The author begins with constitutional history, abstracted where possible from the personalities and contingencies of political history, which is presented in a separate chapter at the end of the book. Hartmann follows the views of Heinz Angermeier about the constitutional history of the Empire during its earliest period, seeing the Frankfurt Reichstag and the foundation of the *Kammergericht* of 1486 as the moment when the empire's constitution took fixed forms, becoming the point of departure for such developments in the next half-century as the *Reichshofrat*, the creation of the *Kreise* (circles) in 1512, and the *Reichsregiment* of 1522.

Hartman then discusses how confessional division entwined with broader questions of the location of authority. He views the Augsburg *Reichstag* and Religious Peace of 1555 as strengthening not only the authority of princes in the religious realm, but also the authority of the circles in maintaining the peace. While these arrangements

kept the peace, he argues, local princes' and authorities' completion of the confessionalization of their territories reduced the effectiveness of imperial institutions. Although Ferdinand II attempted to use military force to restore the authority of the empire, particularly in the Edict of Restitution of 1629, defeat forced Ferdinand III to accept sharp limitations to the emperor's power and admit the *Landeshoheit* (if not precisely sovereignty as known elsewhere) of local rulers in the Peace of Westphalia. These arrangements lasted until the radical innovation of the French revolutionary armies.

From constitutional history, Hartmann moves to a description of the constitution, its meaning, and its relevant parts. He first considers whether "constitution" is the correct word, what it might have meant to the jurists of the time, and how it was constituted by what he calls "*Reichsgrundgesetze*" and customary law. He then examines the different members of the empire before analyzing its institutions and their powers. The descriptions are concise, accurate, and measured.

The book's next section on "Society and Economy" describes population, social orders and classes, minorities, and--exceedingly briefly--economic development and demographic and confessional change. In many respects, this section of the book feels like a dutiful summary of necessary topics. Hartmann makes few connections among the subjects treated here and the other chapters, excepting a brief discussion of Oliver Volckart's work noting that common imperial coin, toll, and guild regulations limited the economic consequences of common market areas being split into tiny territorial principalities.

Hartmann writes with more passion in the chapter on "Religion, Princely Courts and Culture," which in large measure reflects his recent, fascinating monograph on the *Kulturgeschichte des Heiligen Römischen Reiches 1648 bis 1806* (2001). After describing the Reformation and confessionalization in two-and-a-half pages, he ar-

gues forcefully that the combination of different confessional cultures and the large number of princely courts and urban cultures allowed the empire to produce a remarkable flowering of cultural diversity and richness. He deftly suggests the distinguishing characteristics and most important dynamic forces driving cultural change within the empire, all the while acknowledging and celebrating its diversity. The account of courtly culture is particularly engaging, but the two pages on popular culture barely permit Hartmann to discuss the concept, and certainly do not give him opportunity to evoke the quality of popular belief and practice.

The final chapter comprises a political narrative, both analyzing the effect of particular emperors and a few major sovereigns on imperial events and exploring how the empire was caught up in broader, pan-European politics. Hartmann ends his book by noting that the Abbé de Saint-Pierre proposed that the Holy Roman Empire might serve as a model for keeping the peace in Europe; in retrospect, we might sooner see the empire existing at the center and mercy of a broader, European balance of powers.

While learned, well written, and in its way audacious, it is difficult to imagine that Hartmann's little book will attract a large North American audience. Scholars would most probably want to read his lengthier works rather than the sketches he provides here. Of course, neither scholars nor North Americans constitute Hartmann's intended audience. German-speaking students or the general public with particular interest in the empire's constitutional history might well be satisfied. Perhaps they will recognize something of the complexity of constitutional arrangements that can be produced when grandiose projects of reform meet a great diversity of particular interests.

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