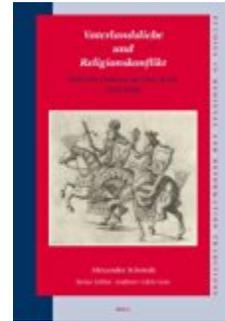


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Alexander Schmidt. *Vaterlandsliebe und Religionskonflikt: Politische Diskurse im Alten Reich (1555-1648)*. Leiden: Brill, 2007. 512 S. \$139.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-16157-3.

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## Who Ya Gonna Love?

This is a massive and wide-ranging study of *Vaterlandsliebe*, the German version of *amor patriae* and commonly translated into English as “patriotism.” This was a commonplace of early modern German political discourse and is, as the author notes, a foundation stone of modern civil ethics as they are currently debated and discussed around the world (for example, in the context of Charles Taylor’s philosophy). Alexander Schmidt has tracked the public expression and rhetorical deployment of this topos in three contexts: elite politico-legal theory of the era; elite humanist literary production, especially civic praise poetry; and the slightly less elite practice of what the author terms *Tagespublizistik*, the workaday political practice of representation and communication in the then-fledgling public sphere. Since the period under consideration is bounded by the Religious Peace of Augsburg and the Peace of Westphalia, the author has framed his main interpretive questions in terms of the confessional conflict that so clearly marked the period. While ongoing discussions, historiographical and otherwise, concerning the origins and subsequent developments of German national identity, *Heimat*, German nationalism, and the like are lurking in the background, this is precisely where the author leaves them (and quite wisely so). Instead, he is guided by the question of how patriotism, a concept derived from classical republican sources, most notably Cicero and, from the later sixteenth century onward, also Tacitus, fared in the context of apparently very un-republican movements toward confessionalism and monarchism/absolutism. The answer, in a nutshell, is: remarkably well. Indeed, the most significant finding of the study is the degree to which pa-

triotic discourse was compatible with both monarchism and confessionalism in the empire.

In the first instance, Schmidt relies heavily on the writings of the bishop of Naumburg, Julius Pflug, who managed to concoct a kind of syncretic German-papal-monarchist-patriotism, especially in his *De Republica Germaniae*, which appeared at Antwerp in 1563. Schmidt contrasts the obvious idealism of such a vision quite effectively with the realpolitik of the imperial “fixer” Lazarus von Schwendi, who was a south German Protestant. It is Schmidt’s other conclusion, however, concerning the confessionalization of patriotism or patriotic discourse, which strikes this reviewer as most significant. According to Schmidt, patriotism of the sort we take for granted today, addressing as an object of affection and loyalty one’s nation or homeland as opposed to one’s home town or village, eventually emerged as a specific habit or practice of Protestant confessional culture.

Among the many strengths of this study is the adoption of Thomas Kaufmann’s concept of such a confessional culture (*Konfessionskultur*). This is a concept that encourages an understanding of the differences between Catholics and Protestants in the empire in terms of a long-term tendency toward differential cultural and social formation, rather than in the terms internal to the most aggressive contemporary religious polemics. This is undoubtedly a good thing. It is also good that Schmidt does not reduce the process of confessionalization, as opposed to the ideology of confessionalism, to the actions of the emerging state in pursuit of social discipline.

Indeed, it strikes me as helpful in many ways to think of the era's lively cultural production—in this case literary production—as contributing to this differentiation between Catholics and Protestants, rather than the differentiation being an effect of some very sudden bifurcation of religious identity in 1517, 1530, or even 1555. To have tracked the changing meaning of *Vaterlandsliebe* via this evolutionary scheme of confessionalization would have been a great achievement.

Unfortunately, Schmidt does not quite reach these heights. Instead, he somewhat undercuts himself by his recourse to rather unhistorical caricatures of the difference between Catholics and Protestants being exclusively theological, or even soteriological. But the image of Protestants who left behind medieval society and culture along with their idea of the righteousness of works will not wash these days. In this case, moreover, the assumption of a conversion to an essentially Protestant way of being leads Schmidt to put the cart of Protestantism in front of the horse of cultural production in his central account of patriotism. That is, he appears to fall into the trap of reading his sources as the works of fully fledged, confessionally defined Protestants or Catholics. The problem of such thinking becomes evident in Schmidt's discussion of what are by far his most interesting sources, the national histories, geographies, and ethnographies that were so widespread in the empire from around the middle of the sixteenth century onward. Schmidt is quite correct, it seems, to point out that these were almost exclusively the work of Protestants. He betrays certain assumptions, however, when he poses the question as to why no such texts were produced in Catholic circles. Quite apart from the obvious problem of trying to build a historical argument around something that did not happen and for which one has no sources, such a formulation misses the crucial point. It was not necessarily the case that Protestants and Catholics explicitly disagreed on the importance of a German national historiography. It was much more likely the case that participation in such historiography is one of the many things that came to define, toward the end of the sixteenth century, German Protestant identity. The difference here may seem like a small one, but it is significant nonetheless, especially when one considers that Schmidt's chief purpose in reading these sources is to extract from them expressions of patriotism. Were these texts viewed as essentially and a priori Protestant, Schmidt might appear to be saying that Protestants were more patriotic than Catholics. Indeed, elsewhere he does suggest that Catholic allegiances operated on a

geographic scale that was both greater and lesser than that defined by German ethno-linguistic identity. My guess is that the author thinks that he was just following his sources; to me, however, he seems to be following them in a direction already indicated by Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*.

In any case, such criticisms, which really amount to a simple observation of inconsistency, must be discounted against the fact that what one has here is a revised doctoral dissertation. The five-hundred-plus pages thus show clear signs of having been produced under the influence of several taskmasters and/or editors. This means that the structure of the text is overly complex and the argument is convoluted. Multiple attempts at summary of the argument, presumably at the request of some of those editors, tend to compound rather than resolve the confusion. Here, perhaps, an index more comprehensive than the available *Personenregister* could have replaced one of the summaries. Likely a further aspect of the book's origins as a German dissertation is the predominance, especially in the first half, of description over narration. One gets the impression that the work was planned as a quasi-phenomenological study rather than as a history.

Moreover, one wonders whether its origins as a University of Jena dissertation may account for the peculiarly provincial character of some aspects of the book, despite some deliberate attempts to situate the work in the context of a much broader scholarship. For example, at the outset, the author acknowledges the input of Martin Van Gelderen (Florence), historian of European political thought, and engages in a methodological discussion with the heaviest hitters of the Anglo-American school of the history of political thought, principally J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. His own theoretical and methodological statements might be characterized as post-Marxist/neo-Weberian (*de rigueur* in today's German academy, it seems), but ultimately the work remains very much in the tradition of German *Begriffsgeschichte*. The frequent insertion of English catchphrases and secondary literature quotations into the German prose deserves mention as a mannered protestation of cosmopolitanism. It may be the current trend among German academics, but to use, for example, the phrase "mental maps" without acknowledging the authors of the classic book by the same title simply raises the question: does the author even know from where the phrase comes? Such are the perils of academic canon-surfing. Finally, it seems that such broader scholarly and historical frames of references only serve Schmidt's ultimate purpose of casting

a favorable light on German intellectuals of the confessional period. Schmidt is quite explicit in his aim to refocus attention from the eighteenth century to the sixteenth century, but there is also more than a whiff of implicit German me-too-ism about his insistence that the German-speaking lands also had what their European neighbor-competitors, especially Italy, France, and England, boasted in terms of republican thought.

While the bibliography is extensive, as one would expect, it too is patterned in odd ways. For example, on the one hand, given both the German topic and scholarly context, one may be pleasantly surprised to see included here the recent work of a Canadian scholar, Henry Heller, on anti-Italianism in sixteenth-century France. On the other hand, some readers may be less pleasantly surprised to see that Schmidt's engagement with the extensive oeuvre of Peter Blickle, on a range of topics related to his own, is minimal. One need not necessarily approve of that oeuvre to recognize its significance for the discussion of nonelite political thought in sixteenth-century Germany. Similarly, regardless of whether one

approves or disapproves of Howard Louthan's book on irenicism, Schmidt's dismissal of it in favor of the work of his countryman, Thomas Nicklas, seems gratuitous. Both Louthan and Nicklas were apparently working on Lazarus von Schwendi in the context of dissertation projects in the early 1990s, at a time before the Internet and the Web, when a certain isolation of scholars, especially very junior ones, was inevitable. To slap Louthan (there is a perceived tone of indignation here) for not incorporating Nicklas's contemporaneous researches further suggests that particular chauvinism that has long infected German academia: anti-Americanism. In the current world political climate, high emotion in this regard may be understandable, but it still is not pretty. It should never be confused with loyalty or patriotism.

On balance, then, this is an impressive study and the careful reader will find much here that is both interesting and new. But it is not an easy read. Partly this is simply due to structure, but it also hinges on rhetorical style and, possibly, ideology.

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