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R. Hudemann u.a. (Hgg.): Eliten in Deutschland und Frankreich

This volume grew out of two conferences devoted to elites, put on by the "Deutsch-Franzoesische Komitee fuer die Erforschung der deutschen und franzoesischen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts" in 1990 and 1992. The focus is on elites in four realms – culture, business, the military, and the diplomatic service – while a second volume (not to be discussed here) deals with elites in religious, political, and associational life, as well as the free professions. This committee represents part of a growing trend in Europe to create institutes and institutions devoted to comparative history, a development which has not received enough attention in this country. One could mention as other examples the "Arbeitsstelle fuer Vergleichende Gesellschaftsgeschichte" at the Free University of Berlin and the "Sonderforschungsbereiche" of the University of Bielefeld. Hundred of ongoing and completed projects attest to the ways in which Franco-German comparisons can enrich and deepen our understanding of social and cultural history (to mention but two sub-disciplines) of either of these countries. This is a consciously bilingual and bi-cultural undertaking in which French and German contributions are evenly balanced. While it is difficult to organize bilingual conferences, it is virtually impossible to carry off a trilingual conference, and so it is hard to blame the organizers for not inviting English-speaking scholars. Nonetheless, one misses the perspective of scholars who have studied France and Germany from varied vantage points, such as Allan Mitchell or Youssef Cassis. Moreover, references to non-German and non-French works are surprisingly sparse in most of the contributions. Why, in an essay summarizing research on the relationship between the military, society and politics, does Manfred Messerschmidt not cite Gordon Craig's classic work, "The Politics of the Prussian Army", Gordon Craig. "Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956). while mentioning works of similar vintage by German authors? Furthermore, many of the twenty-five essays are not truly comparative in nature but rather focussed on either Germany or France, and they tend to cite literature only in the respective language. Some are nonetheless quite good treatments of specific themes, though the best essays are those which overcome the cultural divide while comparing the two societies. The volume is suffused with a desire to communicate, to understand the other culture, to overcome older models of comparison that made Germany and France out to be utterly, essentially different and alien to one another. A more explicit discussion of the nature of comparison would have been helpful, however – one that paid attention to differences and similarities in national traditions and structures, as well as to convergences and divergences in development. In addition, a more sophisticated model of interaction is needed in this volume u one that tries to distinguish between influence and coercion an that takes into account the ways in which one culture reinterprets elements of another culture.

Elites lend themselves well to a comparative approach, particularly given the existence of a large body of theoretically-oriented literature on the subject. Unfortunately, none of the four introductory essays provides much in the way of theoretical background. For such a discussion, the reader has to look at articles throughout the volume. The most important distinction made is that between power elites, which exercise real power, and functional elites, which carry out elite functions but do not necessarily possess power. Elites are also placed in the context of larger social entities, particularly the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, the two introductory essay on the aristocracy contribute little to an understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century elites because they concentrate on questions primarily relevant to the study of medieval and early modern societies. The bourgeoisie receives too little attention in

this volume, despite the enormous wave of interest in this subject in recent years. See for example Juergen Kocka (with Ute Frevert), ed., "Buergertum im 19. Jahrhundert" (Munich: DTV, 1988) or the abridged English ed., Juergen Kocka and Allan Mitchell, eds., "Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe" (Oxford and Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993). In no essay does gender figure into analysis in a meaningful way. For an example of research on gender and elites, see Ute Frevert, ed., "Buergerinnen und Buerger" (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

Perhaps the lack of a theoretical framework explains the seemingly arbitrary organization of the two volumes. Why begin with the cultural elites, which are not even clearly an elite, as Christoph Charle points out (47)? It would have made more sense to start with power elites such as political and military elites, and then move on to elites that did not as clearly participate in power. Or one could have begun with those elites which were most closely associated with the old order, such as the military elites, diplomats, and landowners (curiously missing from these volumes), and then turn to elites more closely tied to industrialization and the rise of the bourgeoisie. These criticisms should not, however, obscure the excellence of many of the essays. One will hardly find such a dense, rich discussion of the literature on elites in modern France and Germany in any other single work. In addition, important new research is presented in many contributions.

The section on cultural elites concentrates more on structures, organizations, and organizing principles than on content – culture itself – largely neglecting phenomena such as social Darwinism, fascism, or anti- Americanism. Discourse analysis is almost completely absent. One of the biggest problems of discussing cultural elites in this (now rather dated) structuralist manner is the dichotomy between ideas and social structures, which is not discussed here. The authors themselves do highlight some of the problems of defining what a cultural elite is. Christophe Charle points out that if one defines the cultural elite in terms of people occupying positions of power, one may end up with an entrenched, backward-looking cultural establishment. At the other extreme would be a vision of cultural creativity which can be overly individualistic or focussed only on the opposition to the establishment. He tries to span the two poles. Jean-Francois Sirinelli also points to difficulties in determining who the important creators and mediators of culture are. Both popularity among contemporaries and posthumous fame can be "capricious, uncertain or simply unjust" criteria (66). Though his "macro" vision of nineteenth-century French culture may make some uncomfortable, Charle brings together what was happening in various segments of the culture elite (including scientists, professors, and bohemian intellectuals) in a very interesting, if debatable, way, concluding that in the nineteenth century, the French cultural elite was more dedicated to the ideal of truth than in Germany, and thus served a more profound social function. Sirinelli ascribes a more central role to the Dreyfus affair, which brought about divisions that have survived down to the present day and which have become basic characteristics of French intellectual life. (68) He also points to the growing social exclusivity of the French cultural elite in the twentieth century, caused by the narrowing recruitment base of the "Grandes Ecoles" (elite universities) from which the cultural elite has traditionally been recruited. Another important point he makes is that in twentieth-century France, ties between the cultural elites and the state have been very close. An article by Hans Manfred Bock on institutionalized forms of Franco- German cultural exchange in the inter-war period shows that while the French side pursued a vision of understanding as a path to securing peace, the German side was much influenced by Arnold Bergstraesser, who rejected the "cosmopolitan conception of (inter-cultural) understanding" ""weltbuergerliche Verstaendigungsidee""), saying that it was a ruse to perpetuate the status quo so advantageous to France.

There are no essays on intellectuals, professors or scientists in Germany. A synthesis is left to Louis Dupeux, whose off-the-cuff remarks, hardly backed up by references to the secondary literature, would have been acceptable as part of an introductory section, but which seem rather unsubstantiated as a conclusion. The section on the business world is altogether more successful, and in fact contains some brilliant insights. Toni Pierenkemper summarizes a large literature on nineteenth-century businessmen, weaving in some of his own research. His comment that the business elite constituted a functional elite, but not a power elite, really should have been discussed at greater length in this volume. Here, as elsewhere, one cannot help but miss some of the more recent research, such as Isabel Hull's book on Kaiser Wilhelm's entourage. Isabel V. Hull, "The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888-1918" (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Dominique Barjot presents the initial results of a large-scale prosopographic study in another contribution. Her approach emphasizes regional differences without making clear what the basic economic characteristics of each of the regions was, or whether the businessmen from the different re-

gions were really at the same socio-economic level.

Now I come to what I consider to be the real gem of this volume, an article by Patrick Fridenson on the business elites of France and Germany in the twentieth century (153-68). He attributes the greater role of powerful employers' and business organizations in Germany to the more powerful labor movement in Germany, the greater threat to economic freedom posed by the powerful German state (or to the lesser fears of such a threat in France), and to the disinclination on the part of French businessmen to cede power to such organizations. In the post-war period, the German business organizations were powerful lobbying organizations, as well as part of a state-union-industry troika which helped to maintain the social market economy. Nonetheless, Fridenson sees distinct signs of a convergence of the German and French patterns of development, with the "Union des Industries Metallurgiques et Minieres" exercising leadership vis-a-vis other industrial organizations (like the West German BDA), and the "Confederation national du Patronat Francais" becoming a lobbying organization and public spokesman of industry. However, Fridenson disagrees with scholars such as Hartmut Kaelble who see capitalism, the European community and other forces as bringing about a convergence in French and German societies in the post-war period. Fridenson argues powerfully that there are basic differences in corporate culture that are based on deeply engrained differences in the ways the two societies are organized. Interestingly, the German model appears to be more modern. Specifically, in Germany, top corporate management is generally recruited from among the ranks of the corporation's employees. They are generally specialists in a narrow field, often engineers, who have worked their way up the corporate ladder.

In France, by contrast, corporate executives belong to a mobile elite, educated at the "Grandes Ecoles" and rather non-specialized, which moves freely between administrative careers in government and private industry. Middle management, on the other hand, has little chance of moving beyond a glass ceiling. There is a social gulf between middle management and top management in France, brought about not only by very different career paths, but also by great differences in education and socialization. As a result, middle management does not display the kind of loyalty to the corporation ("patriotisme d'entreprise") typical in Germany, and has unions of its own. The German union for "Leitende Angestellte" represents, by contrast, the prerogatives of top management vis-a-vis workers (especially on corporate boards and works councils). Fridenson sees the more elitist French system as based on an archaic sense of "honor," a respect for a kind of "academic nobility," proven in national examinations. He sees the root cause as lying in very basic differences in the logic according to which each society is organized. Here he makes use of Philippe d'Iribarne's thesis that France – unified earlier and centralized to a greater extent that Germany – had a homogeneous system of ranks, whereas German society was characterized by the coexistence of a plethora of large groups or communities which functioned fairly autonomously, which generally competed little with each other, and which demonstrated a fair amount of internal solidarity. Though many examples spring to mind which contradict this thesis, it should not be dismissed too easily. In particular, recent scholarship points to the tremendous importance of "Milieux" in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German society (for example, the Catholic milieu, the working-class milieu, etc.).

Further essays in the section on businessmen include one by Heidrun Homburg on department store founders in France and Germany. Here, she is able to show the impact of political centralization versus decentralization on the development of capitalism in the two countries, as well as the impact of the existence of a large Jewish business community in Germany. In another contribution, Annie Lacroix-Riz present important results of a study on the behavior of the business community in France under Nazi occupation. Banks and industry (particularly heavy industry) seemed to believe that the occupation would last indefinitely, and that they had to accommodate themselves. Confronted with exploitative German policies, they behaved opportunistically, showing little inclination to stand up for French interests. Though shorter, the section on military elites includes many fine essays. The first, by Klaus-Juergen Mueller, cogently analyzes the similarities and differences between the French and German military elites and the changes that they underwent in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In an article on military elites in France from 1871 to 1914, William Serman sketches out the long-term conflicts between the right and left in the French military elite, dating back to the French Revolution, but much exacerbated by the Dreyfus affair. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, successive secretaries of war tipped the balance against clerical, anti- Semitic and anti-republican elements in the army. Berhard Kroener's contribution on German officers in the Nazi era centers on a generational analysis of the officer corps. Distinguishing between five "generations" of officers, he shows how their sociological origins and formative influences (such as service in WWI

and unemployment during the Weimar Republic) fit together with their values and political behavior. General Jean Delmas traces the process of professionalization of the French military through the development of military higher education between 1876 and 1985. In an important article, Manfred Messerschmidt elegantly compares the relationship between the military, politics, and society in France and Germany. This reviewer agrees with his assertion that the outcome of revolution in the two countries decisively molded the relationship between the military, society and the state. Whereas in Germany, the military largely retained its special position outside of constitutional control, in France, growing political control "tamed" the military. Messerschmidt sees the naming of Joffre as chief of general staff as an important step in the latter development. He points out that military men were disenfranchised in France as a way of trying to neutralize the continued predominance of clerical, conservative outlooks, especially in the top ranks. In Germany, on the other hand, "The military state saw no necessity in controlling or politically domesticating the military elite. The military elite embodied the existence and value system of the state" (249-50). Messerschmidt covers familiar terrain here, though adding interesting nuances and (fairly) recent research results. However, I would question the author's claim that in the imperial period, the German bourgeoisie backed the military's claim to unlimited power in military matters, rather than the political leadership's desire to maintain the primacy of political control (260). On the other hand, Messerschmidt is on very solid ground when he concludes that the military saw Nazi policies as compatible with its own goals, and that it participated in the Nazi destruction of its own traditions.

The volume closes with a short section on diplomats in the twentieth century. A competent, largely quantitative piece by Jean-Claude Allain on French diplomats from 1900-1939 is followed by an essay by Peter Krueger on the German diplomatic corps of the inter-war years. An important conclusion is that reforms of the years 1918-1922 brought about a bureaucratization and "modernization" of the diplomatic corps, transforming it from an elite of privilege ("Standeselite") to a functional elite. The Nazis retained these reforms, only to rob the diplomatic corps of any influence in foreign affairs. A third article, by Peter Grupp, is an interesting sketch of the internationalist and dilettante diplomat, Count Harry Kessler, who played a certain role in German diplomacy for a brief moment in the early 1920s. In a concluding essay, Georges-Henri Soutou discusses the state of research in the field, which he sees as not very advanced. The career diplomat who studied at a "Grande Ecole" is typical in France, whereas in Germany, diplomatic careers were more open to outsiders, most of whom had, however, studied law. Soutou asserts that up until 1939, the concept of the Concert of Europe dominated thinking in diplomatic circles in both countries. Taken together, these essay form an astonishingly rich picture of French and German elites, contributing in important ways both to the literature on elites and to Franco-German comparative studies. They demolish important aspects of the "Sonderweg" thesis, particularly the thesis that the German bourgeoisie was lacking in social autonomy, the notion that German society was unusually hierarchical, and the idea that links between the state and society were much stronger in Germany than in Western countries. At the same time, they reinforce and refine other theses developed in the era in which German history seemed "peculiar," particularly the idea that in France, a republican system was able to control the military, whereas in Germany, the survival of elements of an absolutist system until 1918 gave the military a dangerous amount of independence. Many of these essays depart from a view of German history that is narrowed by a "Sonderweg" perspective, and tell us very important things, such as that German society has in some respects been less elitist than that of its neighbor across the Rhine, and that the lack of elite institutions of higher education (in the style of the "Grandes Ecoles") is an important factor here. Above all, this volume drives home how very important it is for the German historian to become better acquainted with French history.

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ENDNOTES:

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