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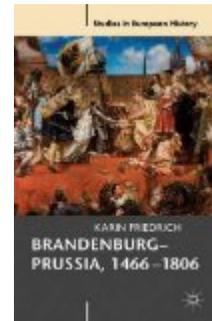
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karin Friedrich. *Brandenburg-Prussia, 1466-1806: The Rise of a Composite State*. Studies in European History Series. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. xxiv + 157 pp. \$26.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-230-53565-7.

Reviewed by Brian Sandberg (Northern Illinois University)

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Prussia has long been blamed for the evils of German nationalism, authoritarian government, social militarization, social discipline, and armed aggression. Some historians have claimed that the Prussian “character” ultimately allowed for the rise of fascism in Germany and the horrors of the Holocaust. Karin Friedrich rejects the *Sonderweg* (particular path) notion of early modern Prussia as progenitor of modern Germany, arguing that this vision emerged only in the early nineteenth century as a byproduct of romantic nationalists’ fascination with the Teutonic Knights and then later became enshrined in German historiography. Friedrich reassesses early modern Prussia by setting it into a broader central European perspective, straddling the divide between western and eastern Europe.

Brandenburg-Prussia is part of Palgrave Macmillan’s Studies in European History series, edited by John Breuilly, Julian Jackson, and Peter Wilson. In a compact volume, Friedrich offers a clear presentation of early modern Prussian history, organized around thematic chapters on state building, estate society, monarchy, and diplomacy. These chapters are framed by an introduction, an initial chapter on medieval legacies, and a final chapter on the Enlightenment transitions toward modernity. The book includes a series of maps and a glossary of administrative and legal terms, useful in understanding the complexities of the Prussian composite state and its relationship to the institutions of the Holy Roman Empire. *Brandenburg-Prussia* succeeds in presenting a large body of recent research on early modern Prussia by Wilson, Wolfgang Neugebauer, William Hagen, Klaus Zernack, and others, and reassesses classic interpretations of the Prussian state. The book sometimes as-

sumes that readers will have a familiarity with Prussian historiography and specific historians’ arguments, but Friedrich’s assessments remain comprehensible to general readers as well as specialists.

Brandenburg-Prussia was a composite state, according to Friedrich, that was constructed by the Hohenzollern dynasty on the basis of Teutonic Knights’ legacies and diverse feudal relationships. The ruler’s position as one of the imperial electors made Brandenburg one of the most influential principalities in the Holy Roman Empire. The book presents the diverse Hohenzollern territories of Brandenburg, ducal Prussia, Cleves, Mark, Ravensberg, Minden, Halberstadt, Magdeburg, and Pomerania as a composite state, which would later incorporate Silesia and Polish lands.

Brandenburg-Prussia makes a major contribution by highlighting the composite state’s eastern orientation, thus bringing eastern European perspectives into Prussian historiography. Poland figures prominently in this history of early modern Prussia. Friedrich sees Albrecht von Hohenzollern’s homage to the king of Poland in 1525 as having lasting significance for the development of ducal Prussia as closely connected with Poland. The partitions of Poland in 1772, 1792, and 1795 destroyed the cooperative Prussian-Polish relationships, since “the Prussian government treated Polish Prussia like a new conquest, not a long-lost province” (p. 93).

Rather than presenting state development as proceeding from an institutional drive to centralization, Friedrich emphasizes the complexities of “integrating the territories” ruled by the Hohenzollerns (p. 25). The nobles and their assemblies provide a bottom-up approach

to state development. The book refers to the “politics of compromise” between provincial estates and the Hohenzollern rulers as a key aspect of political culture. Here, Friedrich draws heavily on the past three decades of historical research on Louis XIV’s France, which has seriously challenged the classic rise of absolutism narrative. William (Bill) Beik’s social collaboration model has become especially influential in analyses of Louis XIV’s royal state. Friedrich also draws on an impressive body of state development theory and historiography in constructing her interpretation of the Prussian monarchy of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Friedrich’s analysis stretches beyond conventional definitions of the state to consider the “new cultural history of politics” (p. 65). She argues that “princely reform was not, however, imposed on a passive albeit privileged class, but practiced in collaboration with the estates, based on the concept of a shared fatherland and its common good” (p. 57). The book stresses the nobility’s participation in the ducal state of Brandenburg-Prussia and the subsequent Prussian monarchy. Friedrich takes seriously nobles’ claims to act as representatives of their territories in provincial estates. Nobles sometimes formed associations and leagues, such as the Pomeranian “patriot party,” to promote specific religious and political initiatives (p. 54). Members of the lower nobility served as military officers in the Prussian army, which gradually produced a “service nobility” by the late seventeenth century with a “proliferation of court offices” (p. 69). Prussian Junkers actively promoted commercialization and economic development on their lands.

Religious factors also play a significant role in each stage in the development of the Prussian state in Friedrich’s analysis. The Habsburg territories are often presented as multiethnic and religiously mixed in contrast to a supposedly Protestant Prussia, but Friedrich exposes the confessional divisions within Brandenburg-Prussia, which by the early seventeenth century included Lutherans, Catholics, and a growing number of Calvinists. The conversion of John Sigismund to Calvinism in 1613 and the acceptance of thousands of Huguenot refugees in the 1680s strengthened a Calvinist identity in Prussia. The book explores the Pietist movement’s influence and Prussian policies toward Jews and other religious minorities.

As the book reaches the eighteenth century, Friedrich probes conceptions of the Prussian monarchy as a fiscal-military state by investigating its practices of military recruitment and war finance. Although the Kanton system

has previously been condemned for militarizing Prussian society, Friedrich finds that garrisons brought urbanization and regulation of civilian-military relations. Friedrich overturns the long-established narrative of the rise of Prussia under Frederick II (known as Frederick the Great), arguing that “Frederick II’s regime cannot be credited with the invention of the modern bureaucratic state” (p. 73). This finding represents a historiographical shift in assessing the “resistance to centralising tendencies” (p. 51). While Friedrich does address the question of “second serfdom” or “neo-serfdom” and peasant “acts of resistance,” these questions do not drive the book’s analysis of the Prussian state (pp. 59-60, 61).

Throughout the book, the author adopts a statist perspective that, at points, hinders analysis of broader dimensions of Prussian society. For example, Friedrich rightly highlights successive waves of human migration that shaped Prussian history, including Teutonic expansion, peasant flight, Huguenot refugee settlement, and Jewish expulsions. But the book could have employed more social history to delve into the experiences of the migrants and the processes of social integration. The statist approach is also evident in passages that draw on modernization narratives: “Modernisation could not have worked without their [the estates] participation and active involvement” (p. 57). An implicitly realist notion of security can be discerned in discussions of state policies and their effectiveness: “Frederick’s pursuit of monarchic status was no vainglorious whim, but the result of eminently rational politics” (p. 66).

The statist concerns prompt Friedrich to engage in a series of evaluations of the successes and failures of the Prussian monarchy and its attempts at state building. “Prussia remained a composite state because it only succeeded in winning over part of its elites, in some of its territories to the drive towards a unitary state. It failed to create a unitary national identity before the nineteenth century because ... it failed to concede a participatory constitution creating the basis for modern citizenship on the model of the European Enlightenment” (p. 117).

The book’s use of legal and intellectual history to complicate traditional state development approaches is intriguing. Friedrich stresses the influence of Emperor Charles V’s 1532 law code on legal developments throughout the Holy Roman Empire, including in Brandenburg-Prussia. The importance of provincial legal privileges within the composite state is highlighted. The book revisits the old concept of “Enlightened despotism” and places it within new contexts of multiple Prussian

Enlightenments: Wolffian, Pietist, and Jewish.

In the end, the book effectively constructs a new historical narrative of Prussian state development in the early modern period. Friedrich considers Brandenburg-Prussia's precarious international position as a subject state of the Holy Roman Empire, but simultaneously as a feudal dependent of Poland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Brandenburg was dominated by Sweden during the Thirty Years' War and Prussia was threatened by Russian expansion in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Instead of seeing the promotion of the Hohenzollerns to royal rank as redefining Prussia's status in Europe, Friedrich sees Frederick II's

disdain for the Holy Roman Empire, seizure of Silesia, and occupation of Saxony as producing a fundamental break in Brandenburg-Prussia's international situation.

King Frederick II sought to instill a uniform status on all of his subjects, according to Friedrich, but a Prussian identity only gradually formed after the disastrous defeat of 1806-1807. "The war against Napoleon revitalised local estate assemblies and boosted a more cohesive Prussian identity across its composite territories. This was Napoleon's legacy: an achievement that had eluded generations of Hohenzollern rulers in their striving for a more unitary state" (p. 113).

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