

Richard Schober. *Von der Revolution zur Konstitution: Tirol in der Ö?ra des Neoabsolutismus (1849/51-1860).* Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2000. 381 pp. DM 83.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-7030-0345-5.



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After the recent attention devoted to the 1848-49 revolutions in Central Europe, the publication of a volume dealing with the much neglected neo-absolutist decade in Austria must - at first sight, at least - appear especially welcome. How disappointing it therefore is to record that Richard Schober's book scarcely merits a warm reception. Schober has produced a turgid, monotonous neo-historicist catalogue, which fails to offer any new insights into government, politics and society in the Austrian Empire during the 1850s. It also gives a misleading and tendentious account of Tirol's German-Italian nationality conflict. In short, Schober's book is a depressing example of old-style Austrian *Landesgeschichte* at its worst.

Despite the broad-sounding nature of the title, this is not a general social and political history of Tirol in the post-revolutionary decade. Instead, Schober's work is nothing if not a "history from above" in its narrowest sense - albeit the "above" comprises the provincial, rather than the central,

administration. The work is based in its entirety on documents from the Tirolian Provincial Archive (*Tiroler Landesarchiv*) in Innsbruck, together with the published reports of the newly established Chambers of Commerce (*Handelskammern*) in Innsbruck, Bozen and Rovereto. >From these sources, Schober aims to reconstruct both the activities of the local authorities and the neo-absolutist regime. (The author notes that potentially relevant material from the Viennese Interior Ministry was destroyed by the *Justizpalast* fire of 1927.) His dutiful aim is thus to "fill in the gap" in historical scholarship on Tirol during the 1850s.

Evidently, he believes that this aim will be achieved by more or less transcribing the contents of the records left by the region's administrators. Collectors of trivia will doubtless admire Schober's work-rate and his determination to utilise seemingly every document filed by the *Statthaltereien* during the decade in question; others will simply despair, and wonder precisely as to the point of this mind-numbing exercise in the compilation of material for its own sake.

The book's structure has been influenced by the internal organization of the provincial bureaucracy. Schober's method is to trawl through each area of administrative responsibility and then to describe the main lines of policy pertaining to each section. After a brief introduction (Chapter 1), the author sets about his task in Chapter 2 by looking at Tirol's post-revolutionary constitutional position. Subsequent chapters describe reforms to the respective systems of political administration (Ch. 3), justice (Ch.4), public security (Ch.5), and tax and finance (Ch.6).

The author's attention then shifts to the practice of government and the effects of institutional changes in a number of spheres, above all the economy (Ch.7), public works and infrastructural projects (Ch.8), and education (Ch.9). Much shorter chapters then deal briefly in turn with social security issues (Ch.10), political associations (Ch.11), the press (Ch.12), the religious question (Ch.13), and the organization of local defence (*Landesverteidigung*) during the 1859 war against Piedmont and France (Ch.14). Chapter 15 examines the Italian national movement and "irredentism" in the south of the province. A final chapter relates the findings of official reports on the mood of the population (*Volksstimmung*) during the 1850s.

The end result of this lengthy trip through the archives is meagre indeed. Schober has little, if anything, new to add to what is already known about the neo-absolutist modernisation programme in the administrative, economic, legal and educational spheres. The book lacks an over-

all conclusion, while the main thrust of Schober's argument can be summarised as follows: the 1850s was a reforming era encompassing nearly all spheres of government activity. Schober considers some of these reforms to have been beneficial in the long run, but for the most part they were either "too hastily carried out" or they foundered on the central government's inadequate financial resources. He suggests that the Tirolians' naturally conservative instincts made them reject most of the innovations, the more so when the effects of certain changes seemed to justify their initial mistrust. For example, the local Estates were alienated by their loss of political influence, while the population as a whole experienced economic hardship as a result of currency reform and tax increases. And that is about it. True, Schober pours forth a stream of detail for us to wade through, but the basic moral is always the same: while the always loyal Tirolians never embarked on open resistance, they nevertheless rejected a reform programme that showed little understanding for their particular needs.

Certainly, for those prepared to sift through the undifferentiated mass of information contained in this volume, it is possible - by reading between the lines - to reconstruct the central government's aims, to assess the problems connected to policy implementation and thus to move towards the cogent synthesis that Schober himself fails to provide. However, such an exercise can only achieve so much and cannot hope to compensate for the text's overall shortcomings. It would be superfluous to comment on the weaknesses of Schober's exposition at great length, so I will confine myself to an enumeration of the work's main faults.

The first and most fundamental problem arises from Schober's reliance on official sources. Given that Schober is a professional archivist employed by the *Tiroler Landesarchiv* (who also teaches at Innsbruck University), one can readily comprehend his willingness to make the most of

the documentary sources available to him. Yet his exclusive focus on administrative records and his failure to interrogate them in a sufficiently critical manner means that, in practice, Schober simply adopts the viewpoint of the government officials composing the original source material. What these people wrote is what Schober takes to be "Tirolian history" during the 1850s. Needless to say, this leads to numerous shortcomings.

These deficiencies are compounded by the second glaring weakness, namely the complete lack of a conceptual framework for the work as a whole. As suggested above, the book is little more than a catalogue of details, with no understanding shown of wider trends or themes. The idea of "modernisation from above", to mention the most obvious issue arising from the neo-absolutist era, is entirely absent from the text. Likewise, the notion of "civil society", as it had developed in Austria in the first half of the 19th century, fails to make an appearance.

There is no place for social and cultural history in this book, or indeed, for political history in any meaningful sense. The author fails to take into account the dynamic trends in Tirolian society or to appreciate the precise impact of the 1848-49 revolutions. He includes the recent book on the revolutionary period in Tirol by Hans Heiss and Thomas Goetz in his bibliography, but there is no indication whatsoever that he has incorporated their findings into his work. [1] For example, Schober ignores the important role of municipal self-government, and pays no attention to how the chambers of commerce provided arenas for liberal political action during the 1850s (fortunately, these and other issues will be explored in detail by Goetz' forthcoming study). [2] Likewise, one could point to the fact that his discussion of educational reforms fails to consider the overall aims and objectives of the reform programme; [3] in fact, one could go on and make similar remarks for almost every subject tackled.

Related to the absence of any theoretical outline comes a third problem, that of context. Schober shows no real concern for developments elsewhere and pays no attention to broader scholarly debates. Thus, the rest of Austria only figures in the shape of the central government, imposing its agenda on Tirol. References are made to foreign policy (e.g. regarding the war of 1859) or to government finances where these cannot be avoided, and for this Schober relies on one or two works, primarily Harm-Hinrich Brandt's classic study. [4] But there is otherwise little awareness as to what was actually specific to Tirol and which problems were intrinsic to the neo-absolutist system as a whole, affecting most parts of the Austrian Empire in the same way. Moreover, one would scarcely guess from Schober's handling of the subject matter that Tirol was an integral part of the German Confederation during a crucial phase for the development of the "German Question", because he pays no heed to important recent syntheses of German and Austrian history. [5]

To give another example, Schober's painstakingly unhelpful discussion of the Tirolian economy in the 1850s not only ignores all the international scholarship on Austria (including works by American-based authors such as David Good and John Komlos that have been translated into German), [6] he has also not consulted important studies of the Tirolian regional economy and population. [7] Instead, we are treated to a series of random and unconnected pieces of information drawn from official sources, without any kind of hypotheses or statistical analysis. Figures are often not given for more than one or two years, while no attempt is made to place data from the 1850s in a longer time series. Nor does Schober try to synthesise his findings, with the result that the aimless, hundred-page long catalogue of information is rendered virtually meaningless.

Fourth, and last, Schober's approach to the national question in Tirol is especially problematic. In the first instance, one is hard-pressed to realise

from this book that Tirol was a province with a very large Italian minority (amounting to around 41-42% of the population at this time). While both title and text claim to be discussing the whole province, the author is in practice only really interested in German-Tirol: the vast majority of Schober's description relies on examples from that part of the province. For Schober, Italian-Tirol - also known as Trentino - appears almost exclusively as a "problem", while he glosses over the full implications of the regime's policies in the 1850s. Tirol is a particularly interesting case in the study of neo-absolutism because of the role played by the Emperor's brother, Karl Ludwig, as provincial governor (*Statthalter*) from 1855-1861. Vienna had already embarked on a policy of germanising administrative practice in 1854, when giving civil servants solely German language office stamps and insignia. Upon taking office, Karl Ludwig intervened personally to further this policy: in 1856, for example, he ordered that district officials had to present reports exclusively in German. Schober deals with these and other issues, such as the Austrian police's heavy-handed treatment of those involved in liberal politics in 1848-49, by summarising:

"Festzuhalten gilt aber: Welschtirol hatte objektiv gesehen keine Ursache fuer eine sachlich begruendete Beschwerde, denn es drohte seiner Nationalitaet keine Gefahr. Auch die kulturpolitischen Initiativen Carl Ludwigs waren niemals germanisierend, sondern defensiv; sie waren Versuche, das Deutschtum im gemischtsprachigen Gebiet und den Insellagen Welschtirols zu bewahren" (p.342).

One-sided judgements such as this become all the more unacceptable when one examines more closely the historiographical base upon which the author relies. Schober draws on pernicious secondary sources and occasionally employs terminology that could have come straight out of the extreme nationalist literature of the period c. 1890-1945. Thus, the main secondary work which

Schober uses as background to his description of the subject dates from 1917, in the shape of a highly partisan polemic and piece of wartime propaganda by Michael Mayr (a Christian Social politician who briefly became Austrian Chancellor in the 1920s, and who before 1918 was a member of the German national pressure group, the *Tiroler Volksbund*).[8] Given this situation, it will not perhaps come as a surprise that Schober - whether consciously or not - adopts a vocabulary reminiscent of the 1930s, when he speaks of the "Rettung des Deutschtums" (p.338) by Karl Ludwig or the German Confederation's determination in 1859, "das alte Reichsgebiet nicht dem italienischen Volkstum zu opfern" (p.326).

These uncritical echoes of *voelkisch* phraseology illustrate dramatically that Schober is not prepared to engage with the nationalities question in a serious scholarly manner. Quite apart from the fact that it is essentially inappropriate to use the term *Irredentismus* for the period prior to the formation of the Kingdom of Italy (1860-61), Schober's blanket labelling of all national-minded individuals in Trentino as "irredentists" obscures a far more complex reality. For example, Goetz and Heiss have shown that there were in practice relatively few Italian Liberals who had argued for complete secession from Austrian rule in 1848-49 - and even these tended to agree with the legalistic course adopted by the majority, some of whom argued for a separate crownland under Austrian rule, others for union with the province of Veneto.

Moreover, the national movement in Trentino was a heterogeneous grouping comprising patrician bourgeoisie and nobility, independent professionals, commercial bourgeoisie and clergy. There were important differences of emphasis according to generation, as well as significant tensions between the trading town of Rovereto and the administrative centre of Trento. All of this passes Schober by. But in any case, just as he displays little interest in consulting relevant Italian literature, it is doubtful whether a proper scholarly analysis is

really of interest to him, given that his main concern appears to be to perpetuate the clichés and to sustain the stereotypes of previous generations. As I have written more extensively elsewhere, [9] the impact of the South Tirol question has meant that Austrian historians have rarely dealt with key aspects of the region's history - particularly the national question - in sufficiently critical fashion. Schober is a classic case in point of these prevailing tendencies.

To sum up: this volume can just about be treated as a reference work for the history of Austrian administration at the provincial level during the 1850s. Beyond that, it cannot be seriously recommended, and one is forced to ask fundamental questions as to its scholarly value. This is a backward-looking, at times wilfully misleading work of traditionalist *Landesgeschichte* that is far removed from the productive discussions stimulated in the last twenty years by the field of *Regionalgeschichte*, conceived of as a critical engagement with the political, social, economic and cultural history of a particular territorial unit on an explicitly comparative basis. [10]

Notes:

[1]. Hans Heiss und Thomas Goetz, *Am Rand der Revolution: Tirol 1848/49* (Wien-Bozen: Folio-Verlag, 1998).

[2]. Thomas Goetz, *Buerkertum und Liberalismus in Tirol 1840-1873: Zwischen Stadt und "Region", Staat und Nation* (Italien in der Moderne 10, Koeln: SH-Verlag, 2001), forthcoming.

[3]. On this, see: Gary B. Cohen, *Education and middle-class society in imperial Austria 1848-1918* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996).

[4]. Harm-Hinrich Brandt, *Der oesterreichische Neoabsolutismus: Staatsfinanzen und Politik 1848-1860* 2 Bde. (Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 15, Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

[5]. On Austria, see: Helmut Rumpler, *Eine Chance fuer Mitteleuropa: Staatsverfall und buergerliche Emanzipation in der Habsburgermonarchie* (Oesterreichische Geschichte 8, Wien: Ueberreuter, 1997). Major syntheses of German history include: Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866: Buergerwelt und starker Staat* (Muenchen: Beck, 1983); James J. Sheehan, *German History, 1770-1866* (Oxford History of Modern Europe, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Wolfram Siemann, *Vom Staatenbund zum Nationalstaat: Deutschland 1806-1871* (Die neue deutsche Geschichte 7, Muenchen: Beck, 1995); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Bd. 3: Von der "Deutschen Doppelrevolution" bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849-1914* (Muenchen: Beck, 1995).

[6]. See, among others: David F. Good, *The economic rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750-1914* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1984), German: *Der wirtschaftliche Aufstieg des Habsburgerreiches 1750-1914* (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Donaupraumes 7, Wien-Koeln-Graz: Boehlau, 1986); John Komlos, *The Habsburg Monarchy as a customs union: Economic development in Austria-Hungary in the 19th century* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), German: *Die Habsburgermonarchie als Zollunion: Die Wirtschaftsentwicklung Oesterreich-Ungarns im 19. Jahrhundert* (Wien: Oesterreichischer Bundesverlag, 1986); Roman Sandgruber, *Oekonomie und Politik: Oesterreichische Wirtschaftsgeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Oesterreichische Geschichte 10, Wien: Ueberreuter, 1995).

[7]. For example: Helmut Alexander, *Geschichte der Tiroler Industrie: Aspekte einer wechselvollen Entwicklung* (Innsbruck: Haymon-Verlag, 1992); *Chronik der Tiroler Wirtschaft*, hg. von der Gesellschaft fuer Wirtschaftsdokumentation G.m.b.H. (Wien: Gesellschaft fuer Wirtschaftsdokumentation, 1992); Andrea Leonardi, *L'economia di una regione alpina: Le trasformazioni economiche degli ultimi due secoli nell'area*

trentino-tirolese (Trento: ITAS, 1996); Elisabeth Mantl, *Heirat als Privileg: Obrigkeitsliche Heiratsbeschränkungen in Tirol und Voralberg 1820 bis 1920* (Sozial- und wirtschaftshistorische Studien 23, Wien: Verlag fuer Geschichte und Politik; Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1997).

[8]. Michael Mayr, *Der italienische Irredentismus: Seine Entstehung und seine Entwicklung vornehmlich in Tirol* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1917).

[9]. Laurence Cole, "'Fern von Europa'? The peculiarities of Tirolian historiography." *Zeitgeschichte* 23 (1996), pp. 181-204.

[10]. For a fuller discussion of this useful distinction, see: Michael Gehler, "'Regionale' Zeitgeschichte als 'Geschichte uebersehbarer Raeume': Von Grenzen, Moeglichkeiten, Aufgaben und Fragen einer Forschungsrichtung." *Geschichte und Region / Storia e regione* 1/2 (1992), pp. 85-120. Also of interest: William D. Bowman, "Regional history and the Austrian nation." *Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995), pp. 873-97.

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