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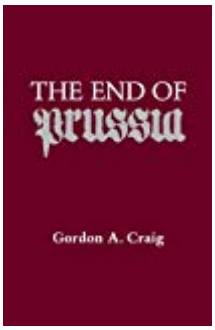
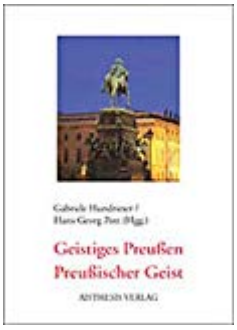
Gordon Alexander Craig. *The End of Prussia (The Curti lectures).* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. 102 pp. $16.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-299-09734-9.

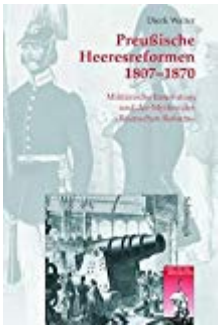


Nils Freytag. *Aberglauben im 19. Jahrhundert: PreuÖ?en und seine Rheinprovinz zwischen Tradition und Moderne, 1815-1918.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003. 506 pp. EUR 92.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-428-10158-0.

Gabriele Hundrieser, Hans-Georg Pott, eds.. *Geistiges PreuÖ?en, PreuÖ?ischer Geist.* Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2003. 217 pp. EUR 24.50, cloth, ISBN 978-3-89528-420-5.



Dierk Walter. *PreuÖ?ische Heeresreformen, 1807-1870: MilitÖÂ¤rische Innovation und der Mythos der "Roonschen Reform".* Paderborn: Ferdinand SchÖÂ¶ningh, 2003. 654 pp. EUR 94.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-506-74484-5.



Reviewed by Karin Breuer

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Since the end of World War II, the dual questions of continuity and national character have dominated the landscape of nineteenth-century Prussian history. Even before Hans-Ulrich Wehler sharpened the debate with the *Sonderweg* thesis, historians sought to advance, mitigate or refute historical continuities between nineteenth-century Prussia and the tragedies of Nazism and the Holocaust. Although the history of nineteenth-century Germany is shifting increasingly toward perspectives about transnationalism and the "Third Germany," historians of Prussia continue to focus on the question of continuities, be they in the realms of culture, high politics, the economy, the military or the treatment of minorities. In recent years, though, historians have found new ways to address the issues of German continuities and the role of conservatism in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Prussia.

Both Dierck Walter's and Gordon Craig's volumes seek to reformulate the questions of continuity in Prussian history. Walter attacks what he considers accepted truth of military history, attempting to undermine the teleology that has governed historical writing about army reform from the Napoleonic era to German unification. According to Walter, the traditional narrative claims that the effort to reform the army during the Napoleonic Wars was a failure and resulted in decades of military stagnation. In the 1860s, Albrecht Graf von Roon led a military revolution that dramatically improved the Prussian army, allowed Bismarck to win the Wars of Unification and strengthened the connection between the Prussian army, Junkers and the king (p. 33). Walter disputes both this "false picture" of radical historical rupture and the primacy placed on the political motives of reformers (p. 552).

To combat this military master narrative, Walter draws attention to historical continuities in the nineteenth century. For example, he points out that Roon and Wilhelm I did not invent military conscription; rather, socioeconomic events in the middle of the century merely made a "return" to it possible (p. 482). Walter's attention to historical continuities can also be seen in his claim that the *Krümpersystem* "enabled the transition from ... [the] soldier army of the Ancien Regime to a national army with universal, compulsory service" (p. 257). According to Walter, the continuities do not end in the nineteenth century. He maintains that Prussia's nineteenth-century wars were the formative phase in modern war leadership and contributed to the "total wars" of the twentieth century (p. 182).

While Walter's book should be commended for its careful attention to detail and strong argument, its organization could be clarified. In the first two chapters, Walter discusses the Prussian victory in the Wars of Unification. Chapter 3 examines the link between the military, war and society in the long nineteenth century, while the following chapter analyzes the social and political conditions under which the Prussian military reformers agitated for change. Chapters 5 to 8 contain the core of Walter's argument; they examine military reforms and the debates surrounding them from the Napoleonic Wars to the military reorganization of 1859-60. The next four chapters investigate shifts in the fields of army organization, mobilization plans, the general staff, officer education and technology (pp. 52-53). The concluding chapter analyzes the extent to which the officer corps was willing to enact changes and the instruments by which it did so. Because the organization is neither entirely chronological nor entirely thematic, the book frequently revisits the same information. In chapter 3, for example, Walter introduces the themes of the general staff and military technology, which he revisits again in chapters 10 and 12.

Other minor shortcomings appear as well. Walter appears to overstate the novelty of his work. He asserts the originality of his ideas almost defensively, stating that "no one in more than a century has been surprised that the ... assessment

has been so constant" (p. 33). Yet by focusing largely on military reforms by Gerhard von Scharnhorst, Hermann von Boyen, Helmuth Graf von Moltke and Roon, he emphasizes precisely those time periods most dominant in the narrative deemed too teleological. Adding to this problem is one of sources. Walter blames much of the historiographical unanimity on the source base. He points out that the few sources that exist are very one-sided (p. 33) and "extremely unsatisfactory" (p. 52). Walter conducted research at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, but admits that what remains there "are only irrelevant splinters for this book's topic" (p. 53). Therefore, the volume relies primarily on published sources. Yet this decision poses a problem for Walter's argument, as these limited sources provided the foundations for the historiographical trajectory against which Walter argues in his book.

Despite these flaws, this book will be of interest both to military historians and historians of nineteenth-century Prussia. The meticulously researched, well-documented book is an important contribution to the history of the Prussian military in the interval between its most significant nineteenth-century tests. Ultimately, however, the main value of this monograph comes not from its overly contentious thesis, but from its meticulously researched details.

Like Walter's book, Craig's volume, a compilation of lectures he delivered at the University of Wisconsin in 1982 which was re-issued in 2003, notes that more attention to historical continuities bring into question many of the accepted truths of Prussian history. Craig points out that, while historians often cite 1871, 1919 and 1932 as the endpoints of Prussia, none of these dates should be considered the state's "death blow." Both Hitler and his generals "invoked the spirit of Potsdam to justify their actions" in the years that followed, meaning that the "spirit of Prussia" continued at least throughout the Third Reich (p. 5). Thus begins an exercise in which Craig implies that Prussia should not be considered to have ***one*** endpoint, but several.

The lectures are structured around four pairs of people deemed representative of Prussian identity and its decline or, as Craig would have it, between innovation and tradition. In the first chapter, the author examines reformer Freiherr Karl von Stein and conservative F.A.L. von der Marwitz, two leading figures in the era of Prussian reforms. The anti-reformer, Marwitz, emerged as the victor in their confrontation, signifying the failure of Prussian reform and the increasing domination of the crown, the nobility and the army (p. 20). Craig argues that Marwitz became "a harbinger of the end of Prussia" because of his opposition "of the new" (p. 26). In the following chapter, Craig pairs the unlikely duo of writer Bettina von Arnim and chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Portraying them as "rival claimants ... to chart Prussia's future," Craig argues that von Arnim provided a progressive anti-industry emphasis on human rights, a counterpoint to Bismarck's state-centered Realpolitik (p. 28). Yet Bismarck's conservative vision emerged triumphant, providing another example of the victory of "tradition" over "innovation." Craig's next twosome, novelist Theodor Fontane and Kaiser Wilhelm II, illustrate a similar trend, with the former critiquing the latter's "absolutism, militarism, and philistinism" (p. 54), traits that eventually contributed to the state's demise.

In contrast to the other chapters, "Prussianism and Democracy: Otto Braun and Konrad Adenauer" does not dichotomize a traditionalist and a progressive. Rather, it analyzes why two politicians opposed to the "military and the old landed aristocracy" did not combine forces against them (p. 82). The explanation for this outcome rests on Franco-German relations. Adenauer, the president of the Prussian state council from 1921 to 1933, was willing to separate from the Rhineland for his desired rapprochement with France. Un-

willing to make such sacrifices, Braun, the minister president of Prussia, found himself combating Adenauer as well as the soldiers and agrarians who were his natural enemies. Such divisions between these otherwise natural allies, Craig suggests, hastened the end of any Prussian governmental autonomy.

While Craig provides a number of interesting arguments about periodization in Prussian history, the book is not without problems. The author--delivering these lectures well after the advent of social history--adopts an unapologetical "great man" approach, critiquing Hans Ulrich Wehler's *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* (1973) for "hardly mention[ing] the emperor at all" (p. 61). Yet by structuring a book about the end of Prussia around great men and one woman, Craig ignores larger political, social, economic and even military problems that account for the state's collapse. What remains is not altogether inappropriate for a set of lectures: a rather impressionistic series of personality clashes rather than a detailed explanation.

Another point Craig discusses rather superficially is the term "Prussia" itself. It is clear that he is talking about the decline not only of the state, but also of a set of beliefs. By entitling the book *The End of Prussia* and by focusing on the successive defeats of reform, individualism, anti-militarism and political moderation, Craig seems to suggest that Prussia *is* reformist, individualistic, pacifist and moderate. Because these assumptions are rather unorthodox, a more thorough examination of this progressive Prussianness would be useful. As is, the book leaves the impression that, rather than interrogating the end of Prussia itself, Craig might simply be detailing the decline of what he considers Prussian virtues. Furthermore, to equate Bismarck and, to a lesser extent, Marwitz, with convention and tradition is somewhat misrepresentative. Each was innovative in a fashion.

Geistiges Preußen, Preußischer Geist, a collection of essays from the German-Polish Conference in September 2002, similarly examines the meanings of "Prussianness" and its literary and cultural derivatives. In his introduction to this volume, Walter Engel draws attention to the many areas that have constituted "Prussia" over the course of its history. Because the state's borders shifted dramatically in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Engel suggests that it is best to look at Prussia as a "transnational" phenomenon, rather than merely a German state. He advocates intellectually and geographically deconstructing "Prussianness" rather than reifying the "black and white" discussion of political history (p. 7).

To this end, several of the essays usefully interrogate what is meant by the term "Prussia." Hans Hecker's essay suggests that there are two meanings of the word Prussia. On one hand, it is a specific historical state, albeit one with ever shifting boundaries. On the other hand, Prussia is a "comprehensive term" encompassing both "virtues" and "vices." He catalogues Prussian virtues as commitment to the state, tolerance, obedience, discipline, respect of property, thriftiness and a respect for education, courage and bravery; the vices include militarism, anti-individualism, authoritarianism and aggressiveness (pp. 16-17). While listing such stereotypical attributes is not particularly helpful, Engel provides an interesting, if rather brief, analysis of the ways in which the changing borders of Prussia helped to inform these attributes.

Tadeusz Namowicz engages the subject of the political/military "spirit of Berlin" and the cultural "spirit of Weimar." Namowicz collapses this old dichotomy and claims that, due to its population growth, political centrality, economic modernity and spiritual life, Berlin actually was already beginning to supplant Weimar as a cultural center during the Enlightenment. He points out that Weimar, the supposed *Kulturstadt* par excellence, was actually the more culturally conservative and traditional of the two cities.

The majority of the articles in this collection deal with Prussian literary and cultural figures, including Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Kristijonas Donelaitis, Vilius Storotsas Vydunas, Willibald Alexis, Theodor Fontane, Günter Grass and Heiner Müller. A key theme in many of these articles is that of cultural contacts both internal and external to Prussia. Alina Kuzborska examines the ways in which two bilingual "Prussian-Lithuanian" authors navigate the notions of otherness in their writings. Similarly, Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann's contribution points to the sometimes conflicting, sometimes overlapping identities in the Danzig Trilogy. In particular, she discusses Polish, Kashubian and Prussian identities in Grass's works and labels the author "one of the first proponents of a German-Polish reconciliation" (p. 183). In the volume's final essay, Gabriele Hundrieser discusses the shifting identities of Prussia and the German Democratic Republic. She argues that in the 1970s, the German Democratic Republic underwent a "significant paradigm shift" and became more willing to discuss positive aspects of the Prussian past. At the same time, East German author Heiner Müller radically criticized the Prussian state as being a "prototype of modern disciplinary power" (p. 210). Such contradictions, according to Hundrieser, shed light on the difficulty of self-identification in the German Democratic Republic, a state whose territory was dominated by what was once Prussia (p. 187).

Arranged chronologically, ***Geistiges Preußen, Preußischer Geist*** encompasses close to four centuries of the state's history. While each of these essays provides interesting insights, thematic, geographic and temporal distance makes it difficult to provide the cohesion that the best conference proceedings contain. Although this short collection's varied subject matter undermines a unified approach to the state's identity, its authors consistently illustrate the ways in which new scholarship about identities and transnationalism can be applied usefully to the Prussian state.

The final book under review shifts the focus from meta-narratives of Prussian identity and their impact on German history to a nuanced analysis of regional history. Nils Freytag provides a fresh approach to the question of Prussian modernity in ***Aberglauben im 19. Jahrhundert: Preußen und seine Rheinprovinz zwischen Tradition und Moderne, 1815-1918***. While the question of magic and superstition has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent decades, this monograph is one of the few that deals with the nineteenth century, a time in which attitudes toward superstition came to embrace "modern forms of superstition" (p. 17). According to Freytag, "tradition and modernity should not be considered contradictory, mutually exclusive concepts" (p. 396). Suggesting that the changes within superstitious beliefs ***reflect*** modernization, the author subverts the traditional narrative of enlightened rationalism replacing the superstitious credulity of previous generations.

A revised dissertation, this monograph places much of its focus on Prussia's Rhine province. Freytag maintains that the Rhine province is the ideal place for a study of superstition, as it was a "focal point of all central conflicts between Catholicism and the state" and encompassed both industrialized areas in the north and agrarian territories in the south (p. 30). While the author correctly argues that the subject would lose much of its specificity at a supra-regional level, the title of the book raises questions. The vast majority of the superstitions the author discusses occurred in the Rhine province; Prussia itself emerges primarily as the government which defined and censored superstition there.

Defining superstition broadly, Freytag's book touches upon a number of themes important to cultural, legal and political historians. First is the relationship between superstition and the law. Freytag maintains that during the nineteenth century, the legal definition of superstition changed dramatically. Instead of being considered a crime

based upon free will, it came to be perceived as a sign of feeble-mindedness (p. 49). Therefore, in post-Enlightenment Prussia, superstition was decriminalized and moved into the realms of medicine and psychology.

While Freytag's discussion of the law is generally relegated to the second chapter of his book, he discusses state views of superstition throughout the text. Some themes covered include conflicts between the church and state regarding "superstitious" religious practices, the state's efforts to control popular piety, censorship of "dangerous superstitious writings" and the role the state played in differentiating between "medicine" and "lay healing." Freytag does a good job illustrating that authorities of the state frequently demarcated the boundaries of the "superstitious." They were particularly interested in checking practices that threatened their authority, such as pilgrimages and prophecies that might lead to popular riots and even revolution (p. 200).

Freytag also analyzes the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and superstition. During the nineteenth century the church, like the courts and the state, came to conceive of superstition in a new way. While the church was willing to embrace potentially "superstitious" elements of popular pilgrimages, religious processions and rituals like exorcisms, it maintained the right to organize such practices itself. Catholic clerics, frequently deemed "superstitious" by their Protestant counterparts, tried to find an appropriate balance between controlling and embracing superstition. In so doing, Freytag claims, the Catholic Church "strengthened the secularization of notions of superstition and simultaneously weakened its own theoretical foundations" (p. 80). In other words, clerical skepticism about superstition may have contributed to the Church's decline.

Freytag's monograph also uses superstitious practices to interrogate the relationship of elite and mass culture. According to Freytag, the differentiation between elite and popular attitudes toward superstition has been overestimated. Arguing against the simpler notion that superstition fell entirely within the realm of lower-class culture, the author maintains that although medical professionalization increased throughout the nineteenth century, elites and the middling classes were often willing to adopt "superstitious" treatments if they were successful (p. 361).

In deconstructing the relationship between institutions and superstition, Freytag illustrates that, rather than being a "mentality," superstition is a stigmatized, external assessment, one which is "measured by changing norms" (p. 363). Drawing on the lessons of cultural history, Freytag suggests that superstition is a flexible term (p. 363). The notion of superstition shifted radically depending on whether it was being defined by Catholics, Protestants, Prussians administrators or medical professionals. For example, in chapter 5, the author illustrates that popular medicine only came to be viewed as "superstition" in the wake of medical professionalization. Chapter 6 similarly traces how the Prussian State and the Roman Catholic Church came to regard superstitions including animal magnetism, hypnosis and spiritism as "suspicious newcomers." While this focus on the constructed quality of superstitions is certainly valuable, the book's detail and technical jargon may alienate lay readers. Its reliance on postmodern redefinitions of everything from superstition, popular culture and elite culture to gender occasionally impedes the author's ability to provide a clear and coherent argument.

For specialists in the field of nineteenth-century Prussia, however, a great deal recommends Freytag's volume. While it draws attention to themes familiar to historians of Prussia, such as modernity; historical continuities and changes; and the power and conservatism of the Prussian state and intolerance toward the Catholic Church, it lacks the teleological imperative that drives so many histories of the nineteenth century. The result is a careful and balanced history that tells us

a great deal not only about the constructions of superstition, but also about modern Prussia.

Each of the books discussed here problematizes accepted truths about Prussian history, whether by interrogating Prussian identities, the periodization of Prussian military reforms, the endpoints of the state or the relationship of superstition and modernization. Despite the wide variety of topics, however, all of the authors engage, at least implicitly, with the themes of identity and continuity in Prussia. While both Craig's volume of two decades ago and Walter's informative tome add to the debate about Prussian continuities, Hundrieser and Freytag's books utilize the lessons of "new cultural history" and perspectives of transnationalism to interrogate Prussian identities and institutions. This latter formula in particular helps to decenter the debate about Prussian history, providing possibilities for a more creative historical approach to the state's past.