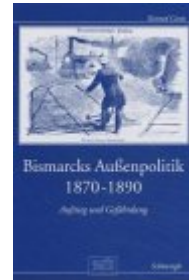


Konrad Canis. *Bismarcks Außenpolitik 1870-1890: Aufstieg und Gefährdung.* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2003. 400 S. EUR 39.80, gebunden, ISBN 978-3-506-70131-2.



Lothar Gall. *Politikstile im Wandel: Regierung, Parlament und Öffentlichkeit im Zeitalter Bismarcks.* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2003. 280 S. EUR 16.90, broschiert, ISBN 978-3-506-79223-5.



Andrea Hopp, ed.. *Otto von Bismarck, Gesammelte Werke: Volume 1, Schriften 1871-1873.* Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004. Table of contents EUR 60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-506-70130-5.



Katharine Anne Lerman. *Bismarck: Profiles in Power.* Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004. Table of contents £14.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-03740-3.



Reviewed by Siegfried Weichlein

Published on H-German (January, 2007)

Otto von Bismarck and his times have been widely dissected by scholars of modern European history. Whereas Heinrich von Treitschke could write German history as a narrative "from Luther to Bismarck," Sebastian Haffner reframed its course, tracing developments "from Bismarck to Hitler." Indeed, ever since historians began to grapple with attempts to explain the Nazi dictatorship, many of the evils of twentieth-century German history have been attributed to him. Bismarck has been associated with both the best and the worst aspects of German history. Scores of books have addressed both the continuities and discontinuities between 1871 and 1933. Bismarck--and his achievements as Prussian prime minister and German imperial chancellor--have thus stood at the center of German history and politics. The two definitive biographies by Lothar Gall and Otto Pflanze, which appeared in the last decade, sum up the research of generations and provide a politically, culturally and psychologically rich picture of Bismarck's personality.[1]

What, therefore--if anything--can be said about Bismarck that is new, and either broadens or deepens our knowledge about the first imperial chancellor? Are any new approaches in sight? A significant new impulse has come out of a new institution--the Otto von Bismarck Foundation. Founded in 1997 by the Bundestag, the foundation is located in Friedrichsruh just outside of Hamburg, where Bismarck spent his retirement years after 1890. The foundation promotes research on Bismarck as well as collecting archival materials and creating exhibitions for the public. These goals have been achieved by its energetic director, Michael Epkenhans, and through relentless scholarly work, exhibitions and conferences. The Bismarck Stiftung has given new impulses to scholarly research on Bismarck. It has launched two series that have significantly enhanced the historiography of Bismarck and his times. The first, a series of monographs (the *Friedrichsruher Beiträge*), focused on aspects of Bismarck's political life. The second, more important series is a

new edition of Bismarck's works, the *Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe*. This edition replaces an older edition that appeared between 1924 and 1935 with the explicit nationalist aim of challenging the outcome of the First World War by glorifying the founder of the German empire. This edition provided a highly politicized basis for subsequent research on Bismarck.[2] Editions published in the meantime have not significantly altered the general direction of research on Bismarck; so, for instance, the eight-volume *Bismarck: Werke in Auswahl* (1962-83) prepared by Gustav Adolf Rein does not really preempt the new Friedrichsruher Ausgabe.[3]

To remedy the deplorable state of this research, the Bismarck Stiftung has installed a board of editors for its new edition: Bismarck experts Lothar Gall, Eberhard Kolb, Klaus Hildebrand and Konrad Canis. The guiding principle behind the new edition is chronological. The edition will cover the works of Bismarck in strict chronological order. part 1 covers political writings in the years 1854-62 (before Bismarck became Prussian prime minister); part 2 will present the period 1862-71; part 3 will cover Bismarck's years as imperial chancellor (1871-90) and the remainder of his works that appeared before his death in 1898. Each part will include sections on "writings" (*Schriften*), "conversations" (*Gespräche*) and "speeches" (*Reden*). The traditional distinction made between political writings and letters will play no role in this edition. The editors see both genres as belonging to political writings. The publication of these materials will allow scholars to follow the political dynamics of Bismarck's chancellorship more carefully. The edition will eventually be completed with part 4, planned to cover Bismarck's memoirs--his *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*.

Nine volumes will cover the "Schriften 1871-1898," presenting Bismarck's political papers and letters as imperial chancellor and elder statesman.[4] Here the years of Bismarck's chan-

cellorship will take center stage, and not the years before 1871, which had constituted the core of the previous edition (which provided seven volumes for the period before 1871 and just one for 1871-90 [6c]); the new edition will include six volumes covering the period of Bismarck's imperial chancellorship alone. The first volume of part 3 under review here includes the editorial guide lines.[5] Unlike the previous edition, the *Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe* presents new documents that go beyond Bismarck's role in the founding of the Reich and touch upon foreign policy and Bismarck's relationship with political parties. The new edition refrains from any comments save for a few rare footnotes. It gives a short summary of each text together with a list of places where the document was published before an archival note where the original can be found. Unfortunately, the editors decided not to include a subject or name indices, which would have made it easier to find specific documents.

The first volume, which appeared in 2004, was edited by Andrea Hopp, known for her dissertation on the Jewish bourgeoisie in Frankfurt am Main.[6] Commentators and reviewers have praised her achievements. And rightly so: Hopp has assembled 506 documents, about half of which are now being published for the first time—a result that says a lot about the editorial guidelines of the old *Friedrichsruher Ausgabe*. The remaining ca. 250 documents which *had* been included in the old edition (vols. 6c and 14.2), receive new treatment here. Hopp has selected these documents from scratch, without relying on the old *Friedrichsruher Ausgabe* for decisions about what to include. She has gone through seven archives, where she collected 1,200 documents, out of which she decided to publish 506. 31 documents included in the old edition are not included in the new one.[7]

The new edition does not fundamentally change our view of Bismarck, but it provides new insights into the mechanisms of Bismarck's for-

eign politics and his attitude toward party politics. We get a picture of an even more egocentric and suspicious personality than previous studies indicate. Today, we would likely characterize Bismarck as a "control freak" who did not tolerate any dissenting opinions. Hopp also provides the reader with some interesting corrections to existing stereotypes about Bismarck's political thinking. With regard to France, this edition reveals, Bismarck favored the republican government of Thiers over a monarchical restoration, as other monarchical powers would be unwilling to partner with a republic. Bismarck clashed with the German ambassador in Paris, Harry Graf Arnim, over this issue, and forced Arnim's resignation by threatening to resign himself. Domestically, Hopp's choice of documents provides new details about Bismarck's motives in the *Kulturkampf*. Bismarck (whose misanthropic tendencies fed his discovery of conspiracies wherever he looked) saw the newly established German empire permanently beset by a myriad of enemies—among these, most prominently, Roman Catholics and socialists. The most dangerous of all conspiracies was a coalition between these two threats, the black and the red specters. Both, he was convinced, sought to bring down the German empire—a judgment that Bismarck saw as a clear political fact. His famous realism was trumped in this instance by his political fanaticism. One of the more important insights offered by this edition is an omission—there is no evidence for Bismarck's so-called charismatic leadership, something that Hans-Ulrich Wehler (in his influential *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* [1995]) posited as an important precursor to Hitler's charismatic rule. Here we see no proof of charismatic intentions, nor of unintended charismatic politics. Instead, the matters that come to the foreground are Bismarck's misanthropy and his tendency to mistrust both friend and foe alike.

This rather skeptical view of politics seems to be a common theme in more recent studies on Bismarck. Rather than the heroic, triumphant

style typical of older interpretations, the tone of recent work is more subdued, and we are now presented with a much more pessimistic politician whose political style could be characterized as defensive-aggressive. Bismarck seemed to have entertained serious doubts about the future and stability of the recently founded empire. Bismarck does not come through as a charismatic politician who required permanent crises in order to display his political finesse. He did not need and produce crisis to stabilize his power. Instead, he saw himself as part of a permanent political crisis, a crisis he responded to not with charisma, but with repression.

This view is corroborated by another book in the *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* of the foundation. In it, Konrad Canis presents a comprehensive history of Bismarck's foreign policy between 1870 and 1890. Canis is an expert in the field of imperial foreign policy, a reputation established with a 1997 study on early Wilhelmine foreign policy.[8] Canis's history of Bismarck's foreign policy covers the same ground as Andreas Hillgruber's *Bismarck's Außenpolitik* (1972; second edition 1993) but with a slightly different tone and result. Canis's methodology is more traditional, one in which great men make history. Individuals other than Bismarck rarely take the stage in Canis's account of foreign policy. The closer the author comes to the year 1890 in his narrative, the more he tries to integrate social and economic themes, but he does not clarify how Bismarck the man is related to Germany's social and economic context.

Canis's account of Bismarck's foreign policy follows traditional periodization: 1870-78; 1879-85; 1885-90. Still, in one point he clearly sets himself apart from the mainstream of German historiography: in his consideration of Bismarck's use of military means for political ends. In particular, Canis asks about the extent to which Bismarck considered using the military for political purposes after 1871. Canis argues that Bismarck weighed the military option whenever significant

political decisions had to be made. The most important moment occurred in 1875 during the so called "Krieg-in-Sicht"-Crisis. Canis interprets this event not so much as a reaction to French rearmament after the defeat of 1871, but more as part of the political project to achieve German hegemony in western Europe. Count Radowitz's mission to St. Petersburg in 1875 signaled the partition of Europe into an eastern sphere and western sphere, under Russian and German dominance respectively. It would have given Germany the opportunity to wage war on France whenever it saw fit—an opportunity that Bismarck, according to Canis, was willing to exploit. The German chancellor did not envisage the maintenance of the status quo for Germany, in which conflicts could be transferred to the periphery of Europe, where Germany had no interests. Instead, Germany's position in Europe was to be strengthened by its cultivation of a credible threat to intervene militarily in central Europe. Canis thus sees Bismarck's foreign policy in a much more aggressive light than that in which it usually cast—within the context of the bipolar confrontation with France. Here the author clearly goes beyond the consensus commonly accepted by scholars as Jost Dülffer and Andreas Hillgruber. For Canis, Bismarck's formulation of hegemony was a precursor to the imperialism of the years after 1890. Canis does not imply that Bismarck threatened to go to war. Instead the military factor was the ultimate trump card in political decision making. Bismarck was—unlike his successors—no high-stakes player. Scholars like Hillgruber have argued that Bismarck downplayed the use of military means, since they carried unforeseeable risks for Germany's alliance-building in Europe. Intervention would have endangered the credibility of the new political player rather than strengthening it. Debates about Bismarck's views on the military option will likely continue; nonetheless, Canis shows that Bismarck's foreign policy did not rely upon compromise and mutual agreement, but rather on pressure. This orientation can be seen as a continuity with-

in modern German politics, one that proved disastrous in the long term, since Bismarck's successors were no longer interested in maintaining a balance between defensive and partly hegemonial politics, but instead sought outright hegemony.

An essay volume in the *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* is devoted to precisely this issue: the political styles (plural!) of the Bismarck years. The term is used here rather broadly and comes close to the analytical concept of "political culture" advanced by Karl Rohe and others some fifteen years ago.[9] The term *Politikstil* (as Dieter Langewiesche points out in his introductory article) refers to different conceptualizations of the political system, not to different modes of political action, as one might expect. Langewiesche identifies at least two styles: the "Fundamentalpolitisierung" that characterized Germany from the 1880s on and the "Fundamentaldemokratisierung" (Karl Mannheim) that was a recurrent theme on the left-liberal side of the political spectrum. This analytical distinction signifies a divergence between a thorough politicization of public opinion in Germany (which could be measured in voter participation) and the inability of the political masses to influence the decision-making process on the national level. This phenomenon has in the past been identified by terms like "Teilparlamentarisierung." [10] Here Langewiesche's term is meant to signify something different, namely a history of unintended consequences, in which anti-democratic politics produced democratizing effects.

The volume identifies the political styles in imperial Germany in three ways. In the first part of the book, Langewiesche, Andreas Biefang and Bernd Sösemann analyze the structural dimensions of Germany's political culture. Sösemann looks at journalists as actors of politicization. Biefang's article on the Reichstag as a political symbol is probably the richest and most provocative of the contributions, insofar as he challenges Wolfgang Hardtwig's thesis that the German em-

pire had no positive political legitimation or political symbols with which to identify. German nationalists, according to Hardtwig, turned instead to a mythical past for their national symbols. Biefang argues to the contrary that this interpretation is overstated and cannot hold true for the Bismarck years, when the German parliament indeed acquired the status of a political symbol through modern press politics, photography and the daily proceedings of its sessions. Biefang presents strong evidence that (at least in the Bismarck years) Germany's political culture was much more diverse and national symbols were indeed affiliated with contemporary political institutions. The absence of charismatic leaders before 1890 opened up a space for the construction of national identity. In the years after 1890, a charismatic emperor and imperialistic politics were to draw symbolic energy away from the Reichstag and attempt to transform the Hohenzollern monarchy into a national symbol.

The next sections of this volume take a different perspective. Focus falls on political parties and their personnel; recruiting mechanisms; and, particularly, on the way politicians earned their living and became more professional. Whereas the volume's first part laid out the politicization of German politics, the second part sketches out the professionalization of German politicians. Four authors examine different parties: Volker Stalman writes on the conservatives; Harald Biermann on the national liberals; Ulrich von Hehlon the Catholic Center party; and Thomas Welskopp on the SPD. All these authors agree that party politics and politicians became professionalized and developed new sources of income as speakers, writers and managers of organizations affiliated with the parties. The volume's last section identifies emotions as a key issue in the election campaigns of 1878 (Bernd Braun), 1887 (Elfi Bendikat) and 1881 (Andrea Hopp). Catering to emotions and resentments proved to be a valuable tool in the political market, particularly when it came to

enemy-bashing, whether directed against "reds," internationalists or (more increasingly) Jews.

The distinction between two different styles in Germany's political culture, one catering to the masses, one to national institutions that resisted thorough democratization, confirms Langewiesche's initial observation. However, this insight about the unintended democratizing consequences of anti-democratic politics does not serve as an interpretative framework for the volume as a whole. It is not dichotomy, but instead paradox, which seems the best analytical model for capturing both Germany's and Bismarck's political styles. Germany was national--but harbored strong ethnic minorities that strove to possess their own nations; it had a democratic franchise--but the parliament was just one of many institutions to embody the general will. But as the will of the people became the most important resource for political styles, these styles in turn sought to become accessible. This volume brings together articles which are either structurally oriented or based on actors and political processes. The analytical point would have been to demonstrate the unintended consequences underlying a system that could only move back to semi-absolutist rule when it moved forward--that is, by appealing to the masses.

Finally Katherine Anne Lerman's book on Bismarck in the series "Profiles in Power" serves as an introduction to the mechanics of power politics in the Bismarck era, thus engaging with these topics. Lerman is known for her previous book on Bernhard von Bülow.[11] She avoids falling into the trap of writing history as one made by great men both in that book and in this one. Her biographical approach incorporates both society and the economy. Advancing chronologically, she introduces students of modern German history to the political system and the economic and social history of imperial Germany. Lerman sees Bismarck as a shrewd *Realpolitiker* who did not hesitate to exploit the mechanisms of modern parlia-

mentarism in order to enjoy the upper hand in power politics. This book does not support the view of charismatic rule by the "Iron Chancellor." In parallel to Canis's conclusions, Lerman suggests that it was not charisma but pressure that stood at the center of Bismarck's power politics.

What do we learn from these books? First of all, future research on Bismarck will be able to utilize new sources. The new critical edition of Bismarck's writings serves as a basis for scholars to build on. This novelty alone may change a great many receive notions and draw new students to Bismarck. Studies on Bismarck will then be based on a similar footing to that available in work on Friedrich Ebert and Konrad Adenauer. Secondly, these studies do not corroborate the historiographical myth of Bismarck's charismatic rule. Instead, his thoroughly instrumental approach to political systems puts him in the company of men such as Talleyrand or even the less successful Clemens von Metternich rather than of Adolf Hitler. Bismarck was not a product of the system he created. He tried to manipulate it and was forced to realize that the democratic nation-state entailed a revolution of Copernican dimensions that gave the masses a great deal of influence. But the turn to the masses could not be unmade. Bismarck himself was not a charismatic politician, desperately trying to ride the tiger of modern mass politics, but rather a trickster who personally symbolized the transformation of Germany's political system.

A trickster is a political figure who embodies at the same time opposite positions and unites them--a figure with great ambivalence. Ethnologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss used this term to analyze ancient myths. A trickster is able to communicate transformation, since he stands with his person for unity with opposing views. These books, taken together, suggest that Bismarck was just such a trickster. When we look at his impact on contemporary Germany, he embodied through ambiguity, anomaly, deception and new methods

of *bricolage* Prussia's past as well as Germany's future. A man of contradictions, Bismarck was a great writer whose memoirs cannot be trusted. As John Leonard has written, "he was sincere about his Protestant God, although he seems to have imagined that God as a sort of unindicted co-conspirator in his Kulturkampf and Realpolitik-ing." [12] Given the diversity of Germany after 1871 and its inherent instability, it was Bismarck's political personality that brought these antagonistic currents together: the federal and the national; the Prussian and the German; and so on. Bismarck united opposing visions of Germany's future. [13] Bismarck was a trickster; Hitler was not.

Notes

[1]. See Lothar Gall, *Bismarck. Der weiße Revolutionär* (Frankfurt a.M.: Propyläen-Verlag, 1980; Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[2]. See especially vol. 6c, covering the period from 1871 to 1890: Werner Frauendienst, ed., *Bismarck. Die gesammelten Werke Bd. 6c: 1871-1890* (Berlin: Stollberg, 1935).

[3]. Gustav Adolf Rein, ed., *Bismarck: Werke in Auswahl*, 8 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962-1983).

[4]. Part 2 will encompass his "conversations" and part 3 his "speeches."

[5]. In the meantime, the second volume has appeared of the *Schriften 1874-1876*. See Rainer Bendick, ed., *Otto von Bismarck. Gesammelte Werke. Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe (NFA), Bd. 3.2: Schriften 1874-1876* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005).

[6]. Andrea Hopp, *Jüdisches Bürgertum in Frankfurt am Main im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997).

[7]. Ewald Grothe, "Book Review of Andrea Hopp, ed., *Otto von Bismarck. Schriften 1871-1873*," *sehpunkte* 4 (December 15, 2004),

available at < <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2004/12/6123.html> >.

[8]. Konrad Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik. Deutsche Außenpolitik 1890 bis 1902* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997); idem, *Bismarck und Waldersee. Die außenpolitischen Krisenerscheinungen und das Verhalten des Generalstabes 1882 bis 1890* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980).

[9]. Karl Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen in Deutschland. Kulturelle Grundlagen deutscher Parteien und Parteiensysteme im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992); idem, "Politische Kultur und ihre Analyse. Probleme und Perspektiven der Politischen Kulturforschung," *Historische Zeitschrift* 250 (1990): 321-346.

[10]. Dieter Langewiesche, "Das Deutsche Kaiserreich--Bemerkungen zur Diskussion über Parlamentarismus und Demokratisierung Deutschlands," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 19 (1979): 628-642.

[11]. Katherine Anne Lerman, *The Chancellor as Courtier: Bernhard von Bülow and the Governance of Germany, 1900-1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[12]. John Leonard, "Review of Edward Crankshaw, *Bismarck*," *New York Times*, November 17, 1981.

[13]. Cf. William J. Hynes and W.G. Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993); Michael P. Carroll, "Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem," *American Ethnologist* 8 (1981): 301-313.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Siegfried Weichlein. Review of Canis, Konrad. *Bismarcks Außenpolitik 1870-1890: Aufstieg und Gefährdung*. ; Gall, Lothar. *Politikstile im Wandel: Regierung, Parlament und Öffentlichkeit im Zeitalter Bismarcks*. ; Hopp, Andrea, ed. *Otto von Bismarck, Gesammelte Werke: Volume 1, Schriften 1871-1873*. ; Lerman, Katharine Anne. *Bismarck: Profiles in Power*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2007.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12801>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.