

**Thomas Friedrich.** *Die missbrauchte Hauptstadt: Hitler und Berlin 1916-1945.* Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2007. 464 S. gebunden, ISBN 978-3-549-07196-0.



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“Die missbrauchte Hauptstadt. Hitler und Berlin” is a voluminous piece of work. Thomas Friedrich has written many accounts on Berlin’s history and is thus clearly passionate about it. This time Friedrich tells us the story of Adolf Hitler’s relationship with Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s. With his study he wants to point out and illuminate a blind spot in the history writing on the Nazi period. Up till now, Friedrich notices, the history of National Socialism, particularly the history of the SA in Berlin, has been largely ignored. Friedrich does not intend to fill this gap entirely, but with his focus on the nexus of Hitler and Berlin he attempts, so he says, to demystify some presumptions that exist on Berlin’s Nazi past and hinder a critical analysis.

Friedrich wants to refute a kind of local patriotism that represents 1930s Berlin as an ‘occupied’ city. In this reading Berlin is seen as a victim of an invading political force that deposed its ‘true’ character. Friedrich wants to prove different but the title of his book confuses. The “abused City” [Die “missbrauchte Hauptstadt”] somewhat emphasizes Berlin’s victimhood rather than con-

tradicting it. In his introduction to the book, Friedrich explains that the title refers to the fact that Berlin was used as an experimental field for several Nazi purposes. It was used as the setting for parades, as a location for exemplary SA attacks against leftist movements, as a venue for anti-Semitic attacks, as a testing ground for rituals, and as a stage for the conquest of public space. According to Friedrich, Berlin was an ‘instrumentalized’ city.

Friedrich also aims to counter the traditional representation of Hitler as a radical opponent of Berlin and big cities in general, who only felt at his ease in the province. In more recent accounts a more ambivalent image is offered, Friedrich admits. In these revamped interpretations Hitler is described as a man torn between contempt and fascination for modern Berlin. But instead of looking for a clarification in emotional and psychological factors, Friedrich argues that Hitler’s relationship with Berlin has to be considered as a tactical and instrumental one, depending upon and changing with the political circumstances. Through a meticulous analysis of the political sit-

uation in which the relation between Hitler and Berlin took shape, Friedrich wants to give us a more nuanced image.

The author does, however, not succeed in proving his point. First, his assessment that Berlin was an experimental field for NSDAP politics in the 1920s and early 1930s, might well be true. But to what extent Berlin represented a special case remains unclear. Friedrich does not draw comparisons with other German cities that could have highlighted Berlin's specific status. Secondly, the so-called tactical and instrumental relation between Hitler and Berlin appears to be non-existent. Hitler is remarkably absent in this book about Hitler and Berlin. It appears that the NSDAP leader was not interested in the Weimar capital during the 1920s and early 1930s. Nor was he the brain or main agitator behind the so-called Berlin experiments. Friedrich did not plan to write a history of the NSDAP or the SA in Berlin, but "Die missbrauchte Hauptstadt" eventually turns out to be one.

Joseph Goebbels is the key character of Friedrich's Berlin story. His diaries are drawn upon so extensively by the author that they almost become the book's main source. One looks in vain for the exploration of new sources as promised on the dustcover. From 1926 onwards, Goebbels was Gauleiter of the NSDAP in Berlin. In this position he struggled continuously with Hitler's lack of interest in Berlin. At several instances he had to remind Hitler that his regular presence in the capital was a necessity. But as Goebbels puts it: „Er [Hitler] hasst Berlin und liebt München. Das ist ein Kreuz. Er beruft sich auf Postdam, Washington und Angora [Ankara]. Aber warum gerade München? Das sehe ich nicht ein.“ (p. 296) Indeed, Hitler was of the opinion that the capital did not necessarily have to be the place of government. He refused to get his own office in Berlin, and preferred to spend his time in Berlin in a hotel. Even in 1933, after seizing power, he stayed in Munich.

Somewhere in the middle of "Die missbrauchte Hauptstadt" it dawns on Friedrich that something crucial is missing. Then he throws in some paragraphs on Hitler's imagining of Weimar Berlin as an Americanized city without tradition and culture. What Hitler disliked most about Weimar Berlin was its inability to produce monumental architecture, which according to him reflected its lack of political power. All this is a familiar story and Friedrich does not really succeed in making it fresh. After 1933 big changes were about to take place in Hitler's Berlin, but this is where Friedrich's book ends. In a last chapter he wraps up with a general summary of the post-1933 period.

"Die missbrauchte Hauptstadt" definitely shows that Friedrich is passionate about Berlin's history, but unfortunately, not always with positive consequences. His 'historical sensation' blinds him to the fact that the reader might be more interested in the author's interpretation of the sources than in their raw material. Friedrich likes to quote a lot and is particularly fond of exceedingly long passages. This gives the book an overly descriptive tone and makes it a difficult read. Friedrich also has the habit of conveying his enthusiasm or surprise by exclamation marks, leaving it up to the reader to guess what the excitement is all about. At some points Friedrich's text becomes emotionally dramatic. Quoting (of course) Goebbels' announcement in 1926 that the Kurfürstendamm had to be cleared of Jews, Friedrich repeats: 'So steht es da [...] So steht es da.' (p. 149) Or, describing (and quoting) the underestimation of Hitler by the leftist press in 1927, he reflects on what their reaction would have been when some prophet had told those journalists that in six years time Hitler would seize power. Some deeper reflections are, however, needed to tackle the nexus between Hitler and Berlin.

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