

Karl Klambauer. *Österreichische Gedenkkultur zu Widerstand und Krieg: Denkmäler und Gedächtnisorte in Wien 1945 bis 1986.* Der Nationalsozialismus und seine Folgen. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2006. 333 pp. EUR 37.80, paper, ISBN 978-3-7065-4076-6.



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Published on HABSBURG (January, 2011)

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In the early 1980s, historian Robert Knight discovered the 1948 cabinet papers where the Austrian leaders discussed the question of restitution for Jewish victims of the Nazi regime in Austria. Knight's revealing of the words of Interior Minister Oskar Helmer--"I am in favor of dragging this matter out"--spelled out exactly how Austrian policy would function. After publication of Knight's book (resisted by the government), Helmer's phrase became part of Austria's political lexicon.[1] Knight's find was concrete evidence of a postwar political culture that was dominated by what historians would later call the victim myth, victim thesis, and other names. In postwar Austria, the political system and the government was characterized by Proporz, the power sharing and divvying of patronage spoils by the two main political parties, the Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). The rebirth of an independent Austria, reversing the Nazi annexation of 1938, came courtesy of the Four Powers who had defeated Nazi Germany. The political leadership in Austria

seized this opportunity and immediately adopted a doctrine that Austria and most Austrians were unequivocal victims of Nazi Germany. This victim doctrine was spelled out in the *Red-White-Red Book* published by the government in 1946. This victim stance separated Austria and Austrian identity from Germany and German identity in an attempt to build a new Austrian nation. The main economic and political reason for emphasizing Austrian victimization was to avoid paying reparations.

Aside from the rebirth of independent Austria, the second great accomplishment of the postwar political class was negotiating the state treaty, which made Austria a neutral country and ended the Allied occupation. By the end of 1955 then, Austria was an unoccupied, democratic land in Central Europe. This was a stunning achievement, given that the rest of what had been the Third Reich was divided into the two Germanys and was the front line of the Cold War in Europe. The complicity of many ordinary Austrians (not to mention extraordinary ones like Adolf Hitler himself)

was largely set aside as Austria became a prosperous model democracy unencumbered by the Cold War. That all changed in the 1980s with the well-known Waldheim affair and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1938 annexation. Suddenly it seemed (though there had been earlier eruptions) Austria was no longer the land of Sachertorte, skiing, and opera, but the land of the unapologetic Nazis. For some critics, the new works critical of Austria and Austrians amounted to a countermyth. By the early 2000s, Ernst Hanisch argued that the victim myth theory itself had become a stereotype and it was time to look at postwar Austria in a more nuanced way.

Karl Klambauer sees his work in the vein Hanisch called for. Indeed, it should be said that for the last decade historians have thoroughly explored the politics and political culture of those postwar years. Those interested in historical memory and its relevance to political culture have written works uncovering the layers and sites of memory. Klambauer's *Österreichische Gedenkkultur zu Widerstand und Krieg* is a valuable contribution to this now extensive body of work. Klambauer's introduction places the work in the context of theoretical texts of historical memory (including, work by Pierre Nora, among others) and Austrian historiography in general.

The second part of the book focuses on two sites where monuments were erected in 1948: the Victims Memorial at the Zentralfriedhof and the Returning Veterans Memorial (Heimkehrer-Gedächtnismal) at Leopoldsberg overlooking the city and the Danube. In this section, Klambauer demonstrates that the culture surrounding war memorials was a split one. The memorial at the Zentralfriedhof was meant to honor the victims of Nazism whereas the Heimkehrer memorial was in honor of returning soldiers. Views of returning Wehrmacht veterans in postwar Austria is especially revealing of the paradoxes inherent to the officially embraced victim myth. It was important to honor their service, yet the rebirth of Austria re-

quired the defeat of the Wehrmacht whose veterans were being honored. Especially interesting about the Leopoldsberg site is its importance in lifting the Turkish siege in 1683, an event that was highlighted at the unveiling of the memorial.

These links between coming to terms with the war and Austria's longer-term past is a particular strength of Klambauer's work. We see this especially in the third part of the book, which focuses on two churches: the medieval and Gothic Saint Stephen's Cathedral (Stephansdom) at the very center of Vienna and the neo-Gothic nineteenth-century Votivkirche just off the Ringstrasse. These sites of memory are thick with layers of meaning. The churches themselves reflect Austria's Roman Catholic identity and they also contain numerous plaques and chapels of significance. In the Votivkirche, Klambauer details a memorial to the Austro-Fascist Sicherheitswachebeamte erected in 1935, as well as the 1986 memorial to those who died at Stalingrad. This links the Votivkirche with the right-wing veterans' organizations in Austria. But the Votivkirche also includes the Jägerstätter (a prominent Austrian victim of the Nazis) stained glass windows erected in 1973 and a Mauthausen stained glass window (1968). Collectively, then the Votivkirche sites represent a kind of Proporz of memorials, as multiple and contradictory threads of both prewar and postwar Austrian historical memory are represented. Klambauer also covers the multiple sites of memory within the Stephansdom. A particular strength of this section is Klambauer's argument that the rebuilding of the cathedral and the return of the big bell (the Pummerin) were rich with meaning in postwar Austria. The Catholic identity of Austria was reasserted, which served to distance Austria from Germany. The memory of the Turkish wars was also stirred up reminding Austrians that the present Soviet occupation was not so unlike their past dealings with the Turks. Indeed, throughout the book, Klambauer highlights how twentieth-century sites of memory overlapped with old sites related to the Turkish wars. This is perhaps Klambauer's most

original contribution to the study of Austrian historical memory.

This is a strong work of scholarship. Klam-bauer has examined these sites of memory with great care and an eye for detail. He also writes in clear prose and avoids the overly long sentences that one sometime sees in German-language academic writing. But a problem with devoting so much detail to these sites is that an opportunity may have been missed to broaden the study to other sites in Vienna, nearby Lower Austria, or other parts of the country. Making the trek to the western provinces could have made for an even more illuminating study. The bibliography also suffers from a kind of insularity too common among Austrian historians--non-German language sources are scant. These criticism aside, Klam-bauer's work is a fine study that makes a strong contribution to our understanding of historical memory and postwar political culture in Austria.

Note

[1]. Robert Knight, *“Ich bin dafür, die Sache in die Länge zu ziehen”*: Wortprotokolle der oster-reischen Bundesregierung von 1945-52 über die Entschädigung der Juden (Frankfurt am Main: Athenaeum, 1988).

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Citation: Peter Utgaard. Review of Klambauer, Karl. *Österreichische Gedenkkultur zu Widerstand und Krieg: Denkmäler und Gedächtnisorte in Wien 1945 bis 1986*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. January, 2011.

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