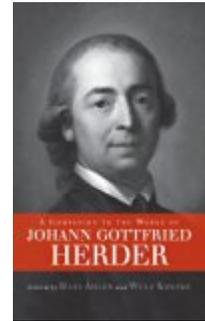


Hans Adler, Wulf Köpke, eds. *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*. Rochester: Camden House, 2008. xi + 489 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57113-395-3.

Reviewed by Robert S. Bledsoe (Department of English and Foreign Languages, Augusta State University)

Published on H-German (February, 2011)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher



Befriending Herder: An Excellent Companion to Herder's Thought

Hans Adler and Wulf Köpke approached this project with higher goals in mind than compiling a set of introductory essays on Johann Gottfried Herder's works; they viewed this "first collaborative attempt to compile a companion to Herder's works" (p. 1) as an occasion to offer an assessment and summation of the current state of research on Herder and his work. The timing of this volume seems especially felicitous. Anglo-American scholars now have access to a number of good translations of Herder's most significant works, including those in Gregory Moore's *Selected Writings on Aesthetics* (2006), which was not included in the otherwise very helpful bibliography. Scholars have not, however, had access to an up-to-date single-volume work in English that could serve as a good introduction to Herder's thought. Furthermore, Herder's work has gone under significant reassessment in the last few decades. Contributors to this reassessment have come to consider Herder not as a "perennial forerunner" (p. 2), but as an innovator whose achievements deserve attention on their own merits and whose thought has something to tell us today. They argue that Herder, despite his idiosyncratic use of terminology, is a more systematic and consistent thinker than he has generally been given credit for, and that his concerns and his ideas are relevant to current thought. The essays in this volume all adhere to this understanding of Herder's work.

As befitting a work of this type, the essays attempt to capture the scope and depth of Herder's activity in a wide

range of fields. After a brief survey of Herder's life and works, the reader encounters essays on Herder's epistemology, philosophy of history, concept of *Humanität*, and understanding of language. This last essay moves us to the field of aesthetics, which is considered in essays on Herder's conceptualization of aesthetics and poetics, mythology, literature, and the future of German literature. We discover an essay by Gerhard Sauder on Herder's own poetic works, translations, and views of poetry, as well as a suggestive piece by Adler on Herder's style and its typographical realization. The volume is rounded out with essays on Herder and politics, his biblical studies, his theology, his work as school superintendent, Herder as a critical contemporary, and, finally, his reception. This essay covers responses to his work not only in Germany but also in France, England, America, and Slavic countries.

The contributors are well-respected scholars from North America and Germany who have been active in the Herder research; they include presidents of the International Herder Society, such as Adler, Köpke, Robert Norton, and John Zammito; and scholars, including Günter Arnold, Christoph Bultmann, and Ulrich Gaier, who worked on the Frankfurt Edition issued by the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. (A complete lists of the essays and contributors is available at Google books and the Camden House Web site.) Most contributors are German—half the essays had to be translated from the German—and the essays transmit the familiarity of the contributors with the

German scholarly traditions.

The essays offer not so much introductions to the material as summative explorations of the current state of knowledge of Herder. A reader looking for a quick overview of a specific work should probably look elsewhere. A scholar looking for a rigorous introduction to

Herder's thought, however, should be pleased with the volume. Furthermore, readers whose familiarity with Herder and Herder scholarship has been limited to specific areas will find this volume rewarding reading. I hope that this well-conceived and well-executed companion finds the readership it deserves.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Robert S. Bledsoe. Review of Adler, Hans; Köpke, Wulf, eds., *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2011.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=29913>



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