

Heinz Duchhardt. *Der Wiener Kongress: Die Neugestaltung Europas 1814/15.*
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As is typical for the Beck Wissen series in which the book appears, Heinz Duchhardt's brief account of the Congress of Vienna is at once accessible and appealing to a broader readership, as well as well-grounded and informative. Although without footnotes, Duchhardt refers frequently to secondary works and primary sources alike and offers more than a sprinkling of illustrative and lively quotes. A specialist in early modern European diplomatic history and biographer of the important Congress participant Baron Karl vom Stein, Duchhardt provides a balanced assessment of the Vienna Congress's achievements and failings and an excellent sense of its significance within the longer sweep of early modern and modern international relations.[1] The work is if anything more an analysis of the Congress than a straight narrative of its negotiations, which makes it of interest to historians as well as to general readers.

Slightly more than half of the book is devoted to background and context. Duchhardt opens with a helpful discussion of the historiography and

source base for the Congress, situating it within the broader diplomatic history of the years from the late Napoleonic Wars through the early Congress period. He highlights the differences between the Vienna Congress and its early modern predecessors, not least that the rulers and leading statesmen at Vienna were present and active in face-to-face negotiations, rather than leaving mid-level diplomats to act upon slow-traveling instructions from their capitals. In addition, the organization of the negotiations into separate committees for specific geographic and thematic areas, comprised of semi-experts on the respective subjects, marked a step in the "professionalization" of diplomacy in this era (p. 71). Duchhardt ultimately points to the creativity of the statesmen of 1814-15 in establishing institutions for cooperative security that proved fruitful in the nineteenth century. The fact that so many states rushed to accede to the Vienna treaties in the following years, whereas many ignored the invitation to sign on to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, he finds telling.

The book also provides a lengthy introduction to the “actors and actresses” involved in the diplomacy and social life. In his presentation of politically active elite women at the Congress--the “actresses”--Duchhardt emphasizes the traditional notion of bedroom politics and rivalries between amorous diplomats or ladies of society rather than, say, the role of salons or direct political lobbying.[2] He also stresses, however, that the parties, festivities, and social life of the Congress played an important part in its diplomacy and should not simply be seen as a distraction from the real work of peace making, as some older views maintained.

The volume’s last two chapters present the negotiations and their results. The first treats the negotiations through February 1815, with the resolution of the central conflict of the Congress in the great power showdown over the Polish lands and the Kingdom of Saxony. The second then covers the race to finish the rest of the Congress’s business after Napoleon’s reappearance on the stage from his too-temporary exile on the island of Elba at the end of February. In Duchhardt’s view the pressure to finish the treaties quickly and relatively comprehensively, helped promoted some of the more far-reaching elements of the Vienna settlement. Compromise seemed the order of the day and encouraged lasting cooperation to ensure security.

In most respects Duchhardt takes a middle-of-the-road approach to the Congress. He finds that the Congress of Vienna was not as innovative in international law as some would have it--the present reviewer included--but he still acknowledges that its two main achievements in that area, the declaration against the African slave trade and the reordering of diplomatic rank and relations, themselves represented progress towards transparency and humanitarianism in international relations. The abolition declaration as he notes did not end the trade and was a limited measure, but he still identifies it as a “milestone”

in diplomacy and a precursor of the 1926 Geneva Antislavery Convention (p. 96).

Similarly, Duchhardt’s final judgment on the *Deutsche Bundesakte* that established the German Confederation, much maligned by disappointed nineteenth-century nationalists, reflects the rehabilitating tenor of recent scholarship. Hence for Duchhardt the Bund offered a useful framework for German political and social life and for European stability over the succeeding half century. At the same time, however, he is still keen to emphasize that the drafters of the constitution missed numerous opportunities to go further in progressive directions, whether in bolstering trade and freedom of movement among the German states, protecting Jewish rights, or adopting representative constitutions, individual-rights protections, and full-scale freedom of the press. Duchhardt’s belief that the Vienna settlement facilitated the maintenance of European peace in ensuing decades has already been noted, but he still gives some credence to the Congress’s critics over the years, who attacked the tendency of the Congress powers to ignore popular demands from liberal or national movements. Here, however, much recent work has shown that these movements were not so broadly popular as previously claimed, which leaves the statesmen perhaps seeming less obtuse or obstructive in their construal of public opinion. The reviewer has also argued that the diplomatic settlements of 1814-15 were by no means so reactionary and actually promoted a significant degree of constitutional protection and recognition of national identities in the wave of border changes and constitutional proclamations that accompanied the Vienna settlements, as in Belgium and the Polish lands.

Putting the present volume together with the slightly longer recent treatments by Wolf D. Gruner and Reinhard Stauber, the Congress of Vienna is now well served with compendious and insightful German-language analyses for a broad-

er educated and student readership--just in time for the bicentennial in 2015.[3]

Notes

[1]. See Duchhardt's *Stein. Eine Biographie*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 2010), *Stein-Facetten. Studien zu Karl vom und zum Stein* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007); *Mythos Stein* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), and *Freiherr vom Stein. Preußens Reformator und seine Zeit* (Munich: Beck, 2010).

[2]. Highlighting the more direct political role of women in salons and lobbying efforts, see Brian E. Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[3]. Wolf D. Gruner, *Der Wiener Kongress 1814/15* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014); Reinhard Stauber, *Der Wiener Kongress* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014). These authors also argue against using "restoration" or reactionary labels to describe the settlement or period.

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