



Richard H. Tilly, Michael Kopsidis. *From Old Regime to Industrial State: A History of German Industrialization from the Eighteenth Century to World War I.* Markets and Governments in Economic History Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 312 pp. \$74.99, e-book, ISBN 978-0-226-72557-4.

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Published on H-Sci-Med-Tech (August, 2022)

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The Industrial State

In their study of German industrialization, *From Old Regime to Industrial State: A History of German Industrialization from the Eighteenth Century to World War I*, Richard H. Tilly and Michael Kopsidis argue that Germany, rather than experiencing a “big spurt” after 1871, instead underwent a longer, multifaceted, and decentralized process of industrialization dating to the eighteenth century (p. 1). The authors see the period before 1800 as essential but overlooked, and they divide the significant developments into three categories: regionalized improvements in agriculture, institutional changes in both state and society, and the regional variations between different parts of what became the German Empire in 1871. These themes are followed up to the end of the book, and in addition to a chapter on population growth before 1800, each theme receives a chapter in the first of the book’s four chronologically organized parts. These cover the aforementioned factors supporting future industrialization under the “Old Regime” before 1800, “Early Industrialization” before the mid-nineteenth century, “The Growth of Industrial Capitalism up to the

1870s,” and “Germany’s Emergence as an Industrial Power” before 1914. This largely follows the current periodization of German economic development, though Kopsidis and Tilly place argumentative emphasis on the first three parts of the book more than the last section, which covers the more heavily studied period after 1871. As the preface indicates, *From Old Regime to Industrial State* is meant to incorporate new information into a “well-worked field,” in part to emphasize how unusual “eighteenth- and nineteenth-century [economic] developments” actually were (p. vii). This new information includes multiple demographic studies by Ulrich Pfister on the period before and after 1800, as well as the ways that regional agriculture supported and did not support the development of industry in Germany. Secondly, the book is aimed at providing a synthetic overview of Germany during the “transition to modern economic growth” (p. vii). Primary sources therefore do not figure in the bases for this study, although the authors sometimes reference the earliest historical economic studies on a subject, typically from the early 1900s or 1910s.

The emphasis Tilly and Kopsidis place on regionalized industrial development is particularly welcome. German-speaking central Europe was a jurisdictional patchwork, even after the post-Napoleonic consolidation in 1815 and the creation of the German Empire in 1871. The latter remained a “League of Princes,” whose governments had autonomous power over economic policies. Beginning in chapter 2, the authors use Württemberg, Royal Saxony, and the “Rhine-Ruhr” area to highlight how developments in the eighteenth century conditioned the readiness of these places for industrial development after 1815. Thus, while Prussia was illiberal and authoritarian, the more representative governments of south Germany—Württemberg, but also Baden and Bavaria—all had liberalized politics from the 1830s and remained far more liberal than Prussia. However, in the early part of the century this actually set back their industrialization, as guilds and other corporate vested interests managed to prevent liberalizing economic measures meant to ease restrictions on production and commerce. Combined with the strong development of Westphalian agriculture to support the less productive but more industrious southern highlands of that province (a specialty of Kopsidis), this allowed the Lower Rhine and central Westphalia to transform into the “Rhineland-Westphalian Industrial District”—the famous Ruhr District—by 1900. But it would be the development of places like the Ruhr and their material resources and already developed institutions that continued to drive German power, and the how and why of the processes in each region is an important point of emphasis as the study of Germany’s economy turns increasingly from national to regional foci.

Tilly and Kopsidis largely achieve their goal of updating the economic history of Germany to reflect more recent scholarship. The latter part of the book doubtless contains many details that specialists on the various topics—agriculture, leading industrial sectors, urbanization, to name a few—will find extremely useful. (“Urban Growth,

1871-1914” was a personal highlight). The themes discussed above are carried throughout the book and receive periodic chapters of their own for extra emphasis, although the regionalized focus is carried more or less through every chapter. As the book moves forward in time and the economy becomes more complex, banking and finance, technology and human capital, and “Growth Trends and Cycles” (chapter 11) also earn special attention. This breadth of coverage makes it useful as an introduction to German economic history, but this comes with the warning that one probably needs to be familiar with econometric methods to fully benefit from some of what the authors are trying to do. As someone who studies the Ruhr coalminers at the start of the twentieth century, I think of myself as familiar with most of the arguments this book engages with, but as someone whose approach leans more to the cultural and intellectual, I found myself a bit lost in the historiographical debates originating specifically from the economic history literature. These debates are scattered through the texts in places where the authors are working through revisions to past paradigms, especially in the first section on the Old Regime, but the argumentative tone can be distracting at times. Anyone with a more general understanding of German history or economic history may find this book useful but should consider starting the book with the epilogue, “German Industrialization from a Twentieth Century Perspective.” Here the authors provide some context for the debates strewn throughout the book, which can better ground those unfamiliar with the peculiarities of the German historiography. In contrast, the introduction focuses on the technical points of the book and will be more useful for specialists.

The “special path,” or *Sonderweg*, referenced in the epilogue also helps explain the book’s tone, based as it is in part on Tilly’s earlier *Vom Zollverein zum Industriestaat* (1990). An idea that arose from serious debate in Germany and the Anglophone world in the 1980s and 1990s over the nine-

teenth-century economic origins of Germany's twentieth-century National Socialist regime, the *Sonderweg* paradigm seems less significant to a scholar of my generation.[1] (I entered the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee History MA program in 2011, where I first heard of the *Sonderweg*, but a shift away from that interpretation was already apparent.) It is not that such origins are not worth looking for and examining when found, but the notion that Germany took a "special path" to modernity which deviated from "correct" Franco-Anglo-American liberal modernity seems absurd today. Germany's path to industrialization was certainly specific to it but so were the paths of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States—from one another as much as from Germany. Thus the biggest historiographical contribution which *From Old Regime to Industrial State* makes might be to further emphasize the shift in the study of nineteenth-century Germany, from a historiography based on national anxiety to one based on the acceptance of national peculiarities. As the discussion of regionalized industrialization in the book indicates, even this would only be the first in a necessary series of shifts in perspective if we are to correctly understand Germany's economy in the nineteenth century.

Note

[1]. The "special path" was first articulated by Hans-Ulrich Wehler in *Das deutsche Kaiserreich: 1871-1918*, Deutsche Geschichte /hrsg. von Joachim Leuschner 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), published in English as *The German Empire, 1871-1918* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1985). He elaborated on this thesis in *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte (Dritter Band): von der "Deutschen Doppelrevolution" bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), which is available only in German, and he still defends it.

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Citation: Matthew A. Hall. Review of Tilly, Richard H.; Kopsidis, Michael, *From Old Regime to Industrial State: A History of German Industrialization from the Eighteenth Century to World War I*. H-Sci-Med-Tech, H-Net Reviews. August, 2022.

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