

**John Breuilly.** *Austria, Prussia and Germany, 1806-1871.* London: Longman, 2002. XVII + 202 pp. \$16.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-43739-5.



**Reviewed by** Alan Sked

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### The Struggle for Mastery in Germany

Breuilly's book is part of the Longman "seminar studies" series which caters largely for sixth form students doing their A-levels (*Matura* or *Abitur*) before going on to university. Undergraduates sometimes use these books too. In any case, these slim volumes are designed to present school and university students with a clear outline of a particular period or topic, some historiographical information and a selection of documents. Breuilly's book contains 104 pages of text and 60 pages of documents, as well as a chronology, a glossary of (mainly) German terms, a "who's who", three maps, and a selected bibliography of works in both English and German.[1]

Clearly, the task he faced in writing his book was to tell his story and to analyse it within the very compressed limits imposed by the series. The end result was bound to be somewhat superficial and derivative and so it has proved. Breuilly does his best to cover the story but the limits of space cramp his style. Sometimes these limits are explicit, for example when he writes (pp.79-80):

"The story of the North German Confederation and Bismarck's policy up to the Franco-Prussian War is dealt with by Williamson's book in this series which in turn relates that to Bismarck's career as the first German Chancellor up to 1890. Another book in the same series by Mason looks at the domestic policies of Austria-Hungary after 1866, beginning with the new constitution of 1867 which conceded autonomy to Hungary. I will not go over the ground traversed by these authors." However, he manages to insert "chapter seven" entitled "The Definitive Exclusion of Austria from Germany, 1867-71" which is almost three pages long. At another point he tells us: "The story of the origins and outcome of that war (the Franco-Prussian War) has been told elsewhere" (p. 82). All this will prove rather disconcerting to schoolchildren who will suddenly find that to get the whole story they need to consult a variety of different books.

The limits of space impose other penalties. At certain points Breuilly seems to persuade himself that he has covered points that have simply been omitted. For example, on page 82 he writes: "Bismarck quickly disavowed any of the vague prom-

ises he made at Biarritz [...]" Yet Biarritz has never been mentioned beforehand, even in the single paragraph devoted to Franco-Prussian diplomacy before the war of 1866. Likewise, on p. 74 in a discussion of Prussian expansionism in Germany, the author states that this went back to Frederick the Great and Silesia, the Saxon Question in 1814-15, Radowitz in 1849-50 and "what Manteuffel had briefly outlined in 1861". Presumably he is referring to 1851 and the Dresden Conferences. However, the couple of sentences he devotes to Dresden fail to mention Manteuffel. Yet again, on p. 41, we are told: "Taking together the views expressed on Schleswig [...]" Yet he fails to discuss Schleswig. The Posen question gets a little bit of coverage, but the development of the Schleswig-Holstein affair is almost glossed over with the comment that before the revolutions of 1848, the German states had intended to incorporate Schleswig in the Bund. Students will gain no idea of its importance in 1848 from reading this book.

There are a number of other points that are unsatisfactory about it. For a start there is the style, which (again due to compression) is sometimes rather breathless and reports just "one damned thing after another" (to use the phrase of H.A.L. Fisher). The first paragraph of the first chapter (and indeed the first two pages) are rather like this. They will probably put students off. Then come some infelicities of expression. On page 178 we are informed that Frederick William IV of Prussia turned down "the imperial Emperorship." On page five, we learn that the partitions of Poland turned Prussia into "a dual nationality dynasty." On page 81 there is a reference to "Balkans [...] policies".

The need to compress also leads to contradictions or near contradictions. For example, on page 59 we are told: "Attempts by Austria to move closer to the Zollverein were blocked" yet "Austria and the Zollverein concluded a more liberal free trade treaty in 1853 and it was agreed from 1860 negotiations on a possible future membership of

Austria in the Zollverein should begin." Likewise, on page 38 it is argued: "Revolution broke out in early 1848 for reasons which had little to do with the national question" while "In the German case a special feature is that some people advocated national unity as a way of dealing with the economic and political issues which had brought about revolution."

On a more serious level, some issues are hardly dealt with at all. One would never guess from Breuille's account, for example, that there is a historiographical debate over Metternich's policies regarding France in 1813; controversies over Austrian policy at Dresden in 1851 are ignored; and there is no discussion of Benedek's role in the war of 1866. Indeed, it is apparent that Breuille is not at all sure-footed--as a German specialist--about Habsburg history. Thus we are told of "the abdication of Francis I and his replacement by Franz Joseph" in 1848 (p. 149). References are made to "the Archduke Johannes" (p. 179) and "Radetzky" (p. 49 and index). Schwarzenberg rather than Franz Joseph is given credit for the abolition of the March 1849 constitution (p. 180--"his last significant act"). Benedek, who retired as *Feldzeugmeister*, is promoted to Field Marshal.

Reference is also made to the "Czech" uprising in Prague in June 1848, although even the imperial authorities there stressed that Czechs and Germans stood shoulder to shoulder in resisting Windischgraetz who had provoked them. On page 48, we are informed that "Its (i.e. Austria's) Italian army had virtually been expelled from Lombardy and Venetia", whereas the army, as every school-boy knows, had simply retreated to the Quadrilateral (the Austrian fortresses in the middle of Lombardy-Venetia) to await reinforcements. It is no coincidence that key books on Habsburg history are missing from Breuille's bibliography (e.g. Gunther E. Rothenberg's *The Army of Francis Joseph*, or Antonio Schmidt-Brentano's *Die Armee in Österreich*).[2]

Much of this might not matter too much, yet Breuille has given his book a somewhat pretentious tone with statements such as "The terms 'Germany', 'Austria' or 'Prussia' are elusive" (p. 6); or, again, "'Nationalism' is as problematic a driving force as is 'Prussia' or 'Bismarck'" (pp. 8-9). At the end he speculates that "nothing is inevitable" yet "equally, however, the actual outcome was not an accident"--"the probability" being that Prussia would win the contest for supremacy in Germany on account of the *Zollverein*—this despite the fact that most German states in the *Bund* and in the *Zollverein* supported Austria. Breuille also fails to take on board Thomas Huertas's revision of Austro-Prussian trade relations after 1853 although Huertas's book is mentioned in his bibliography. [3]

The final point I would like to make is that in his discussion of Germany in 1848-49, Breuille is at pains to play down the national question. On page 41 he simply dismisses historians who see in 1848 "connections with the expansionist ambitions of the Second Empire or the Third Reich." As has already been noted, the Schleswig-Holstein Question is glossed over; Posen is dismissed as the revision of an original policy of surrendering territory; while sympathy for Italians and Magyars is used to assert that there was no consistent national policy. However, there is another side to the story, namely that Germans wanted to create a new empire in the centre of Europe that would overthrow the balance of power, that they thirsted for national prestige after centuries of relative impotence, that they wanted to create a large fleet and to start acquiring colonies. The (German) historians connected with this viewpoint are simply overlooked. Their works are omitted from the German bibliography and their case is ignored.[4] This is not good enough. One aspect of the struggle between Austria and Prussia between 1848 and 1851 is that it produced a variety of schemes to unify Germany—any one of which would have threatened the European balance and overturned

the 1815 settlement. Nobody reading Breuille's account would be aware of this.

All in all, therefore, there are many caveats to bear in mind before recommending Breuille's book to school or university students. Its best aspect is its collection of documents, which—although many are severely edited—will undoubtedly prove useful. On the other hand, if students want a very short, reliable account of Germany's struggle for unity, they should simply read the first half of Imanuel Geiss's splendid little book on the topic.[5]

Notes:

[1]. Surprisingly, Longman lists the book in its catalogue under a slightly different title: *Austria, Prussia and the Making of Modern Germany, 1806-1871*.

[2]. Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1976); Antonio Schmidt-Brentano, *Die Armee in Österreich. Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1848-1867* (Wehrwissenschaftliche Forschungen. Abt. militärgeschichtliche Studien 20, Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1975).

[3]. Thomas F. Huertas, *Economic Growth and Economic Policy in a Multinational Setting: The Habsburg Monarchy, 1841-1865* (Dissertations in European Economic History, New York: Arno Press, 1977). See also the relevant discussion in Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918*, second and expanded edition (London and New York: Longman, 2001), chapter four.

[4]. See inter alia the work of Günther Wollstein, *Das "Großdeutschland" der Paulskirche. Nationale Ziele in der bürgerlichen Revolution 1848/49* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977); also his *Deutsche Geschichte 1848/49. Gescheiterte Revolution in Mitteleuropa* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986); and his essay "Paulskirche und Deutscher Bund. Nationale Probleme bei der Realisierung von Freiheit und Einheit", Holger Fischer (ed.),

*Die ungarische Revolution von 1848/49. Vergleichende Aspekte der Revolutionen in Ungarn und Deutschland* (Beiträge zur deutschen und europäischen Geschichte 27, Hamburg: Krämer, 1999). The literature cited by him in footnotes 3, 4 and 5 of this essay gives a list of other authorities who develop a similar theme of Germans striving after world power and imperial status in 1848-49 including Andreas Beifang, Hans Fenske and Frank Lorenz Müller.

[5]. Imanuel Geiss, *The Question of German Unification, 1806-1996* (London et al.: Routledge, 1997); German original *Die deutsche Frage, 1806-1990* (Meyers Forum 1, Mannheim et al.: BI-Taschenbuchverlag, 1992). Geiss (English translation, pp. 38-39) supports the Wollstein/Fenske line that in 1848 even left-liberal Germans supported the idea of Germany as a world power using a fleet to establish colonies and challenge Great Britain. He may be wrong--or right--but the whole issue of national power is hardly ignored.

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