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## Review of Kontroversen um Osterreichs Zeitgeschichte.

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**Botz, Gerhard, and Gerald Sprengnagel, eds.** *Kontroversen um Österreichs Zeitgeschichte. Verdrängte Vergangenheit, Österreich-Identität, Waldheim und die Historiker.* Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1994. Pp. 586.

"Die österreichische Geschichtswissenschaft sollte es allerdings längst als ihre Aufgabe sehen, in dieser Frage [that is, the consideration of contemporary Austrian history within the context of 'Greater German' history] neue, differenzierende Positionen und Interpretationen im Lichte neuer historischer und politischer Entwicklungen zu erarbeiten, sich nicht auf Ewiggestrige zu berufen, insbesondere dann nicht, wenn letzteres als Lehrstück eher eine Tragodie war" (357).

Helmut Rumpler's plea for a new historical sensibility captures the essence of post-Waldheim calls for the critical rethinking of Austrian historiography and the reexamination of public memory. From 1945 into the mid-1980s, Austrian historical writing, whether academic or popular, had accepted the comfortable, albeit confining, parameters of Second Republic political culture. The Moscow Declaration of 1943 had declared Austria (and, by extension, Austrians) the first victim(s) of German aggression. This founding myth, or *Lebenslüge* effectively precluded self-critical examination of Austrian circumstances under the Third Reich. The Grand Coalition and the institutions of the Social Partnership had contributed to repression of the past through the creation and maintenance of a consensually managed system. Gerhard Botz suggests that whereas the West German historical profession had begun to confront the German past critically as early as the Fischer Controversy, political realignment in the early 1980s and the Waldheim Affair provided the first real opportunities for the historical community to call Austrian taboos into question. In this respect, he notes, a functional analysis of the political culture that effectively repressed Austria's past shows a greater resemblance to the former East Germany than to the democratic West (18-22).

The excellent collection compiled by Botz and Gerald Sprengnagel offers a number of important essays that, in their entirety, form the closest approximation of the German *Historikerstreit* to be found in the Austrian guild. Based originally on a series of papers presented in May 1987 in Salzburg, the book was supplemented with more detailed essays and selections from larger, provocative works to provide a documentary record that illustrates a wide-ranging reevaluation of how contemporary Austrian history is imagined. The book is divided into five sections that examine the relationship between the political context of the later 1980s and the "crisis" of Austrian *Zeitgeschichte*, the methodological state of *Zeitgeschichtsforschung*, the debate over Austrian national identity vis-a-vis Germany, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and resistance research. The authors include almost every major *Zeitgeschichtler*, as well as important German contributors. Botz and Sprengnagel also reprinted the now classic essay by the English historian Robert Knight, which arguably did more to stimulate discussion of the state of the profession than any other piece written in the wake of the Waldheim controversy.

The collection's greatest strength is its comprehensive examination of the historical roots of Austrian identity as a subset of, or an alternative to, a larger sense of "Germanness." Debate focuses upon Karl Dietrich Erdmann's "three states-two nations-one Volk" thesis, championed by Fritz Fellner, which located Austrian history and identity in a centuries-old continuum of German

cultural and political relationships. The reaction to Erdmann's essay is telling; his implication that the Second Republic is a German-Austrian state evoked strong responses from proponents of a distinctly Austrian identity, and equally fervent counterreactions from advocates of a German-national Austrian essence. Erdmann and Fellner might be commended for suggesting that Austrian history can be written in a broader Central European context without fear of the shadow cast by the Third Reich hiding some sinister motive.

Still, without an adequate working theory of nationality or ethnicity either sophisticated enough to purge the term *Volk* of its racial connotation or consistent in its reliance upon common language as the basis for the *Kulturnation*, historians who advance a German source for Austrian identity and fail to acknowledge Slavic, Hungarian, and Jewish cultural influences (long-standing Habsburg pretensions to impart German culture to southeast Europe notwithstanding) will continue to encounter resistance. As an alternative to these historians' inclination to construct a Pan-German unity, Rudolf Ardelt's selection emphasizes Central European regional histories as a viable alternative. Identity, he argues, need not be thought of in all-inclusive terms, and may stress locality and diversity (280-81).

Identity and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* form the volatile point at which contemporary political issues interface with historical writing and popular historical conception. Richard Mitten offers insight into the popular support for Waldheim's insistence that he had fulfilled his duty and was a victim himself, like many other Austrians. Mitten's thoughtful Mozartkugel metaphor emphasizes just how problematic the relationship between documentary sources, professional historians, journalists, and the public can be (400-402). Rather than conclude on this uncertain note, the editors offer the reader selections emphasizing the importance of bringing *Alltagsgeschichte* and the history of mentalities to bear on studies of resistance and complicity — methodological approaches capable of moving historical scholarship out of this potential cul-de-sac. The arrival of this long overdue volume is welcome. It is perhaps the most important collection on the topic of contemporary Austrian historiography hitherto published, and it should be read and taught widely.

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