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OTHER REVIEWS

Sociability and power in late-Stuart England: the cultural worlds of the Verneys, 1660–1720. By Susan E. Whyman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Pp. xii + 287. ISBN 0-19-820719-0. £45.

This gracefully written study recreates the overlapping city and country worlds of the Verney family, especially through the activities of John, merchant and younger son, who later inherited the estate. It is based on a large database of around 12,000 documents classified by family status, occupation, kinship, gender, and type of letter. Dr Whyman is interested in how ordinary experience connects to larger issues and hence focuses on the Verneys' social lives, cultural values, and personal networks. Overall, the study questions accepted categories like family patriarchs, helpless women, independent heirs, and the landed/middle-class divide.

The first section deals with networks: those of a country gentleman, Sir Ralph Verney (1613–96) and those of a London merchant, John Verney (1696–1720). The former relates a world of generosity, patronage, and gifts of deer; the latter a world dominated by financial pursuits, striving for status and the coach. By the late seventeenth century, London was central to the lives of the landed elite. Commercial terminology and values had penetrated landed behaviour and discourse, the gentry took full advantage of the financial revolution of the 1690s, snapping up annuities and lotteries, and the London marriage market was a central feature of marriage strategies. The rising importance of London and the financial revolution created opportunities for younger sons: they became, in Whyman's view, agents of change. London's commercial culture could effect major changes in the behaviour of the landed elite. John made more money than his father and improved the family finances, but he did not continue his father's practices when he took over the family seat. He gave less to dependent kin, raised rents, hired workers only as needed, sold nothing on trust and stopped giving away food at the door.

Urban and country modes of sociability differed and Whyman utilizes John as a case study to discover how civil society evolved. The coach, rather than the bestowal of a haunch of venison, became the embodiment of polite society and the symbol of power. When John was house hunting in London, he counted the numbers of coaches per street. Birth became less important as a determinator of rank than the public display of polite behaviour. As politeness became a mark of status, control of manners increasingly fell to women. It was women who interpreted the social code and female relations who ensured that John, irked by the rules, adhered to the strictures of polite society.

Whyman also examines the cultures of femininity and masculinity. When money was available, gender and birth order produced varied outcomes but when there was no dowry, law and inheritance customs reinforced gender stereotypes that assumed feminine humility. Many gentry women were unable to marry and eked out life on the margins. Elder sons had a special responsibility to show self-discipline and to perpetuate the family estate and name, and hence the duty to father and family honour often overrode other factors. Some individuals found subtle ways to attain their own ends and to challenge the dominant model of domestic femininity and public masculinity.

The final chapter is a fascinating exploration of the world of party politics in the days of Queen Anne. For Whyman, political behaviour and events took place in everyday social activities: by 1715 the ritual of election had supplanted the ritual of hunt as the locus of power. She uncovers the world of competitive politics which so fractured the gentry community. Whyman disputes the political pacts made by the gentry as evidence of an elite consensus or elite hegemony over voters. John won in 1710 and discovered that this victory obligated him to help his supporters, in other words a pattern of calling in debts had developed. She also reveals the importance of the influence of gentry women in vote getting – the rage of party in fact gave women opportunities in public affairs.

Whyman is not really interested in the human condition; she is much more concerned with detailing finances than relationships, political jockeyings than psyches. She does not pursue the issues of how Mun's wife coped with having his mistress living in the home as the wet nurse; nor why John's daughter Elizabeth rejected several suitors, remaining unmarried. She may also portray too great a divide between the milieu of John and that of his father – it was after all venison that was served at the banquet celebrating John's electoral victory. Her own evidence shows that John's aunts complained about his disregard of social protocol, but they did so to the country gentleman, Sir Ralph, who then exhorted his son to play by London's rules. Moreover, John, the product of urban commercial values, became a staunch Tory Anglican, fully at home in the fields of Middle Claydon. She also works within a model which juxtaposes surface stability to underlying tension and disputes, when it might be more fruitful to investigate the dynamism of conflict and co-operation and how one produced the other. Nevertheless, she successfully lays bare a world riven by struggle and self-interest, yet bounded by the desire for harmony, a world in which sociability was a fundamental element of power and dynasticism was an empowering concept.

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Das Alte Reich, 1648–1806. Band 3. Das Reich und der österreichisch-preußische Dualismus (1745–1806). By Karl Otmar von Aretin. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997. Pp. 657. ISBN 3-608-91398-X. DM 128.

Reichskonstitution und Nation. Verfassungsreformprojekte für das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation im politischen Schriftum von 1648 bis 1806, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Abteilung Universalgeschichte, 173; Beiträge zur Sozial – und Verfassungsgeschichte des Alten Reiches, 13. By Wolfgang Burgdorf. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998. Pp. xi + 578. ISBN 3-8053-2499-5. DM 98.

The historiography of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation – or Reich – has tended to reflect the political environment in which it has been generated. Following the unification of Germany in 1871, there were few who had a good word to say about a structure which had so conspicuously failed to defend Germany and German unity against external, particularly French, aggression. All this was to change after the catastrophe of 1945, and the manifest failure of the united German national state. A new generation of scholars, partly building on the work of earlier marginal figures, now set out to rehabilitate alternative models of political coexistence. The old school of particularist territorial history – which had maintained itself in Bavaria, Württemberg, and elsewhere even at the height of the Prusso-centric paradigm – gained a new lease of

life. The *Rheinbund* of 1806, once excoriated as an association of the running dogs of Napoleonic imperialism, was reborn as the champion of German social, legal, and economic modernization. It now began to look, even in its geographical outlines, which excluded Austria and most of Central and Eastern Germany, more like a forerunner of the modern Federal Republic in Western Germany after 1949. Finally, the image of the old Reich itself underwent a remarkable transformation from a chaotic anachronism into a political commonwealth of the 'good Germans': quaint, inoffensive, and largely static, the very model of peaceful conflict resolution.

The foremost historiographical protagonist of the Reich was – and remains – Karl Otmar von Aretin, whose two volume work *Heiliges römisches Reich, 1776–1806. Reichsverfassung und Staatssouveränität* (1966) was immediately recognized as authoritative. Now, more than thirty years later, Aretin has revisited the subject with *Das Reich und der österreichisch-preußische Dualismus (1745–1806)* an accomplished synthesis which completes his trilogy on the empire between 1648 and 1806 (vols I–II: *Föderalistische Ordnung oder hierarchische Ordnung (1648–1684)*, and *Kaisertradition und österreichische Großmachtspolitik (1684–1745)*. In the meantime, of course, Germany has been reunified, but Aretin's approach is mercifully free of any overtly presentist allusions. Instead of unleashing a fashionable condemnation of the 'new' nationalism of recent historiography, his introduction charmingly tilts at some very old windmills indeed: Gustav Droysen's *Geschichte der preußischen Politik* (1861) and the 'Borussian historiography' of the nineteenth century.

Das Reich breaks some important new ground, for example in the treatment of *Reichsitalien*, those territories south of the Alps, such as Castiglione near Venice, Mons S. Maria near the Papal States, and San Remo near Genua, subject to imperial jurisdiction; here the author shows that 'it was at all times possible for the subjects of Italian estates of the empire to take their masters to the [imperial] courts' (p. 15). But the principal added value of *Das Reich* lies in its integration of the vast amount of literature which has appeared since 1966 – particularly the work of Karl Härter and Heinz Duchhardt – into a new analytical narrative.

Aretin still adheres to what might be called the school of 'imperial realism': his deep sympathy and identification with the Reich does not blind him to its shortcomings, which he describes with ferocious candour. Thirty years on, the great powers, at first Prussia and then Austria, remain the villains of the piece: their continuing struggle for supremacy was at the expense of the broader German commonwealth. Aretin's assessment of the middling states, such as Baden, Saxony, Württemberg, and Bavaria, is scarcely more positive: their attempts to modernize by casting off the shackles of the empire and their enthusiasm for secularization and 'compensation' exacerbated the feeding frenzy preceding the collapse of the Reich in 1806. A rather more benevolent view is taken of the smaller and smallest statelets and the long-suffering, if slow-moving, imperial bureaucracy, as well as some patriotically minded statesmen and writers: the Austrian chancellor Kaunitz, the Prussian minister Hardenberg, and various constitutional experts.

The great strength of *Das Reich* lies in the skill and authority with which the author sets out the myriad regional, dynastic, diplomatic, and confessional cross currents at work in the empire: the struggle between Catholics and Protestants; Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns; the two great powers (Austria and Prussia) and the 'Third Germany' of Württemberg, Bavaria, Baden, Hesse-Cassel, Saxony, and Hanover; the pope of Rome and the German Catholic church (*Reichskirche*); bishops and archbishops; and even, in so far as the jurisdiction of imperial courts was involved, peasants and lords.

This is exemplified by Aretin's nuanced treatment of the *Nuniaturstreit* of the mid-1780s occasioned by the creation of a papal nunciature in Munich – 'effectively an archbishopric for the Wittelsbach lands' (pp. 242, 256) – in collaboration between Rome and the Bavarian elector. This was bitterly opposed by the imperial church as a first step towards a subordinated state church and possibly secularization. As Aretin shows, it was initially rather less obviously opposed by the Protestant princes, who sought to deny their Catholic counterparts the benefits of the internal cohesion which they already enjoyed. Conversely, on this occasion emperor Joseph II shied away from offending the ecclesiastical princes for fear of driving them into the anti-Austrian League of Princes, even though his own policies were very similar to those of Bavaria. As Aretin points out, in a phrase which is repeated in various permutations in various contexts throughout the book, 'Here too it was political [as opposed to ideological] considerations which were decisive' (p. 265).

One of the younger historians influenced by Aretin is Wolfgang Burgdorf. Fittingly, his monumental dissertation on *Reichskonstitution und Nation* has now been published as the 173rd volume in the same series in which Aretin's *Heiliges römisches Reich* first appeared more than thirty years ago. The dimensions of Burgdorf's enterprise reflect not only the sheer weight of relevant material – Marianne Goerdeler gave up on a similar endeavour some sixty years ago – but also his determination to establish the importance of his subject beyond peradventure.

'Reform' of the empire is generously interpreted to include all major – and some minor – debates which took place since 1648. Painstakingly, Burgdorf takes us through the proposed reform of the imperial military constitution in the face of the seventeenth-century French threat, the attempts to agree a permanent *Wahlkapitulation*, and the demands for a reform of the imperial courts, to name only the most important debates. Extending an argument advanced by Andreas Gestrich from a different angle in *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit. Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1994), Burgdorf shows that the politicization of the 'public sphere' (*Öffentlichkeit*) long predates the late eighteenth-century '*Bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*' once postulated by Jürgen Habermas. Moreover, imperial patriotism and reform endeavour did not as one might have expected recede in the final four decades of the empire, but experienced a revival; with the exception of the last imperial arch chancellor, Dalberg, however, none of the protagonists achieved the intellectual heights of the seventeenth-century discussants.

Burgdorf's monograph thus elaborates on and reinforces Aretin's synthesis. Both, Burgdorf even more so than Aretin, see a revival of imperial patriotism in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Both emphasize the long-term legacy of the Reich and its influence well into the second half of the nineteenth century: 'The beginning of the liberal-democratic constitutional tradition in Germany', Burgdorf argues, 'was not the imperial constitution of 1849 ... but the debate on imperial reform in the last three decades of the eighteenth century' (p. 512). Both authors agree that all plans for imperial reform impaled themselves on the fact that their implementation depended on the same overmighty estates against which they were directed. Aretin and Burgdorf differ, however, on the very important issue of the modernizing potential of the empire. Burgdorf, on the strength of a number of thought-provoking progressive tracts, claims to identify an 'essentially modern conception of the constitution' (p. 384), whereas Aretin (pp. 164 et passim) restates his long-held, and ultimately more plausible, view that the empire was incompatible with social, political, and economic modernization.

There can be no doubt that both books are in their different ways major, excellent,

and definitive contributions to the history of the old Reich. If they have a limitation it lies in the realm of perspective. Aretin, particularly, pulls no punches in the description of personal failure or political opportunism. Indeed, his pithy and often humorous judgements are one of the stylistic strengths of the book; and because the author makes no secret of his pro-imperial inclinations they are methodologically legitimate. Nevertheless, a more balanced view especially of Prussian policy would not have been amiss, and at times Aretin is inconsistent even within his own frame of reference. It is not clear, for example, why Berlin is castigated for baling out of the war against Revolutionary France, while the attempts of the middling states to execute the same manoeuvre (p. 418) is characterized as 'patriotic'. Prussia can hardly be blamed for wanting to secure her gains; nor can Württemberg and Bavaria be reproached for exiting before they suffered serious losses; and one can even follow Austria's determination to continue the war until it had extracted the necessary 'compensations'. No less understandable is the despair of the abandoned smaller western states, who soon rued their original demand for intervention against France. None of the protagonists was any more at fault than the other; they merely had differing interests.

The authors might also be chided for their range of historiographical reference. Both works are massively researched, but they make relatively little use of the not inconsiderable relevant literature in English. One is reassured to find T. C. W. Blanning extensively cited by Aretin, but there is no mention of recent studies by Peter Wilson on Württemberg (1995) or such a classic as Paul Schroeder's *Transformation of European politics* (1994). A look at the latter's interpretation of the Second Coalition, for example, might have resulted in a (slightly) less jaundiced view of Austrian policy. In Burgdorf's case, John Gagliardo is cited but not William Sheldon on Justus Möser (1981) or, surprisingly, Mack Walker on Johann Jakob Moser (1981).

Both *Das Reich* and *Reichskonstitution und Nation* are informed by a deeply sceptical view of the *Machtstaat* and the 'balance of power', which as Aretin points out was entirely inimical to the spirit of the empire. It is certainly true that nothing was to prove more damaging to the Reich than the prospect of partition, aggrandizement, and 'compensation' which hung over its final decades. Nor – as Burgdorf points out – was the determination of Germany's neighbours to thwart the creation of a power-centre in their midsts particularly conducive to imperial reform. But it is also true – and this is perhaps less obvious in both accounts – that the Reich was itself subject to the general European balance. It was not so much changes in the internal German balance – which were serious but largely contained before 1792 – that were decisive as the total collapse of the European balance in the face of the French onslaught. Only an imperial reform which harnessed all of Germany's internal energies against the external predator could have staved off disaster. But the cause of failure to effect such a transformation before 1806, of course, lay within Germany itself. In the words of Leibniz many years before, as cited by Burgdorf, the condition of Germany 'is shameful, but the fault lies not in the constitution, but in ourselves [and] in the insouciance with which Germany is governed'. As the putative imperial reformers discovered to their cost, there is no constitutional arrangement on earth which is proof against the intentions of those operating it.

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Decoding history: the Battle of the Atlantic and Ultra. By W. J. R. Gardner. London: Macmillan Press, 2000. Pp. xviii + 263. ISBN 0-333-69303-5. £45.00.

Nearly thirty years' service in the Royal Navy kept Jock Gardner's head clear. In this book, written fresh from a career as a civil servant, he applies naval common sense, and the vocabulary of operational research, to the Anglo-German struggle for control of the Atlantic in the world war of 1939 – 45. He begins by making clear how wide the oceans are, and how hard it always is for a submarine – or a submarine-chaser – to find its target. He goes on to discuss the theory of convoy, and the various methods then available of detecting and destroying both ships in convoy, and their underwater attackers. Not till nearly halfway through this book does he approach signals intelligence in any detail; and his main aim is to show that, important as ultra secret decryption at Bletchley Park was, it was by no means the only weapon available to the Allied navies against Dönitz's U-boats.

He rightly dislikes monocausal explanations of complex events and has no trouble in showing, in good clear English, how complex a business the naval war in the Atlantic was. He seldom ranges outside it, beyond such chance remarks as pointing out that not one of the U-boats that passed Gibraltar eastbound ever returned; but he understands his subject, in all three of its dimensions – the air aspect was often critical. 'Small and taut is not always beautiful' concludes a passage on the comparatively tiny staff with which Dönitz handled the U-boat war. Hitler and Churchill are kept properly in the background.

He dislikes the many books that have come out on this subject that concentrate on dramatic actions on the high seas. While admitting their drama, he maintains that they are unhistorical; because what really went on was so dull, so intricate, and so wearing for the sailors – on both sides — who did it, that it is misrepresented by mere tales of derring-do. Interesting literature, in short, makes for poor history; an awkward bone for the profession to gnaw. He is equally reluctant to admit the supremacy of the intellectual feats performed at Bletchley; he points out that decryption, like many other weapons, was double-edged, and reckons that down to 1943 the Germans got almost as large an advantage from reading British ciphers as the British got from reading German ones.

The short and telling book is designed, in fact, to make its readers think again about how the anti-submarine war fitted into the general pattern of strategy.

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