

progress involved an intolerant rejection of pluralist understandings of politics and society, as can be seen in his promotion of the *Kulturkampf* or in his hostility to the emerging socialist labor movement.

Goschler does tend to reject the charge that Virchow's sponsorship of a racial-anthropological investigation of German schoolchildren in the 1870s fostered anti-Semitic racism. He explores in interesting detail the differences between Virchow's understanding of race and its relation to nationality and those of social Darwinist and fascist thinkers. In this respect, as in many others, the author presents Virchow's opinions on science, philosophy, politics, and society as shaped by events of the mid-nineteenth century and increasingly outdated by the century's end.

Goschler's *Rudolf Virchow* is an intriguing and challenging work. One may wonder about the validity of the critique of natural science that the author employs as a central framework for his investigations, and, at times, his conclusions on the Berlin slaughterhouse controversy, for instance, can seem a little strained. Nonetheless, the book is a testimony to the possibilities of writing an empirically well-documented biography following the problematization of historical subjects, their relationship to their social and political environment, and their linear life-course. Of course, the approach is so successful in this case in part because the author has studied an extraordinary individual and his remarkable life-course.

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*Berlin, Kabul, Moskau: Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer und Deutschlands Geopolitik.* By Hans-Ulrich Seidt. Munich: Universitas. Pp. 510. EUR 24.80. ISBN 3-8004-1438-4.

Oskar Niedermayer had an unusual and varied career in the service of causes, all of which, sooner or later, were lost. Born into an educated middle-class Bavarian family — his knighthood came later — he was commissioned a lieutenant in the artillery in 1905. Soon he also began to study geology, geography, and Islamic languages at the University of Erlangen. The new discipline of geopolitics attracted him, but he retained an independent, critical view of its not infrequent tendency to convert geographic realities into political absolutes. Between 1912 and 1914 he was given leave to travel in Iran. This experience led to his appointment at the beginning of the First World War to an expedition to Afghanistan, sent out to foment insurrection against the British rule in India. Other than concluding a treaty of friendship with Afghanistan, the enterprise achieved little. Niedermayer then served with the Turkish forces until he was

recalled to Germany in May of 1918 to plan a new operation in the Caucasus.

After Germany's defeat, Niedermayer entered the new Reichswehr, for a time as adjutant to General von Seeckt, who sent him to Russia to promote the Reich's secret military cooperation with the Soviets. Between 1924 and 1931, Niedermayer served as second in command and then as head of the "Zentrale Moskau," retired from the army, and turned to an academic career. In 1933 he was appointed *Privatdozent* at the University of Berlin in the new field of *Wehrgeografie* and *Wehrpolitik*. He both welcomed the Third Reich and disagreed with some of its positions. He did not regard Slavs and Afghans as racially inferior, valued individual Jews, but identified the Jewish race as Germany's international enemy. In the fall of 1933, he joined the party. Nevertheless, he continued to speak positively of the Soviet Union, in his view Germany's natural ally against the British Empire — an attitude that attracted the Gestapo's attention, but did not block his advancement to *Ordinarius*.

When the Second World War began, he became assistant head of the German military mission to Iraq. In 1942 he was promoted to major general and appointed commanding officer of a new division made up of Russian prisoners of war, who were members of non-Russian ethnic minorities. The division carried out police actions against partisans in the Ukraine and Slovakia, after which it was sent to Italy where Niedermayer, who had never gone through standard training for senior officers, was found inadequate for his position and was transferred to command Russian and East European volunteer units in France. Late in 1944 he was denounced by a fellow officer for saying that, regardless of communism, Germany and Russia should be allies. He was in prison awaiting trial when the Third Reich collapsed, and he was freed. Instead of making himself inconspicuous, Niedermayer seems to have walked into a Russian headquarters, presumably counting on the important contacts he had made in Moskau in the 1920s. He was rearrested and taken to Moskau, where he died in 1948.

What might have been no more than a picaresque tale has been turned by Hans-Ulrich Seidt into an excellent biography, distinguished by wide-ranging research and a firm understanding of the shifting political and military context. Niedermayer was the sort of man whom historians value less for what he achieved than what his life touched, and the nuances of past conditions and attitudes he conveys to us. His career included a number of unusual episodes, but even these are interesting above all for the social, intellectual, and political features characteristic of their time and place. Until the last years of his life, Niedermayer was a member of a compact majority, but sometimes out of step with it — a contrast that throws much light on his environment. Seidt's biography, an instructive cross section through half a century of German history, does not ask general questions, let alone develop theories of social and political behavior, but it offers the facts and attitudes that such hypotheses must confront

and in the end explain. His book raises any number of issues that go beyond the immediate subject: two, which define much of Neidermayer's life, are attractions in both world wars of strategies to defeat a continental enemy by striking at his southeastern flank, an indirect approach that has always been difficult to implement; and the moral adjustments that a *Bildungsbürger* felt driven to make in the Third Reich.

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*Diktaturen im Vergleich.* By Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann.  
Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. 2002. Pp. viii + 174.  
EUR 16.50. ISBN 3-534-14730-8.

This book, part of the series *Kontroversen um die Geschichte* and accurately described in its title as a comparative study of dictatorships, is essentially a biographical essay on the central themes the author has chosen to discuss. It deals almost exclusively with Europe, with emphasis on the Soviet, German, and Italian experiences. China, Chile, and indeed all non-European dictatorships are mentioned only as asides.

An introductory section describes the rise of "modern" dictatorships (which the author regards as the "*signum*" of the twentieth century), and includes a survey of the techniques of dictatorial rule from ancient times to the present. A second section is a detailed discussion of the methodology of comparative history, its problems and limitations. In this connection he presents his rationale for his choice of themes. These include an "integral comparison" of twentieth-century dictatorships, of communism and Stalinism, Italian fascism, and Nazism. He goes on to compare the leadership qualities of Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini, their political parties and government machinery. There follows a comparison of the social and economic background of these dictatorial regimes, the intellectual life and language of dictatorship, and the role of women in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

Of particular interest is the author's review of literature dealing with the criminal record of the dictatorships under discussion, a comparative analysis of their secret police and networks of informers, their use of terror and repression, and their mass slaughter of people under their rule. On this subject he clearly sides with scholars who reject the equation of Nazi and Communist crimes — Nazi genocide and the Communist mass murder of social/economic classes. However horrendous the crimes of communism were, there never was a Red Holocaust (p. 122). He also sides with critics of the theory, advanced by some scholars, that Italian fascism, unlike Nazism, was never racial nor anti-Semitic.