The hard reality of international struggles and financial exigencies put paid to the project. "Absolutism" in Lower Austria and elsewhere was an alliance between monarch and local elites, and in this particular case not as harmful as the French variant.

The second perspective is indebted to John Elliott's classic article "A Europe of Composite Monarchies" (1992). Doubting the validity of "empire" as a description of the Habsburg conglomerate, Godsey attributes the remarkable resilience of the monarchy to its composite structure and, equally important, to the fact that the Habsburgs recognized the advantage as well as the inevitability of working with, rather than against, that structure. Indeed, as the author points out, in the struggle against centralized Napoleonic France, the composite structure proved a source of vigor.

The third paradigm on which the book rests is that of war as the motor of state formation. Godsey's analysis confirms it up to a point. Continuous warfare did lead to the creation or significant enhancement of administrative, fiscal, and financial practices, bolstering monarchical authority along the way. Between them, these changes amounted to the making of a fiscal-military state. But this development should not be equated with the centralized, unitary state. Wars did not lead to the paradigmatic modern state.

The implications of Godsey's arguments thus extend well beyond the confines of Lower Austria. The book is highly suggestive on a whole range of important aspects of early modern European history. Any early modern historian would benefit from reading this outstanding work.

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Preussen. Eeine besondere Geschichte. Staat, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Kultur 1648–1947. By Hartwin Spenkuch. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019. Pp. 532. Cloth €59.99. ISBN 978-3525352090.

In this book, Hartwin Spenkuch presents us with an extensive and detailed investigation of the history and historiography of Prussia. Over the course of seven chapters, he examines many of the key themes that have preoccupied scholars of this seemingly problematic state since the early twentieth century, considering both the facts of the matter and their interpretation. This is avowedly not a narrative history of Prussia. Indeed, as the introduction makes clear, Spenkuch seeks to provide an academic rejoinder to what he views as a troubling, repeated resurgence of "popular" reassessments of the state's past. Since the so-called *Preußen-Welle* of the early 1980s, he suggests, the public sphere has been regularly flooded with uncritical narratives and myths, often propagated by the media, which aim either to rehabilitate or to condemn Prussia as the main actor in the drama of German history. Instead, he aims to provide the "stringent causal analysis" and "explicit comparison of the virtues and deficits of Prussia" that was called for by Hans-Ulrich Wehler (13).

Under the overarching concept of state building, the individual chapters—of widely varying length—explore Prussia's position between East and West, its regional composition, its economy, society, politics, and culture. The final major chapter before the conclusion, entitled "Prussia and the World," considers the state's global entanglements, its colonial

legacy, and its perception by scholars abroad. Throughout, the traditional, central questions of Prussian and German history are addressed, from the role of the state in the process of industrialization, to the social and political influence of the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie, the influence of Prussian militarism, Protestant-Catholic relations, and attitudes to Jewish and Polish minorities, among others. But the scope of Spenkuch's analysis is broad, and other interesting subsections are devoted to music, theater, and architecture. Throughout, he examines both the major historiographical trends of the twentieth century and the much more recent literature on each subject, providing the reader with a clear overview of the field.

Although the author's perspective takes in the full range of Prussian history, his focus is clearly on the "long" nineteenth century. The chapter on the economy, for instance, begins with the mercantilism of the mid-eighteenth century, when the state under Frederick II moved to center stage, a place it refused to relinquish throughout the following century, as it sought to balance Prussia's industrialized West and agricultural East while intervening to mitigate the social consequences of modernization. The driving force was the authoritarian state, and the analysis ends around 1920. In the realm of politics (chapter 5), the years 1648–1800 are briefly sketched out as a period of absolutism, with enlightened modifications from circa 1750, before subsequent developments are examined in more depth. In particular, Spenkuch rejects the notion that the *Kaiserreich* allowed Germans to practise democracy, as proposed by Margaret L. Anderson. Prussia, he insists, remained a bureaucratically managed state, governed by the monarchical principle, and thus constituted the *Reich*'s "conservative anchor" (214) in the contemporary tide of democratization. Spenkuch suggests that a real transformation took place under the Weimar Republic, when Prussia had the opportunity to represent a bastion of democracy. By this point, however, it had lost its influence within an expanded Germany, and the old forces of Prussiandom, exemplified by Paul von Hindenburg, soon resurfaced.

If many of the book's conclusions thus appear to reaffirm some of the tropes that have long dominated the historiography of Germany, it is not for lack of engagement with the wide range of explanations and approaches that have been proposed over the years, especially since the 1980s. Spenkuch's expansive knowledge of the literature allows him to work methodically through different points of view, presenting a balance-sheet of arguments that—initially—does justice to both sides. Throughout, he rejects overly simplistic continuities in German history, while acknowledging the connections among different periods and developments and highlighting those fields that he believes require more research before assertions can be made. To take one example, on the question of Prussian militarism's influence in both the massacre of the Herero and Nama peoples in German South West Africa and the war of annihilation of 1939–1941 in eastern Europe, Spenkuch argues that "the path from Windhoek to Auschwitz was not predetermined," but emphasizes that its elucidation remains a pressing intellectual concern (158).

On a number of issues, one cannot help but feel that the author abandons his cool-headed examination of the historiography, abruptly asserting his opinion when the specter of—usually Anglo-American—"revisionism" emerges on the horizon. In this respect, Christopher Clark's *Iron Kingdom* (2006) functions as the anti-Spenkuch, a work that he condemns for its purportedly "redemptive" answer to the question of Prussian and German culpability (13). Clark's works are repeatedly cited disapprovingly to highlight the line taken by Spenkuch: Prussia was not "semi-federal" (107), nor was it dominated by a "feeling of vulnerability" (37); the workers' movement must be recognized as "Prussia's largest emancipation movement" (127); the old Prussia destroyed the new Prussia in 1932 (257). The list goes on.

This oscillation between methodical analysis and piercing judgment raises interesting questions as to the practice of history in general, and of German history in particular. At the outset, the author affirms his commitment to both "empirically demonstrable truth" and "retrospective justice" (16). Spenkuch is by no means an advocate of the negative *Sonderweg* thesis that sought to blame Prussia for all the evils that befell Germany during the twentieth century. But in his determined anti-revisionism, he also dogmatically refuses to admit the possibility that the perspectives through which Prussia and Germany were approached in the past may have been too restrictive. The challenge presented by opponents of the *Sonderweg* model was not simply to reassess the question of positive or negative continuity in German history, but to rethink its central categories—where region, state, and nation overlapped, for instance, or where bourgeois society and liberal politics conflicted. Doing so meant decoupling some of the strict causal connections that models such as Wehler's modernization thesis had established among these categories, thereby also blurring the moral implications of the *Sonderweg* itself.

The book's short concluding statement, on "the state as a leading category for the history of Prussia" (444), is illuminating in this regard. Here, Spenkuch emphasizes that his conception of the state is an advisedly inflexible one. The state, for Spenkuch, consists of rulers, institutions, bureaucracies, committees, and the like; and while we ought to acknowledge the agency of individuals, to suggest that state and society were porous and overlapping, he implies, is to devoid those concepts of utility—this latter tendency he traces back to "the critique of the Sonderweg by David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley" (447). This explains, in part, why the book focuses on the years when the literature has traditionally distinguished more clearly between state and society—that is, before the traumatic transition of 1918–1919 that threw those very concepts into disarray. This is also, perhaps, why Spenkuch's judgment falls less harshly upon more recent, particularly global-historical approaches, which do not directly attack the categories intrinsic to the *Sonderweg* model. But the *process* of state building he evokes is rather singular and not further expanded upon.

The result is a curiously historicist model of a Prussian state that lived and died with its monarchs and bureaucracy, rising to prominence under Frederick the Great, alternating between reform and repression during the nineteenth century, until, unable to manage the pressures of modernity and having thus outlived its purpose, it dissolved into the centralized Weimar Republic. At the same time, the parallels drawn by the author between nineteenth-century Prussia and the Soviet Union or modern-day China indicate that his conception of the state is to be understood as abstract and transferrable. These two visions are difficult to reconcile, and this peculiarity is reminiscent of the tension between universalism and particularism that, as Georg Iggers once highlighted, was central to the "German Conception of History" (Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* [Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968]).

As an up-to-date, wide-ranging, and analytical introduction to the discussions and debates surrounding Prussian history, this book will be of great benefit to all those embarking on research in this field. As a historiographical intervention, its composition invites a deeper reflection on the nature, purpose, and future of Prussian and German history.

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