

to the detailed scrutiny of particular problems and judgments. But whatever we do, we shall be forever in his debt, for he has reopened the Hohenzollern question, not closed it down.

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*Vergangenheit als Geschichte: Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert.* By Rudolf Vierhaus. Edited by Hans Erich Bödeker, Benigna von Krusenstjern and Michael Matthiesen. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 2003. Pp. 528. €56.00. ISBN 3-525-35179-8.

The volume under review is a selection of shorter writings of the well-known historian Rudolf Vierhaus, who served from 1971 until his retirement as director of the prestigious Max-Planck Institute for History in Göttingen. There is also a fascinating interview with Vierhaus held at the institute in April 1999, in which he answers very frankly and with great integrity the searching questions put to him. Born in 1922 into a basically *deutschnational* Protestant Ruhr mining background he describes as *kleinbürgerlich*, he belonged to the *Deutsche Jungvolk*, but not the Hitler Youth, and served in the Luftwaffe from 1941. In the fall of 1944, he was severely wounded at the Western front, was hospitalized for a longer period, and for eighteen months was an American prisoner of war. After beginning his studies in Munich in 1947, he had to spend two years in hospital owing to a lung disease resulting from the war. The list of his writings takes up eighteen pages. This would be an enormous achievement even for somebody who survived the war in good health. That Vierhaus should have been able to overcome his injuries to emerge as one of the most productive historians of his generation is astounding. He expresses his gratitude to his wife for having helped him to come to terms with his war and postwar traumas.

A major theme developed in the book is historiography, one of Vierhaus's specialties. Very widely read, he has thought deeply about the problems of historical writing, and what he has to say on it is of great interest to all historians. He emphasizes both the constantly changing relationship between the historian and the past as time moves on, and the importance the past — and its interpretation — has for the present. To Vierhaus, “history is the scholarly interpretation, undertaken from the present, of human actions handed down in their temporal and social structures, and in the context of a continuity which makes their knowledge relevant for the present” (p. 29). He emphasizes perhaps more than is usual how much even historical “facts” need to be interpreted (clearly by the standards of the period) and how much the historian is influenced by the

environment of the age in which he lives. Historical writing cannot confine itself to political aspects or to a chronology of events.

The other main topic of the book, besides historiography, is the course of German history, two closely linked subjects. In his examination of German developments between 1848 and 1933, he is perhaps too hard on the liberals for not sufficiently using their opportunities. While recognizing the positive aspects of the Weimar constitution drafted by left-liberal, bourgeois-democratic jurists, he wonders whether this kind of constitutional structure was not already out of date owing to the development of an industrial and egalitarian mass society (p. 143). Of particular interest is a brilliantly written piece about the effects of the world economic crisis around 1930 on the German people and on their consequent vulnerability to the Nazis (pp. 201–23). German scholars and statesmen who are examined in some detail include Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher, the brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, Leopold von Ranke, Otto Hintze, and Adolf von Harnack, as well as the less well-known Karl Hillebrand, a distinguished nineteenth-century essayist.

In the interview, Vierhaus describes how the German military collapse and his imprisonment were for him “a time of deep depression [*Niedergeschlagenheit*], of an open future and full of self-doubt and of doubt about the Germans.” He added that he could no longer speak the sentimental language (*pathetische Sprache*) “of nation, fatherland [and] heroism, that he could no longer live in communities [*Gemeinschaften*], that he could not and did not want to sing in a choir” (p. 500). He replied with great dignity to questions concerning the part played by German historians during the Nazi period. Vierhaus believes one of the reasons for the frequent lack of resistance of historians to the Nazis was that they had previously evaded a critical and self-critical confrontation with the social and cultural changes in the industrial age (p. 504). As to leading German historians in the postwar period who had hidden their “Nazi past,” some of whom had been his teachers, he feels it would have been better if they had spoken up as witnesses for the specific dangers to scholarship arising from a political and ideological involvement. He believes it would not have harmed them if they had done it out of moral responsibility and with considerable dignity (p. 508), which may have been true in a particular case, but in others would have risked exclusion from university teaching, at least for a time. He also rightly stresses that human beings should be allowed to compensate for their earlier shortcomings (p. 507). In a detailed study of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for the promotion of the sciences, the predecessor of the Max Planck institutes, Vierhaus is in general critical of its conduct during the Nazi period; however, he relates the intervention of the president, the physicist and Nobel Prize winner Max Planck, with Hitler on behalf of his Jewish colleague Fritz Haber in May 1933. Planck drew Hitler’s attention to his view that without Haber’s process for producing ammonia from the nitrogen of the air, the First World

War would have been lost for Germany from the beginning. The audience had to be terminated when Hitler went into a rage (p. 460). Vierhaus reaches the conclusion that it was unrealistic to expect greater political insight, higher political-moral sensitivity, and more *Zivilcourage* from scholars and scientists than from the average educated citizen. One of the worst consequences of the regime was the destruction, corruption, and discrediting of elites (p. 477).

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*Imperialism at Sea: Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power and the Tirpitz Plan, 1875–1914.* By Rolf Hobson.  
Boston: Brill Academic Publishers. 2002. Pp. x + 358. \$90.00. ISBN 0–391–04105–3.

Hobson analyzes the rise of Imperial German naval power within the context of the changes in international relations, industrial development, and naval strategy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This thoroughly researched, well-organized volume adds much to the existing literature on Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and Germany's quest for sea power.

In the first part of his work Hobson addresses the broader international context of the rise of German naval power, emphasizing the significance of the “war in sight” crisis of 1875, during which Britain and Russia warned Germany that, in the interest of the European balance of power, they could not countenance another German victory over France. During the last quarter of the century, Britain's maritime domination on the world stage elicited much the same reaction as Germany's military position in continental Europe, with other leading states seeking in each case to place limits on the hegemonic power. Hobson observes, however, that both France and Russia were willing to accept a further expansion of British maritime might to help counter any German attempt to expand beyond its 1871 frontiers.

Hobson's section on “Naval Strategy in an Industrializing World,” encompassing four chapters, accounts for roughly half of his work. His systematic treatment begins with an analysis of Britain's “Blue Water” school and France's *Jeune école*, continuing with the “Prussian School of Naval Thought” and the place of the navy in German grand strategy after 1871. He then turns to the works of the influential American naval officer and writer, Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose views on the role of sea power in history became so influential in the late nineteenth century. Hobson weaves these threads together in his chapter on the years 1891–1895, arguably the most original and important part of the book, treating the reception of Mahan's ideas in Germany and the genesis of Tirpitz's strategic and operational doctrines. Reading the military and naval history of