II. Accounts of the Conferences Sponsored and Co-Sponsored by the German Historical Institute.

A. "Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s through the 1950s". Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, March 16–18, 1990. Conveners: James Van Horn Melton and Hartmut Lehmann.

The academic proceedings of this conference began with Winfried Schulze's (Bochum) paper on "German Historiography from the Thirties to the Fifties." Schulze described in some detail a now famous meeting held under Werner Conze's auspices in Bad Ems in 1957. This meeting heralded the beginning of Sozial- or Strukturgeschichte in postwar Germany. Raising a central theme of the conference, Schulze questioned the origins of this development. He emphasized that from the 1920s on there had been a boom in völkische interpretations of German history, a trend opposed to dominant interpretations based on the primacy of the Nationalstaat. These völkische interpretations of German history stemmed largely from a renewed interest in Ostforschung during the Weimar period and were an attempt to study and preserve German culture and influence outside of the boundaries of the German nation-state. During the Nazi period, of course, völkische interpretations were the norm in the German historical profession. After 1945 there was little break in personnel among German historians, and as a result, völkische interpretations continued; a major aspect of the post-1945 period was, however, an attempt to de-nazify the concept of Volkstum. Schulze pointed to Freyer, Ipsen, and Brunner as the major conduits of völkische interpretations from the Weimar period to the post-1945 generation of historians led by Werner Conze. Thus the Sozial- or Strukturgeschichte proclaimed by Conze and the other historians gathered in Bad Ems in 1957 marked a continuity with prewar interpretations of German history.

In his comment, Georg Iggers (SUNY Buffalo) agreed with Schulze's views on two points: the continuity of conservative attitudes in the German historical profession, and that Conze's Sozial- or Strukturgeschichte did not represent a break with the past, but rather had its roots in the völkische ideas current in the Weimar and Nazi periods. Iggers then, however, argued that Schulze had told only part of the story. The emergence of social history in the 1950s cannot be explained without reference to the role of émigré intellectuals who returned to Germany after 1945. While relatively few refugee historians came back to Germany, émigrés in other fields—including Max Horkheimer, Otto Flechtheim, and Richard Löwenthal—did, and brought with them older German
traditions of critical analysis which had survived National Socialism in exile. While Schulze ended with events in the late 1950s, the beginning of the 1960s saw many developments in the field of social history. The Fischer Controversy, the republication of Eckart Kehr's works by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, a new interest in Weber, and the rediscovery of other streams of thought banished from Germany after 1933 all influenced a new generation of historians in the direction of social history; at the same time, these developments were ignored by Conze and Theodor Schieder. Thus while some of the impulses for social history came from Freyer and Ipsen via Conze, many others came from other traditions.

In the discussion, Schulze argued that Iggers's interpretation of the origins of the social history of the late 1950s and early 1960s has become the dominant historical interpretation. He wished to show that there were nonetheless impulses from the German historical profession of the 1920s and 1930s which were significant for the social history of the 1950s and 1960s. At this point, other conference participants joined the discussion, raising the issue of whether 1945 represented a break with German traditions of historiography (Lothar Gall, Frankfurt); arguing that between the 1930s and the 1950s there was a fundamental continuity of structural antimodernity in the German historical profession (Jörn Rüsen, Bochum); and asking why there was a period of silence between 1945 and 1959 (Charles Maier, Harvard).

In the next session Klaus Schwabe (Aachen), Lothar Gall, and Fritz Fellner (Salzburg) spoke on Gerhard Ritter, Franz Schnabel, and Heinrich Ritter von Srbik. Schwabe argued that Ritter did not change his approach to history after 1945, since he felt that he had already done so in the wake of Hitler's ascent to power. At that time Ritter had attempted to defend the autonomy of professional historians from Nazi intervention; he also became increasingly interested in the nature of value judgments in history. Between 1933 and 1945 Ritter wrote several historical studies which, Schwabe argued, could be read as anti-Nazi publications.

In his comment, Thomas Brady (Oregon) disagreed with Schwabe, arguing that Ritter's approach to history remained essentially unchanged from the 1920s through the 1950s; the new approaches which Schwabe saw in Ritter's work after 1933 were, at best, nuances.

In his paper on Franz Schnabel, Lothar Gall questioned the grouping of Schnabel with Ritter and Srbik in the conference program. Gall argued that Schnabel was a pillar of German revisionism: opposed to a purely political history, Schnabel argued for a broadly-based European structural history which would address the overarching themes of any given time period. Although Schnabel always remained something of an outsider in the German historical profession, he was influential because he offered a new methodological position: a, structurally analytical Weltanschauung from an idealistic perspective.
Hartmut Lehmann (German Historical Institute) agreed with Gall that Schnabel was one of the finest historians of the period under discussion. Schnabel, however, was not really an outsider after 1945, particularly since he had not compromised himself during the Nazi period. Lehmann then outlined some of Schnabel's positions prior to 1933. During the interwar period Schnabel publicized unpleasant truths about the First World War by giving an unvarnished account of the domestic war front, and by making no attempt to cover up the military defeat of 1918: By continuing to treat German history honestly, Schnabel maintained a degree of continuity in his historical work from the 1920s to the 1950s quite unique among his colleagues.

Participants then discussed why Schnabel did not take on more of a leadership role within the German historical profession after 1945. Schnabel's Catholicism (Schulze), his wariness of self-proclaimed leaders (Gall); and his reluctance to play the role of a Mächtmensch (Fellner) were all reasons for why Schnabel did not occupy a dominant position in the postwar historical profession. The discussion ended with Gall remarking that Schnabel was limited in his potential influence after 1945 because he had become a more conservative historian.

Fritz Fellner then spoke on Heinrich Ritter von Srbik. He argued that Austrian historians found themselves in a situation very different from that of their German colleagues after 1945. The Austrian historians were thrown out of German historical traditions and, in fact, out of the German historical profession. Because Srbik had always attempted to integrate Austrian history into German history, there was no place for Srbik in Austria after 1945. In his comments on Fellner's paper, John Boyer (Chicago) raised a number of questions concerning Srbik. What did it mean for Srbik to be a German nationalist? What role did Catholicism and Christianity play in Srbik's life and work? Was Srbik a collaborator in the Third Reich?

In the ensuing discussion, James Melton (Emory) underscored the point that Srbik's books are unduly criticized because of their sharp anti-semitic tone and Srbik's relationship to the Third Reich. Srbik's works cannot simply be written off because of his pronounced anti-semitism, yet at the same time one cannot ignore the issue. A heated discussion ensued about whether there was a contradiction between Srbik's and Ritter's words and deeds vis-a-vis anti-semitism (Schwabe and Fellner arguing with Iggers). Because there are known cases in which these historians protected individual Jews, can Srbik and Ritter be somewhat excused for the compromises they made with the Third Reich?

Douglas Unfug (Emory) chaired the session on Hermann Aubin, Hans Freyer, and Otto Brunner. Marc Raeff (Columbia) described Aubin's program of geschichtliche Landeskulturforschung as a sort of Heimatkunde.
Aubin's main methodological tools included historical cartography and the investigation of languages. Aubin was interested in a total history, in the Gesinnung of a given area. In his longue durée approach, Aubin incorporated elements of structuralism similar to the Annales School, but because of Germany's history, Aubin stressed localism in his analyses. Aubin focused on the racial, ethnic, and cultural aspects of a given community, since these were the unifying factors of Germanentum. Nazi vocabulary seduced Aubin because it articulated his understanding of history.

Jerry Muller (Catholic University) spoke on Hans Freyer. He questioned whether there is a link between Sozial- and Strukturgeschichte and liberal/democratic traditions or political views. Muller described Freyer as a conduit of structural analysis from nineteenth-century historical traditions to the Sozialgeschichte of the 1930s to 1950s. In the postwar period Freyer was influential because he relayed the importance of sociology and social and economic structures for historical analysis. His pessimistic analysis of modernity was also influential after 1945.

In his talk on Otto Brunner, Melton emphasized that while social history is usually viewed as having leftist origins, other origins should also be examined. He then outlined why Brunner was important as a forerunner of Conze's Sozial- or Strukturgeschichte. Brunner had broken decisively with nineteenth-century historical traditions, particularly with the obsession with the nation-state. Brunner's ideas concerning "disjunctive" history, his interest in the peculiarities of Austrian historical development, and the boom in Volksgeschichte in the 1920s and 1930s led him to question the primacy of the state in historical analysis.

In his comment, Roger Chickering (Oregon) argued that the "missing man" or "uninvited guest" at this conference was Karl Lamprecht. Lamprecht's interest in "total history," "in a history which included demographic, social, economic, intellectual, and other histories; his intellectual debt to Roscher and Burkhardt; and his challenge to the primacy of the state in historical analysis all found resonance in the Bad Ems Group.

Steven Rowan (University of Missouri, St. Louis) commented on Melton's talk, remarking that Brunner has long been a "guilty pleasure" for many contemporary historians. Brunner's work resembled that of the Annales school, although in large part it is the non-progressive or anti-progressive elements of the Annales school found in Brunner's works. Finally, Rowan commented on the coherence of Brunner's vocabulary; cultural pessimism and nostalgia permeate his writings.

In the discussion, Iggers reminded the conference participants that three kinds of social history were being discussed simultaneously: first, the social history of the Annales school, of Lamprecht, and of the völkische
social history; second, the social history of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Charles Tilly, an
analytical tradition which has its roots in Marx, Weber, and positivism; and third, the
new cultural history influenced by post-modernist anthropology. While the conference
participants had been right in suggesting that social history in general had some roots in
the first of these kinds of social history, Iggers questioned whether the speakers had not
attributed a greater role to this social history than it merited. In a rejoinder, Melton
argued that it was necessary to look at those roots of social history which have been
ignored. Work has been done on Eckart Kehr's influence; should this not be
complemented by an examination of the more conservative origins of social history?
Raeff summed up this part of the discussion by saying that a feature of the whole
tradition of social history is that it can be used by historians of different schools in many
different ways.

Charles Maier opened the session of the conference on Werner Conze and Theodor
Schieder, commenting that the conference had been, to date, a filio-pietistic exercise.
Irmline Veit-Brause (Deakin University) then spoke on Conze, arguing that continuity
in the German historical profession was essential for Conze's identity with his profession.
Given the interruptions in Conze's life and career, who are we to question his search for
continuity?

Jörn Rüsen argued that the historicism so prevalent in Schieder's work was the only
way he could approach what he perceived as the catastrophe of 1945. In essence,
Schieder needed the continuity which historicism represented to explain the
discontinuities of recent German history. Furthermore, Conze and Schieder never
abandoned their earlier approaches to history; social history supplemented their historical
methodologies. Rüsen ended his remarks with the comment that Schieder's neo-
historicism will find renewed interest in the future German historical profession.

In his comments on Veit-Brause's paper, Peter Reill (University of California, Los
Angeles) returned to the issue of continuity and discontinuity. There could be no break
after 1945, because admitting such a break would have destroyed the profession. The
Volksgeschichte of the 1920s and 1930s became the Sozialgeschichte of the 1950s;
basically, there was just a name change. Thus, he wondered, was the earlier
Volksgeschichte already the new social history? Reill then argued that Conze's
Sozialgeschichte was rooted in the historicist tradition and that the "new"
Sozialgeschichte did not include an epistemological critique of the "old" historicism.

Maier commented on Rüsen's paper on Schieder. He argued that the conference
participants were dealing with historical fathers rather respectfully; one could, however,
commit patricide. The historical fathers
in question were deeply conservative. To these historians, 1933 was not the tragedy, but rather 1945. It is important to get some distance from these historians. Maier then questioned whether Rüsen's view of Schieder's historicism as a strategy for survival after 1945 was really operational.

The final session of the conference was devoted to witnesses' accounts of the German historical profession after 1945. Felix Gilbert (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton) gave a talk on "German Historical Scholarship after 1945," in which he recounted his impressions of the German historical profession in 1945, when he traveled around Germany as an American soldier. After Gilbert's remarks, Anneliese Thimme (Alberta), Hans-Günther Zmarzlik (Freiburg), and Fritz Fellner, on a panel titled "The Younger Generation after 1945," offered personal remembrances of their student days. In each of these historians' remarks, the leitmotiv was their disillusionment with how the standard bearers of the Historikerzunft treated German history after 1945.

In a short discussion in which some of the main themes of the conference were reiterated, Muller argued that the rise of Conze's and Schieder's Sozialgeschichte meant the exclusion of many kinds of questions because they could not be addressed in the framework of Sozialgeschichte: the role of the Bildungsbürgertum, the rise of National Socialism, and the Holocaust were topics simply not addressed by Conze and Schieder. Hartmut Lehmann and James Melton then closed the conference proceedings.

Catherine Epstein.


If anyone believed that social history is on its way out and about to be replaced by a new emphasis on the narrative and the history of politics, he or she should have been in Toronto in late April. No, social history is alive and kicking, especially in North America and Great Britain. The British German History Society, which has long promoted the social historical approach to Germany's past, held one of its regional conferences in Ontario's thriving capital. James Retallack of the University of Toronto