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Rezensionen

Bernhard VOM BROCKE, Kurt Breysig. *Geschichtswissenschaft zwischen Historismus und Soziologie*. Lübeck und Hamburg (Matthiesen Verlag) 1971. 351 S. 8°. (Historische Studien, 417).

The present book is to be welcomed for two reasons. It represents a valuable analysis of Breysig's thought and work in a biographical context, the first such extensive analysis in over thirty years. In contrast to Ernst Hering's earlier monograph,¹ Dr. Vom Brocke's book studies Breysig within the framework of the scholarly profession and the intellectual climate in the early twentieth century and succeeds in making a significant contribution to the study of the origins of social history at the German universities.

Kurt Breysig is interesting because he more than any other university historian in Germany before the First World War, with the possible exception of Karl Lamprecht, called for a radical revision of methodological and historiographical assumptions and unlike Lamprecht, who died in 1915, continued to write and to teach until after the end of the Weimar Republic. Breysig himself was still trained in the tradition of the »Prussian School« whose conception of historiography he later challenged. He was deeply influenced by Heinrich von Treitschke, with whom he studied in Berlin in the 1880's and with whom he maintained close personal and scholarly ties until the latter's death in 1896, and even more deeply by Gustav Schmoller under whose direction he wrote his dissertation. Schmoller, to be sure, in his concern to proceed from economic history to economic theory and his interest in economic, administrative, and constitutional structures deviated from the more narrowly conceived ideographic political historiography which dominated the historical profession. Nevertheless Schmoller's work was largely state, and particularly

¹ Ernst HERING. *Das Werden als Geschichte. Kurt Breysig in seinem Werk*. Berlin, 1939. A recent dissertation by Kurt FISCHER, »Der historische Positivismus Kurt Breysigs (1866–1940)«, submitted to the University of Rostock in 1969 has apparently not yet been published.

Prussia, oriented as was Breysig's own work in the early years of his career.

Vom Brocke distinguishes three stages in Breysig's work. In the first, which vom Brocke calls the »Prussian« (»borussische«) period, from Breysig's doctorate in 1889 until the late 1890's, Breysig in close co-operation with Schmoller worked almost exclusively on East Prussian and Brandenburg constitutional, administrative and financial history in the seventeenth century. Very early, however, Breysig began to move from political to social and from Prussian to comparative European and world history. In 1894 he began to lecture on the history of the German family. In March 1896, shortly after his appointment as »Aussenordentlicher Professor« in Berlin, Breysig outlined the program which was to guide his future work. He emphatically did not want to »sit away fifteen or twenty years of my life – as Treitschke is doing – not even for the sake of a great comprehensive work.« His aim was to write a »history of mankind« which would go beyond the »mad chaos (*tollen Wirrwarr*) of political history« to a recognition of the »great phases of development« »without neglecting the great individuals – for example, – Napoleon – entirely.« Such a history would transcend a European scope and include Chinese, Indians, and Ancient Mexicans but significantly would have »little to say about the barbarians and nothing about the Blacks.« (p. 42)

Breysig then actually put this program into practice. Vom Brocke distinguishes a second »positivistic« period of Breysig's work from about 1896 until 1908/09, in which Breysig remains a historian, although one who under the influence of Lamprecht and Wilhelm Dilthey sought to reconstruct not merely social but also psychological and intellectual processes, and a third period after the First World War in which the philosopher and the sociologist increasingly replaced the historian. Already in »Der Stufenbau und die Gesetze der Weltgeschichte«, first published in 1905, Breysig sought to establish the parallelity of all national histories, the transition of all nations (*Völker*) from a primeval age (*Urzeit*) to the »old age of Modernity« (*Greisenalter der Neuesten Zeit*).² The parallelity of development made it possible to speak of the contemporaneity of certain periods – such as the Middle Ages – in cultures appearing at chronologically different points such as Greece, Rome, and Germano-Romanic Europe, much as Spengler and Toynbee did later. Beginning with the »Stufenbau«, Breysig increasingly turned to grand scale explanations of universal history, explanations which were rooted in a peculiar mixture of ideas gathered from Lewis Henry Morgan, Darwin, the German Roman-

² Cf. *Der Stufenbau und die Gesetze der Weltgeschichte*. 2nd rev. ed. Stuttgart und Berlin 1927. P. 9.

tics, and Goethe. Vom Brocke rightly stresses the antinomies in Breysig's thought. On the one hand he posited the inseparability of nature, life, and thought and »transformed history into a grandiose morphology of the spirit« (P. 271); on the other hand, he remained enough of a historian to construct no »system« of world history in the manner of Spengler or Toynbee – or of the old Friedrich Engels who had also read and been deeply influenced by Lewis Henry Morgan. He wanted to harmonize the role of law and of human individuality in history, in his words to »personalize and deify the idea of development.« (p. 245) Breysig sought the solution to this dilemma in the concept of a mysterious primal force (*Urkraft*) which expresses itself in the creative actions of every great personality.

In his demand for broad comparative inter-cultural studies, Breysig was relatively unique among German historians in his time. The attacks within the profession against Lamprecht were also to an extent directed against him. Breysig's attempts to establish a »Seminar for Comparative Historical Research« was decisively defeated by the Berlin faculty in 1909. Breysig became a full professor only in 1923 and then only when he was appointed by the Prussian government to a new chair after his colleagues had voted against his promotion. But while I agree that Breysig had indeed offered German historical scholarship a new perspective, I wonder nevertheless whether Breysig's contribution to the emergence of social history in Germany was quite as crucial or original as Dr. vom Brocke suggests. It is regrettable that Dr. vom Brocke, who has so carefully analyzed Breysig's place within the framework of the German historical profession, has almost completely neglected Breysig's relation to politics.^{2a} And this is regrettable not only because Breysig's career and work might have thrown light on the role of German historical scholarship within the broader framework of German society and politics but also because Breysig's political notions and valuations were much more significant for his concept of social history than Dr. vom Brocke realizes. It is surprising how a man as »positivistically« oriented as Breysig could have been so deeply committed to Treitschke, Nietzsche and Stefan George. Vom Brocke briefly speaks of the impact of Treitschke's anti-Semitism on Breysig (pp. 134–135). He stresses that Breysig was a person who seldom left his study, remained inactive in university or professional affairs, and was uninvolved in politics. This is true. Nevertheless in reading Breysig, it becomes clear that he had deeply held political views. We need only think of his »Von Gegenwart und von Zukunft des deutschen Menschen« (Berlin, 1912) with its condemnation of liberalism as a political outlook

^{2a} Dr. vom BROCKE intends to write a separate essay on BREYSIG's politics.

which seeks to make »the strong into servants (*Knechte*)«³, his ridicule of parliamentarism and democracy, his call for strong personalities and true leaders (*Führer*), and his demand for living space for the growing number of Germans (*Ein edler Zuwachs, den die Menschheit erfährt: manch unedles Blut auf Erden wäre besser durch dieses ersetzt.*)⁴ The aggressive nationalistic tone of the book was toned down in his writings during the Weimar Republic—indeed, Breysig, like few of his colleagues, after the war stressed the errors of German foreign policy before 1914 and urged his countrymen to recognize the moderation reflected in the Treaty of Versailles. Nevertheless his emphasis on the role of strong leaders remains, as does his disdain for the material concern of the masses. Germany's cultural superiority in the world rests on the »eternal German« attachment to the »unconscious creative« and her stress on the irrational (*Verstandeswidrige*).⁵

It is not surprising therefore that Breysig, as Vom Brocke rightly emphasizes, recognized only »the great personalities« as the driving forces of all historical creativity. *Die Kraft, die im Einzelnen wohnt und von ihm ausgeht, ist der einzige Quell geschichtlichen Lebens. Die Masse kann nicht Träger der Kraft sein*, vom Brocke quotes Breysig (p. 242). But such a valuation carries an élitist bias into historical writing which seriously threatens Breysig's concept of social history.

It is not without interest that Breysig dedicated the second volume of his »Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit« to Jacob Burckhardt. Breysig's great historical syntheses, despite their comprehensive scope, were far being »histoire totale.« Breysig's main stress in the history of early man was on anthropological development, viewed essentially as a natural process in which men played little of a determining role. It is striking how Breysig's interest in economics and social structure steadily recedes as he approaches modern societies. The broad concern with the social and material life of the masses in early times is replaced by a concentration on politics and »Geistesgeschichte«—religion, arts, sciences—in the nineteenth century.

Vom Brocke has at length analyzed Breysig's philosophical concepts, his thoughts on individuality and development, on law, voluntarism and chaos in history, but he has devoted surprisingly little space to an analysis of Breysig's methodological procedures and to a content analysis of Breysig's historical works. Yet if Breysig is so neglected today, it is in part because he lacked the methodological and conceptual rigor which Otto Hintze and above all Max Weber introduced into historical studies and

³ P. 125.

⁴ P. 224.

⁵ *Vom deutschen Geist und seiner Wesensart*. Stuttgart und Berlin 1932, pp. 241–247 and *passim*.

the social sciences. Breysig rejected the attitude of the majority of his German academic colleagues in the Lamprecht controversy who held that history as the sphere of human intentionality and will defies rational analysis or scientific method. But, as Vom Brocke observes, Breysig never succeeded in overcoming the gap which he suspected between the systematic approach of the sciences and the need to recognize the intentionality of individual human actions. The *Urkraft* emerged as the »deus ex machina« in this dilemma. Breysig's picture of historical development thus remains speculative and impressionistic. In contrast Max Weber and Otto Hintze recognized that history no less than other sciences requires hypotheses and models of explanations which, while they take into account the role of intentionality in social behavior, are subject to empirico-rational validation.

I can therefore not agree with Dr. Vom Brocke that Breysig's *Entwicklungsgeschichte* already represents a form of modern »Strukturgeschichte« (p. 269) or even a preliminary stage to such history (p. 53). We must, of course, understand what we mean by the term. Vom Brocke may be right if he identifies the term primarily with the work of Otto Brunner and the intent of Werner Conze. But it is not Brunner or Conze but Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel and the historians of the »Sixième Section« who have provided international historical scholarship with modern concepts of structural history. In important ways, in his attempt to overcome Europo-centrism, in a much broader conception of what constitutes the subject matter of history, in his interest in comparison, and his willingness to ask theoretical questions regarding the nature and direction of historical change, Breysig, although his work predated that of Brunner and Conze, had come closer to contemporary conceptions of social history than have Brunner and Conze whose work concentrates on institutions in a relatively restricted geographic area. But Breysig had made these steps at the expense of methodological precision. Breysig not only consciously refused to do archival research himself and based his syntheses on existing works but he also fairly uncritically accepted certain anthropological and socio-psychological notions of the late nineteenth century and applied them to history. The result was a grandiose work of synthesis, both less dogmatic and less brilliant than those of Spengler or of Toynbee, but like theirs essentially speculative in nature and date. Breysig therefore had relatively little of a contribution to make to the integration of the theories and methods of modern social sciences into historical inquiry.

It was a common misconception held by many German historians since Ranke – but not fully shared by Breysig – that theory necessarily meant system and that philosophy and history were therefore antithetical. Vom Brocke shares this view when he writes: »Philosophie strebt zum System.

Hauptkriterium für die Denkarbeit des Historikers wird dagegen immer die Anschauung des geschichtlichen Lebens selbst sein.« (p. 172). But philosophy, as we have seen, has often been anti-systematic; we need only think of thinkers as diverse as Pascal, Hume, and Nietzsche. And history is by no means devoid of theory or philosophy. Breysig recognized this, even if he did not succeed in merging theory and empirical practice. The insistence of Dilthey, Windelband, or Meinecke that the natural sciences explain but do not understand and that history understands but does not explain is no longer accepted by many practising social historians. All historical understanding involves explanation and therefore theory. But the role of theory in historical inquiry as conceived by social historians of quite diverse orientations – whether influenced by Weber, the »Annales« or a sophisticated Marxism – is a more modest one than that proposed by Breysig. It aims not at broad laws (*Gesetze*) or at lawfulness (*Gesetzmäßigkeiten*) in Breysig's sense but rather at models of explanations derived from concrete historical subject matter, which seek to understand, and hence analyze, processes of change and continuity.

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Percy Ernst SCHRAMM, Kaiser, Könige und Päpste. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, Band II, Stuttgart (Hiersemann) 1968. – 352 S. mit 12 Tafeln.

Wer meinte, der 75jährige Hanseat und Göttinger Professor hätte nun auch wie viele andere seine gelehrten Aufsätze noch einmal abdrucken lassen, hat sich geirrt: »Kaiser, Könige und Päpste«, Schramms neuestes, auf mindestens sechs Bände geplantes Werk ist mehr und will mehr sein als nur Sammlung von verstreut Gedrucktem. Alle Aufsätze sind überarbeitet, ergänzt, in den Zusammenhang des Gesamtwerkes gebracht und nicht selten durch Auszüge aus den selbständig erschienen Veröffentlichungen des Verfassers miteinander verbunden. Etliche Beiträge sind neu hinzugekommen. Neu sind außerdem die Einleitungen zu mehreren ihrer thematischen Zugehörigkeit entsprechend aufgeteilten Aufsätzen. Den bibliographischen Nachträgen ist besondere Sorgfalt gewidmet.

Von den bisher erschienenen Bänden, die im wesentlichen chronologisch gegliedert sind, führt Band I von der Spätantike bis zum Tode Karls des Großen, II. vom Tode Karls des Großen bis zum Anfang des 10. Jahrhunderts und III. vom 10. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert. Da der letztgenannte Band sich ausschließlich dem deutschen Kaisertum von Otto I. bis Heinrich V. widmet – mit Ausblicken nach Byzanz –, sei auf ihn hier nur ver-