

Die Darstellung von Canis ist sachlich gehalten, allerdings glanzlos. Bisweilen werden Zusammenhänge oder Personen – an denen kein Mangel herrscht – nicht mit der nötigen Klarheit eingeführt. Auch die Zahl der Errata könnte etwas kleiner sein. Eine Karte von China wäre der Anschaulichkeit förderlich gewesen. Die Kreta-Krisen hätten vielleicht etwas mehr Detailfreudigkeit gebrauchen können. Die Distanzierung von Klaus Hildebrands Buch »Das vergangene Reich« wirkt etwas bemüht, zumal dessen einen viel weiteren Bogen spannende tour d'horizon das von Canis analysierte Lustrum nicht mit dessen Ausführlichkeit zu würdigen vermag. Diese Feststellungen treffen heißt nicht, die Leistung des Vf.s schmälern zu wollen, der die Motive und Zwänge einer die Geschicke unseres Landes ins Negative wendenden Phase helllichtig präsentiert. Die Tragweite innenpolitischer Erwägungen besonders in der »Sammlungspolitik« des ausklingenden Säkulum betonend, verkennt Canis doch nie die hohe Autonomie außenpolitischer Entscheidungsfindung und rückt von Modellen ab, die schicksalträchtiges Handeln im internationalen Raum zu einer Funktion inneren Machterhalts degradieren wollen. Kurzum, eine lohnende Lektüre mit großem Informationswert und von hohem Format.

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Ralf FORSBACH, Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter (1852–1912). Ein Diplomatenleben im Kaiserreich. 2 Teilbände, Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 1997, 835 S. (Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 59).

Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter (1852–1912) was the most interesting and problematic of the men who stood formally atop the German foreign office in the early twentieth century. He personally engineered two of the crises that stand as way-stations along the road to catastrophe in 1914. In 1909 he framed the blunt German ultimatum that humiliated the Russians as it ended a crisis that grew out of the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Two years later, his dispatch of a gunboat, the *Panther*, to the North African port of Agadir provoked the so-called second Moroccan crisis, whose resolution fortified British antagonism to Germany, much as his actions during the Bosnian crisis had durably antagonized the Russians. Kiderlen's posture in these two incidents reflected a temperamental preference for the brusque show-of-force, the brutal gesture as a tool of diplomacy. He was, as Gordon Craig once noted, one of those diplomats »who knew how to pound their fists upon the table«¹.

Despite his centrality in the diplomatic origins of the war, Kiderlen has lacked a major scholarly biography. Ernst Jäckh, his subordinate in the foreign office, published an early appreciation which was based on Kiderlen's personal papers; but it was wedded to the improbable view that things would have fared better in the summer of 1914 had Kiderlen still been at the helm of German foreign policy. Accordingly, scholars interested in Kiderlen's career have had to collect fragments out of the pertinent monographic literature.

Ralf Forsbach has now addressed the problem with a massive biographical study of the German foreign secretary. In the absence of a *Nachlaß*, the author has assembled material from more than a dozen archives, principally the files of the German foreign office in Bonn and the papers of Jäckh, which are in the Yale University Library. The product of these labors is – by far – the most comprehensive and reliable study to date. It throws light on every phase of the diplomat's career. Kiderlen was Swabian, the son of an aristocratic mother and a middle-class father whose patent of nobility was the fruit of a bureaucratic career. Kiderlen's diplomatic career began in the 1880s. His rise to prominence was due to the patronage of Friedrich von Holstein and the others who, in the early 1890s, opted to drop the diplomatic link to Russia in favor of seeking a closer tie to Great Britain. Kiderlen's prominence was due

1 Gordon CRAIG, *From Bismarck to Adenauer: Aspects of German Statecraft*, New York 1965, p. 42.

as well to his close personal ties to the new emperor, whose company he frequently kept until 1898, when William discovered that he himself had been the brunt of Kiderlen's venomous humor. Kiderlen was thereupon exiled to the Balkans, where he served as ambassador to Rumania until he was recalled – thanks to the intervention of Bernhard von Bülow on his behalf – to Berlin in 1908, to serve as deputy to the foreign secretary, Wilhelm von Schoen, who had fallen ill. His intervention in the Bosnian crisis came in this capacity. After he became foreign secretary in Bethmann Hollweg's government in 1910, Kiderlen's attentions turned with noted result to North Africa. His attempts to repair relations with Great Britain in the aftermath of the Agadir crisis were part of a long-standing foreign-policy agenda, but his record in this respect was modest, too, punctuated by the failure of the Haldane mission, which Forsbach lays principally at the feet of Admiral von Tirpitz.

In following these adventures and misadventures in minute detail, Forsbach has produced a formidable piece of diplomatic history; and his work displays both the strengths and liabilities of this genre, narrowly conceived. The biography's principal virtue – and it is a considerable one – is the prodigious research that underlies it. Little that Kiderlen said or wrote – or what was said or written about him – has escaped Forsbach's attention. The text often reads like a digest of the source-base. While it furnishes the particulars, the biography does not significantly challenge the story whose general contours were known. In his treatment of the Moroccan crisis, for example, Forsbach endorses the conclusions of Emily Oncken that Kiderlen's object from the start was to gain compensation elsewhere in French Africa.

The weakness of the book lies in its confined scope. It plays out entirely in a self-contained realm of foreign policy; and it appears to dismiss the proposition that forces outside of this realm bore on the formulation or conduct of policy. The hermetic narrative strategy reduces Kiderlen himself to a much less problematic or interesting character. He functions here like a vessel for memoranda and policy-decisions, which the author seeks to weigh in light of the preemptive question »whether his individual achievement was helpful to the salutary [*gedeihlich*] development of international relations« (p. 16). So formulated, the question begs a negative answer. It also obscures the central biographical problem, which relates directly to what one might call the culture of foreign policy-making in Imperial Germany. Kiderlen-Wächter was a notorious boor, a man of little intellectual depth, subtlety, vision, or imagination, and even less gift for empathy. In these respects, he seemed almost to embody the features of German diplomacy that unsettled international relations in the years before the war. That these personal traits could serve as assets in a diplomatic career, that a man who so conspicuously paraded them could rise to the pinnacle of the German foreign service, raises intriguing questions. In this biography, the details yield no answers.

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Thomas MEYER, »Endlich eine Tat, eine befreiende Tat ...« Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächters »Panthersprung nach Agadir« unter dem Druck der öffentlichen Meinung, Husum (Matthesen) 1997, 348 S. (Historische Studien, 448).

Mit seiner Dissertation über die – wie er einräumt – bereits detailliert erforschte Marokkopolitik des Deutschen Reiches im Sommer 1911 möchte Meyer »die Dinge vom Kopf der regierungsamtlichen Politik auf die Füße der politischen Öffentlichkeit« stellen (S. 13). Leider ist er dabei unsanft gelandet.

Zunächst einmal: Es ist methodisch inakzeptabel, die Hälfte des Buches einer Geschichte der westeuropäischen und deutschen Presse zu widmen. Dazu läßt sich nur feststellen: Thema verfehlt. Warum Meyer Gleichgültigem soviel Platz einräumt, wird bei seiner Darstellung des eigentlichen Gegenstandes deutlich: Er bewegt sich auf ausgetretenen Pfaden