

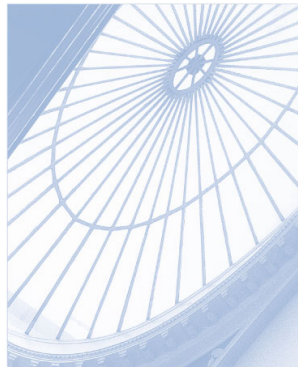
Citation style

Siemann, Wolfgang: review of: Anna Ross, *Beyond the Barricades. Government and State-Building in Post-Revolutionary Prussia, 1848-1858*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, in: *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, Vol. XLI (2019), 2, p. 138-141, DOI: 10.15463/rec.2064343177

First published: *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, Vol. XLI (2019), 2

GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE LONDON

Bulletin



copyright

This article may be downloaded and/or used within the private copying exemption. Any further use without permission of the rights owner shall be subject to legal licences (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

ANNA ROSS, *Beyond the Barricades: Government and State-Building in Post-Revolutionary Prussia, 1848–1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), x +229 pp. ISBN 978 0 19 883382 6. £60.00

This book could not have found a better cover image than that of a destroyed memory – a monument that only exists as a photograph. The monument itself, a statue of the Prussian Prime Minister Otto Theodor von Manteuffel, was melted down for the armour of the First World War. Like his monument, Manteuffel's biography has fallen into oblivion, and now only a few specialists in Prussian history know him as an exponent of post-revolutionary reaction politics. His name is associated with repression, censorship, and surveillance of the domestic and foreign opposition, especially of the 'forty-eighters', the revolutionaries of 1848 who had remained in the country.

Anna Ross wants to prove this stereotype wrong and devotes herself unbiasedly to the challenges that a Prussian politician had to overcome in dealing with the revolution of 1848–49 and its consequences. She has consulted the relevant Prussian archival sources for the central, provincial, and local authorities; estates; files of the royal house; and relevant newspapers and magazines. From the secondary literature, she has taken into account international and especially German-language research, and it is surprising how richly Prussian history has been researched, even for the alleged decade of reaction that lay in the slipstream between revolution and the foundation of the German Reich. Nevertheless, the author manages an approach that brings a breath of fresh air to the discussion of the post-revolutionary decade.

Although Manteuffel is the focus of the study, Ross is not writing a biography, but an inside view of the Prussian Ministry of State. It is important to her to emphasize that the ministry did not undergo an involuntary modernization, as was previously thought, but played an active role. She is interested in specific policies and thus makes it clear how undifferentiated the approach to the notion of 'conservative' politics has been so far. The concept of the conservative is differentiated in an almost exciting way. She destroys the image of a monolithic Prussian domestic policy after the revolution, showing both the counterforces (above all, the ultraconservatives represented in the camarilla), and the resistance and stubbornness of King Frederick

William IV. In sharp contrast to Prussia's ultraconservatives (Leopold and Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach) Manteuffel showed a new realism, more pragmatic and deviating from the doctrinaire approaches of the ultraconservatives.

The author is also concerned to refute the idea of a Prussian special path (*Sonderweg*). She does this by comparing the policies of Austria and the German middle states in the same period, recognizing many parallels with the bureaucratic modernization of the Habsburg Monarchy after 1850 in the Bach era. Ross also observes a comparable flexibility of conservative governments in many German states, following recent studies embedded in and across Europe more broadly and with recourse to the latest research.

Ross recognizes parallels with previous state-building projects in the Napoleonic era, illuminating threads of continuity that are too often overlooked in histories of the nineteenth century. However, she goes even further and puts forward the bold thesis that 'the post-revolutionary moment should be recognized as a second Reform Era, essential to the formation of the modern Prussian state' (p. 18). The policy under Manteuffel was the logical continuation of the Prussian reforms of Stein and Hardenberg, breaking down noble prerogatives. Manteuffel sought to remove the feudal intermediaries, and, in cities, dissolved the authority of the guilds, creating a growth-oriented capitalist economy; he also wanted to complete the process of peasant liberation. Then as now it was the bureaucracies that carried out these reforms. The bureaucracy promoted a course of moderate reform between revolution and total restoration.

However, the decisive and strongest argument for the continuation of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms can be found in the political will to seek compromise with the civil constitutional movement, which the reformers had failed to do at the time. Brandenburg and Manteuffel were able to convince the king, or at least to force him to acknowledge, that constitutionalism was an urgent necessity and the only tool by which anarchy, terrorism, and the Jacobinism of the French Revolution could be overcome.

In detail, Ross is interested in the state-building projects and initiatives to strengthen contact between state bureaucrats and the Prussian population. She examines policies in various fields: judicial and penal institutions, agriculture, industry and communications, and knowledge management, made possible by the statistical knowl-

edge being produced by the Prussian Central Statistical Office. She recognizes a consistent will to modernize the state and centralize its resources, not least through investment in infrastructure, for example, new railway tracks and telegraph networks. Commercial affairs changed decisively, facilitating free trade, introducing an array of measures to protect impoverished craftsmen against hardship, promoting the mining industry, and precipitating the introduction of commercial investment banks.

The Municipal Ordinance of 1850 was a logical continuation of Stein's reforming work, now without drawing a distinction between region or city and the countryside. Here the police assumed an important function because they were not only an instrument of repression, but part of the old welfare police in Berlin. This is shown by the introduction of the Police Construction Ordinance (*Baupolizeiordnung*) in 1853, tightening building regulations, preventing fire, and affirming a growing state interest in public health. Demonstrating a strengthening of official activity commonly associated with self-governing communities, the police played a role in reforming urban life, especially in Berlin under Hinckeldey.

The Criminal Code of 1851, however, reveals the inherent ambivalence of Brandenburg's and Manteuffel's initiative. Superficially, one might imagine that it was created as a counter-revolutionary measure. Ross shows, however, that it helped to constitute a second Reform Era, believing that procedural, rather than substantive reform was the best way to establish the rule of law, securing codes for trial procedures, laws for court organization, and laws governing the organization of the private legal profession; in other words, it was a significant contribution to the formation of the modern *Rechtsstaat* in Prussia, continuing the liberal fiscal policies of the revolutionary years.

Ross does not conceal the restrictions imposed by changes in electoral law, the tightening of criminal law, and the manipulation of freedom of the press and of associations. Manorial estates remained exempt from taxation. The government took many measures to control and manipulate the press. This was done by press offices, promoting newspapers with subsidies for government-friendly broadsheets. Here modernization initially went hand in hand with manipulation and monitoring. Nevertheless, public opinion played a larger role than had previously been acknowledged; not least the family

papers played a large part in this, keeping national questions alive throughout the 1850s. The management of the press and the sharing of government-friendly data continued after 1858, especially under Bismarck.

Nevertheless, the study presents a convincing argument that the policy of the Manteuffel era was formative for the development of the Prussian state, a second Reform Era. Those who deal with the New Era that began with the Prince Regent Wilhelm must now reconsider whether there really was so much that was 'new' about it. What *was* new was clearly not so much the implementation of specific policies underpinned by an effective bureaucracy—a form of government that was already seeking legitimacy through participation, and which continued under Bismarck. Wilhelm, however, set a qualitatively new accent when he proclaimed to the State Ministry on 8 November 1858 that Prussia must achieve *moral* conquests in Germany ('In Deutschland muss Preußen moralische Eroberungen machen'). The Manteuffel era, on the other hand, was introverted, focused on stabilizing and developing the state.

This new interpretation of the post-revolutionary era is supported by evidence that Brandenburg and (after the latter's death in 1850) Manteuffel were firmly convinced that popular participation and representative assemblies had become a necessary part of modern politics. It is a merit of this study that it also highlights the resistance to this strategy and so clearly shows that the prime ministers were pursuing an approach of reform, which Bismarck was later able to follow up. However, I would not go so far as to claim (like the historian Daniel Ziblatt, with whom the author sympathizes) 'that the successful emergence of "conservative political parties that originated representing old regime elites" was *the* essential shaper in democratization in the nineteenth century' (p. 14).

WOLFRAM SIEMANN is Emeritus Professor of History at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His most important works include *The German Revolution of 1848-49*, trans. Christiane Banerji (1998); *Metternich: Stratege und Visionär. Eine Biografie* (2nd edn. 2017); revised edn. trans. Daniel Steuer and to be published as *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary* (2019).