

Jürgen Kocka (Hrsg.), Sozialgeschichte im internationalen Überblick. Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Forschung, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1989, VI, 252 S., geb., 49 DM.

In many of the countries discussed in this useful new collection, the origins of social history can be traced back at least as far as the 1920s and 1930s. But it was not until the 1960s that an independent social history emerged from the shadow of more powerful and respected branches of the discipline. The student revolt of the late 1960s provided the decisive impulse for an explosion of interest in social history in Western Europe and North America. The radical 60s focussed attention on the social causes of political action, proposed a much expanded notion of politics and power and legitimised discussion of the role played in history by subordinate and oppressed social groups – workers, women, blacks and others. In Eastern Europe, where the political impulse provided by the 1960s was lacking, many of the new approaches to the past pioneered by western social historians have only just begun to make inroads.

Social history challenged the old ways of writing history. The first generation of social historians abandoned the detailed narration of »events« for the more abstract analysis of large-scale »structures« and long-term »processes«. In the USA, Britain, France and Austria (though not in the two Germanies or most of Eastern Europe) demographic and family history also promoted quantification and computer-assisted research which gave social history a certain veneer of »social science«. But many younger social historians today find this older *Strukturgeschichte* too arid, bloodless and impersonal; their studies of popular culture and *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) offer a new »historicist« counter-offensive within social history. The needs, wants and desires of living, breathing, feeling individuals, so long neglected by the social-structural historians, are now to be restored to the center of the social historical stage. The earlier generation of social historians brandished the weapons of Marxism or Weberianism, sociology, political science, »modernisation theory« and quantification. The current generation turns instead to anthropology, cultural studies and oral history. Counting and grand theories are out; »thick description« of »revealing miniatures« is in. The impact of this new »green« history varies considerably. In West Germany *Alltagsgeschichte* has produced acrimonious confrontations between older and younger social historians. In Austria, the relationship between *Alltagsgeschichte* and *Strukturgeschichte* appears more harmonious. And in Eastern Europe, the new »history of everyday life« is scarcely visible.

Social history displays a remarkable international diversity. In many western and some eastern European countries, social history began as the history of the working class. But in France, it was the history of the peasantry and of rural society that provided the decisive impulse. Women's history and the history of the family have made important contributions to American and British social history; but in Austria, France and Germany social historians have only recently begun to discover women's history. In Poland and East Germany, women's history still receives little serious attention. And there are some distinctive national peculiarities; in Poland, for example, a great deal of research is concerned with the social and cultural history of the Polish intelligentsia, an undertaking that finds few parallels elsewhere.

Despite, or rather, because of its remarkable achievements in the past three decades, social history now faces an identity crisis. Is it no more than a successful sub-discipline, or does it offer a new approach to all fields of history? Has the actual practice of social history produced the coherence required of either a sub-discipline or of a new general approach? Or is »social history« no more than a vague umbrella term sheltering a colorful, yet incoherent assortment of topics and approaches? In short, does anyone really know what social history is?

It is perhaps ironic that social history exhibits the greatest coherence and the clearest sense of purpose in those countries, like West Germany, where it has not been fully emancipated from the service of political history. In some other countries, such as Britain and the USA, social historians quickly ventured beyond the boundaries prescribed by political history. Here, they discovered a fascinating new landscape but soon seemed to lose their way. This is certainly not an argument for retreating back inside the familiar questions and categories that political history provides. Just a few years ago, Geoff Eley and Keith Nield asked »Why does social history ignore politics?« Today, Eley and Nield's question would have to be reversed to read: »Why has (past) politics ignored (so much) of social history?« Recent work in women's history, oral history and Alltagsgeschichte, along with some intimations of the eventual impact on social history of deconstructionism and the »linguistic turn« suggest that the inherited questions and categories of political history no longer command the analytical high ground. Social historians have discovered that even the left-wing political movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which claimed to speak for the broad masses, frequently failed to address the complex, often contradictory needs, wants and desires of ordinary people in the past. In Weimar Germany, this deficiency had fatal consequences when the »social spaces« not occupied by the left, were subsequently colonized by the Nazi movement.

In the years of its childhood and adolescence, social history expanded the boundaries of historical inquiry well beyond the limits set by the history of politics. In its more mature years, social history promises to make us question and re-think the understandings of the world that political history has given us. Even social history's most severe critics will have to admit that this is an impressive record.

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Helge Gerndt (Hrsg.), *Volkskunde und Nationalsozialismus. Referate und Diskussionen einer Tagung* (Münchner Beiträge zur Volkskunde Bd. 7), Münchner Vereinigung für Volkskunde, München 1987, 333 S., brosch., 36 DM.

Albrecht Lehmann/Andreas Kuntz (Hrsg.), *Sichtweisen der Volkskunde. Zur Geschichte und Forschungspraxis einer Disziplin* (Lebensformen Bd. 3), Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin/Hamburg 1988, 393 S., geb., 58 DM.

Rolf W. Brednich (Hrsg.), *Grundriß der Volkskunde. Einführung in die Forschungsfelder der Europäischen Ethnologie*, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin 1988, paperback, 484 S., 34 DM.

Die Volkskunde vollzieht in den letzten Jahren einen tiefgreifenden Paradigmenwechsel; zum einen geht sie mit großen Schritten auf die Ethnologie und die Sozialgeschichte<sup>1</sup> zu, andererseits stellt sie sich immer intensiver ihrer vielfältigen und teilweise sehr belastenden Geschichte. Eines dieser dunklen Kapitel bildet die Geschichte der Volkskunde in der NS-Zeit. Als Wolfgang Emmerich 1968 sein Buch »Germanistische Volkstumsideologie. Genese und Kritik der Volksforschung im Dritten Reich«<sup>2</sup> veröffentlichte, waren die Meinungen gespalten und die Angriffe gegen den Autor vehement. Doch Hermann Bausinger

1 Siehe hierzu die klugen Überlegungen von *Wolfgang Kaschuba*, Mythos oder Eigen-Sinn. »Volkskultur« und Sozialgeschichte, in: *Utz Jeggle* u. a. (Hrsg.), *Volkskultur in der Moderne. Probleme und Perspektiven empirischer Kulturforschung*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1986, S. 469–507, sowie *ders.*, *Volkskultur zwischen feudaler Gesellschaft und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft. Zur Geschichte eines Begriffs und seiner gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt/New York 1988.

2 Tübingen 1968; sowie *ders.*, *Zur Kritik der Volkstumsideologie*, Frankfurt/Main 1971.