

## DIPLOMATIC HISTORY SINCE THE CULTURAL TURN

*Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg.* By Johannes Paulmann. Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 2000. Pp. 478. ISBN 3-506-77160-4. €44.99.

*Royalty and diplomacy in Europe, 1890–1914.* By Roderick R. McLean. Cambridge: University Press, 2001. Pp. xi + 239. ISBN 0-8223-1522-X. £35.00.

*British envoys to Germany, 1816–1866, 1: 1816–1829.* Camden Fifth Series, Volume 15. Edited by Sabine Freitag and Peter Wende. For the Royal Historical Society in Association with the German Historical Institute London. Pp. xxi + 592, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. ISBN 0-5217-90662. £40.00.

*Does peace lead to war? Peace settlements and conflict in the modern age.* By Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann. Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2002. Pp. xiii + 242. ISBN 0-7509-2514-0. £20.00.

Since the 1960s it has been claimed that diplomatic history is in decline – upstaged over the decades by more fashionable subjects like social, gender, or cultural history.<sup>1</sup> However, Clio's anaemic patient is alive and kicking as the four books to be reviewed here all clearly show. This renaissance is in some ways due to a modernization process which proves the inherent flexibility of the subject. Diplomatic historians have adopted new methods for their work by amalgamating cultural, semiotic, and anthropological ideas as well as by going global through multiarchival research. Admittedly these progressive developments are still at an early stage, yet Johannes Paulmann's thought-provoking *Pomp und Politik* which analyses the subtext of ceremonies and symbolic behaviour among monarchs, could be used as an excellent guideline for further studies in this field.

Paulmann does not ask 'what was negotiated', but how this was done, and what long-term effect it had on international relations. His method is a combination of structural and event history proving that social and political historians should no longer fear each other. The structure used is the international system between 1815 and 1914, the events are the 223 monarchical visits between the Great Powers. As is the case with spin today, politics in the nineteenth century needed to be made visible, personalized and 'sold' to the outside world, in short a theatricalization of international relations was needed (p. 12). This was done, inter alia, by royal visits. Surprisingly it was not Wilhelm II, the 'travelling Kaiser', who led in the visiting charts, but King Edward VII who, during his relatively short reign, visited one or more of the Great Powers at least three times a year. In total, he made

<sup>1</sup> For the 1960s see E. R. May, 'The decline of diplomatic history', in G. A. Billias and G. N. Grob, eds., *American history: retrospect and prospect* (New Haven, 1971). For the 1990s: Ursula Lehmkuhl, 'Diplomatengeschichte als internationale Kulturgeschichte: Theoretische Ansätze und empirische Forschung zwischen Historischer Kulturwissenschaft und Soziologischem Institutionalismus', in Gisela Bock, Dieter Langewiesche, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, eds., *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27. Jahrgang (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 394–423.

sixty-one trips between 1901 and 1910 covering great distances from Stockholm to Tangiers, Malta or Athens (p. 178). His unloved German nephew followed him at close distance (2.7 meetings a year), while Poincaré achieved an average of 2.0 and Nicholas II 1.5 (p. 27 and table 1, p. 421). The numbers also show that shortly before the Great War the meetings reached their climax, probably as a psychological distraction to calm everybody's nerves. Interestingly, by then they had become so significant that when a monarch cancelled a visit this was seen as a major political problem (e.g. Wilhelm II did not visit Rumania – something that Queen Maria claims was held against him in 1914).

Yet it should be remembered that before 1800 such visits had not been the norm. As long as there had been constant wars – Paulmann uses Johannes Kunisch's phrase of the monarchs 'bellicose disposition' – successful meetings could hardly take place. (This does not mean, of course, that interaction between monarchs through marriage, exchange of ambassadors etc. did not exist.) Moreover, the ceremonial side of the ancien régime hindered state visits for a long time. For example, by giving one monarch precedence over another at the dinner table one acknowledged his superiority, an act that would have undermined the authority of the other monarchs present. Ceremonial acts were, thus, political acts (p. 403) and monarchs did not consider each other as equals. This competition blocked any form of monarchical unity according to Paulmann.

So what changed between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century? The author brings forward various answers: the relative peacefulness of the nineteenth century made it possible for monarchs to meet. The Vienna Congress was the turning point in this direction. The 'community of sovereigns' was invented as a strategy to cope with crisis and against the increasing social and political demands nationalism made on the monarchies. The author employs here Paul W. Schroeder's theories about the 'transformation of political thinking' at the Congress. The new legal and moral community of 1814–15 was not a 'balance of power' according to Schroeder, but a novel 'political equilibrium [which] meant a balance of satisfaction, a balance of rights and obligations and a balance of performance and payoffs'. Ergo an equality among the monarchs was from now on an unspoken assumption. The new structure of international relations made it possible for them to meet on an equal base, even if in practice some of them must still have felt more equal than others and occasionally made this obvious to their 'cousins'. Theoretically, however, co-operation overcame the competitive tendencies. Because they tried to keep the foreign policy domain under their control while the rest of the social, cultural, and political institutions of their countries were nationalized, their rules of diplomatic communication could be continued. In this field they were not reacting but acting figures.

By the end of the nineteenth century the monarchies were nationalized, an outcome that had not been predictable from the start and, of course, the extent of nationalization of each monarch differed. Though it is possible to see lots of different *Sonderwege* here, the author shows that ultimately the similarities outweighed the differences.

In the second part of his book he explores how the symbolic language at the meetings could directly influence European politics. While the court ceremonials in each country were written down, there did not exist a universal guide book to international monarchical meetings. As the 'stars' of these gatherings, the monarchs had the decisive say in their planning and therefore could manipulate their political message. For example, the visit Edward VII paid to Kaiser Franz Joseph in 1908 helped both sides to achieve different ends: Austria, shortly before the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, needed 'symbolic

capital' to signal to Germany that she was courted by other nations, while Edward VII wanted to compete with Wilhelm II's earlier visit to Vienna and, therefore, pushed to be invited (p. 185). At the same time, Edward feared the jealousy of his German nephew and, therefore, did not want to overdo it. He kept the visit mildly low key (by meeting in Ischl and not in Schönbrunn). These seemingly small details (including discussion on whether one should have a 'toast' at the dinners or not) were decisive bonding codes which have been so far ignored by political historians. For a better understanding of their importance Paulmann therefore uses Pierre Bourdieu's theories of 'symbolical capital'. Whether this was needed or not also influenced the decision to admit or exclude the public (in the form of journalists and spectators in the streets) at such meetings. In the 1830s Franz I and Friedrich Wilhelm III did not want to be seen during their visits by non-courtiers, while Louis Philippe and Victoria included the public (p. 274). This mirrored the different policy aims they had. The eastern monarchs (Russia, Prussia, Austria) wanted to stabilize the European order against changes and kept their meetings away from the madding crowd, by meeting at low-key events in the provinces. Western monarchies, like France and Britain, needed public approval for their entente and therefore admitted a controlled public. However, by 1900 all monarchical meetings had become part of the entertainment industry, with pictures of monarchs on cigars and hams – a development from which the shopkeepers profited as much as the monarchs.

Roderick McLean is also of the opinion that the monarchical aspect of international politics has been neglected, yet unlike Paulmann, his method of approach is more of a roll back, leaving the sociological explanations of Pierre Bourdieu and Niklas Luhmann by the wayside. McLean's speciality is the historical narrative, which seldom goes beyond what one monarch said to (or about) another. Of course both genres, Paulmann's and McLean's, have every right to exist alongside each other and are in many ways dependent on the other. It is therefore still entertaining to read descriptions of the diplomatic problems Wilhelm II created and which John Röhl has recently analysed. McLean also includes angles that Paulmann does not use. One of them is the secret diplomacy in which monarchs indulged, which often did not correspond with their governments' concepts (e.g. at Björkö). Furthermore, the inner perspective of the monarchs, largely excluded by Paulmann, is unravelled using interesting primary sources by McLean.

His focus is however not on the whole of European royalty as the title indicates, but mainly on Wilhelm II and his relations with Edward VII and Nicholas II. The 'Eastern line' was indeed dominated by the marriages between the Romanovs and the Hohenzollern, but the fact that the 'south-east' Habsburger-line, which was connected to Italy and smaller German states but excluded from English and Russian networks, has been left out completely from this study is to be regretted. It would have been interesting to see if the Habsburgs, because they were at the periphery of the eastern and western networks, as a consequence followed a different foreign policy. In this context the role of a monarch's religion could have been studied too because it seems to have offered (or hindered) certain ways of communication. Although the author has tried his best to include the part women played in royal diplomatic manoeuvres this definitely needs further archival research. All European ruling houses were after all like female 'news-agencies' (Paulmann), run by the wives, daughters, and mothers of monarchs. These women were of great importance as mediators (and intriguers) because, unlike their husbands, they could act and manipulate unofficially behind everyone's back without ministers intervening (this was one reason why Bismarck feared the 'petticoat influence',

a remark which has always been described as particularly vicious, but was probably not so far from the truth). Royal marriages offered transnational networks in an age of nationalism and it is still a great desideratum to look at this aspect more closely. Though marriages no longer had territorial effects as in the wars of succession, there still existed a territorial-dynastic way of thinking which had political effects. This can be seen in the case of Schleswig Holstein, where two members of the British royal family, the Danish-born princess of Wales, Alexandra, and the British-born Prussian crown princess, Vicky, were dragged into the dispute on opposite sides by their respective governments, or in the case of Hanover, which was seized by the Prussians to the outrage of Queen Victoria.

As Paulmann and McLean have both shown, diplomacy always has to be analysed as a complex code system. Signs and indications are given, a nation's stock is rising or falling, and with it her envoys can find themselves placed at the top or far end of the green table. The German states' stock was not very high from a British point of view in 1816, which marks the beginning of Sabine Freitag's and Peter Wende's edition of dispatches from British envoys from Germany. Shortly after 1815 it was not considered a promotion to be sent to Dresden, Stuttgart, or even Berlin. The embassy at Paris or a posting in Vienna were naturally more sought after. This does not mean, however, that the British view on the German states in the 1820s is not worth studying. Surprisingly, to this day historians of British-German relations have more or less avoided this period – a mistake which this publication proves.

The edition is a historian's dream and a publisher's nightmare. The German Historical Institute started to undertake the worthy cause of editing sources on Germany in 1994 and this is only the first volume of a series of four. It must surely be a costly enterprise, but it will eventually become the kind of reference book that generations of historians have to take into account if they want to understand the processes which led from the German Federation to the German Empire. To see these events through British spectacles gives one a fresh angle on the inner German developments and it also reveals a lot about the British approach to other countries.

The decisions that the editors have to make in selecting the most interesting out of a vast quantity of sources is of course always a difficult one. They have taken into account that today's scholars are not simply interested in political dispatches but, for example, want to know more about the crime statistics of German cities. The result is a well-balanced selection that will probably please political, social, economic, and military historians alike. The dispatches, which have never been published before, are transcribed and annotated in an exemplary fashion, only the short subject index leaves something to be desired.

The way these dispatches are organized is quite original, however, and could be labelled the 'Rashomon' technique. Each mission's dispatches are quoted chronologically and therefore, as in Akira Kurosawa's classic screenplay, major events are told from the perspective of four or five envoys from different parts of Germany. They offer a kaleidoscope of images, some written on a sunny and some on a grey day, and one wonders whether the recipients of these letters were actually capable of decoding this great mixture and finally coming to a useful conclusion about German affairs. By looking chronologically at the missions in Frankfurt (Diet of the German Confederation), Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart, Dresden, and Vienna (Hanover will be added in the next volume from 1837 onwards) the differences of the German states are also well documented. This lack of Prussia-centricity is healthy, and again proves David Blackbourn's comment that 'yes, but not in the south', serves well as a response to almost any argument. The local topography does influence

the envoys, of course, but the fact that we do not get a homogeneous picture of Germany is also due to their differing temperaments. As in *Rashomon* none of them is ever an impartial witness, showing his prejudices and preferences between the lines and creating stereotypes about Germany which exist to this day. When the theology student Karl Ludwig Sand was beheaded in Mannheim for the murder of the writer and Russian informer Kotzebue in 1820, the envoy in nearby Frankfurt was outraged about the 'fanaticism' of Sand's supporters (p. 24); his colleague in Berlin thought that the Prussian government was too lenient against rebellious students (p. 101), while the much calmer envoy in Dresden tried to explain the wider context: 'There may, as the cases of Sand and Lönning and the discoveries at Berlin may warrant us to suspect, exist some union among desperados on such atrocious means of attaining the wishes for object of reform, but the principle, abstractedly speaking of reform pervades generally the minds of all men' (p. 403).

As the editors make subtly clear in their introduction, the intelligence and capability of these British diplomats varied considerably. George Rose, who clung to his belief in 1819 that a Prussian constitution was imminent, could easily be outshone by John Philip Morier who wrote – out of boredom – a history of Saxony on the side (p. xv). It would therefore have been an ideal supplement to add to the official dispatches at least a few private letters by the more gifted envoys, in which the 'unguarded' diplomat usually talks more openly. The editors acknowledge this, but claim that it differed from envoy to envoy whether he produced a homogeneous bulk of private letters, or even had personal contacts with the foreign secretary. Reaction, advice, and admonitions from headquarters, rare at the best of times, are only occasionally included in this volume, but this gives the – realistic – impression that the envoys were pretty much on their own. However, they knew what was expected of them. The editors quote a typical guideline that the earl of Clanwilliam received from George Canning in 1823 before leaving for the Prussian court: 'to obtain a knowledge of the Temper and Inclinations of His Prussian Majesty, and of His opinions on the several public points which may occasionally arise ... to procure the best information respecting the several Parties or Divisions which at present exist, or may hereafter arise in Prussia' (quoted p. xi).

The diplomats needed to be good psychologists and researchers who had to find out as quickly as possible the latest on a broad field of developments ranging from fiscal policies to military fortresses. Though the editors show how nervous from 1827 onwards the Board of Trade was about the founding of the German Customs Union (p. xvi), despite such occasional fears, German states were never seen as threats as such. British officials often used them as a 'think tank', which helped to look at British domestic problems from a different angle:

The Foreign Office's interest in all religious matters in the German states was motivated by the discussion of the Catholic emancipation in Britain ... The long and detailed reports from Berlin on the cholera epidemic which had spread from Eastern Europe provided the officials responsible in London with information on the extent and severity of a disease which was on its way to the British Isles. (p. xvii)

Thus, a German–British exchange of ideas did occur to the benefit of the home office or the board of trade, even though the German states were not yet taken seriously by the majority of British politicians. In England 'continental talk bores everyone to death', the British ambassador to Germany would still claim in the 1870s. This edition proves that this should not have been the case.

The Vienna Congress had brought a new form of tranquillity to the European system and made these peaceful dispatches from Germany possible. However peace settlements have often been mere dates having no lasting effect on the minds of the former belligerents. Many peace conferences were doomed undertakings, which could not deliver what was expected of them. How difficult it is to make a lasting peace is shown by the monograph by Matthew Seligmann and Matthew Hughes. It is an original re-examination of well-known events, which intends to polarize its readers. Not getting a peace settlement right the first time could lead to an endless succession of new conflicts. Of course many other factors had to come together as well, yet, as the authors show, the actual settlements often sowed the seeds. The motives for the Greco-Turkish war can be found at Versailles; Yalta triggered off the Chinese Revolutionary Civil war; and the second Indochina War 'started' at Geneva in 1954. The eight peace treaties discussed in this volume prove this point by covering a great time span (from 1870 to 1975) and great geographical distances (from Europe to the Near East and Far East). Despite the fact that these peace agreements were negotiated by at least five generations of politicians and diplomats who had to make very different decisions at various phases of history, the pattern of conflict regulation seems to have been remarkably similar in many respects – and so were the mistakes.

Though the authors occasionally question the wisdom of diplomats, they do not make them the scapegoats for failed peace settlements. Instead they look at the wider political, economic, and geographical context of the time. The motto of the book, which wants to show 'a direct relationship between the peace that ends one war and the outbreak of the next conflict' (p. xi) could give one the idea that this is deterministic history. However, this is avoided by a balanced analysis of each settlement. The Treaty of Frankfurt, for example, which ended the Franco-Prussian War, is not made responsible for French opposition to Germany in 1914. It is shown that forty years after the shock of 1871 the feeling of revenge no longer played a decisive part. Though the loss of Alsace-Lorraine was still commemorated, and leading politicians of the Third Republic felt sentimental about it, for a younger generation of Frenchmen this had already become an empty ritual. In 1900 the German ambassador Graf Münster therefore could inform the Wilhelmsstraße that 'the hope of being able to reconquer Alsace Lorraine is diminishing year by year and only a few think seriously of a war to this end' (p. 13). On the other hand, the Treaty of Frankfurt did have a long-term effect. As Klaus Hildebrand has shown, from its beginning it limited the German alliance system and Bismarck himself was only too aware of this, occasionally claiming that he had made a mistake in 1871. For Germany 'Frankfurt' became a trap that influenced her foreign policy for forty years and finally led to the perception of encirclement.

The Treaty of Versailles became a similar trap for its creators. The recent press controversies about it are discussed here. Versailles was of course not a Carthaginian peace, as some critics described it. We now know that from an economic point of view the indemnity was bearable (and ultimately financed by American loans to Germany, which led Stephen Schuker provocatively to label them as 'American reparations to Germany' (p. 33)). Furthermore Germany remained 87 per cent intact, a relatively good fate compared to Austria-Hungary, which lost 70 per cent of their pre-war territory. Versailles was therefore not a second Brest-Litovsk. Still, the psychological effect that the war-guilt clause had on the Germans should not be underestimated either. The Germans believed that they had been fighting a defensive war and the height of their fall was too much to bear. This does not explain Hitler of course, but irrational feelings did play a part and have to be taken

into account. Also the metaphor of Versailles was, as the authors acknowledge, ideal to instrumentalize for propaganda purposes and brought all factions of German society together.

So what can we learn from this at a time when the cycle of war–peace–war in former Yugoslavia is still on our minds (p. 187)? There are five simple factors identified here for successful treaties: they only work if they are fairly proportionate (e.g. the unfair treatment of Turkey in 1918 could not work in the long run); if ambiguities and inconsistencies in treaty documents are avoided (see the Potsdam Protocol of 1945); if they are not ultimately mismanaged by those on the ground (see the chapter on Korea, p. 141); and if the treaties can be enforced. The last point is more than topical and the authors therefore end their book with the example of George Bush senior who won the war and lost the peace.

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