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JAMES RETALLACK

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Editor's Preface

The main purpose of this new series of studies is to make available to teacher and student alike developments in a field of history that has become increasingly specialised with the sheer volume of new research and literature now produced. These studies are designed to present the 'state of the debate' on important themes and episodes in European history since the sixteenth century, presented in a clear and critical way by someone who is closely concerned himself with the debate in question.

The studies are not intended to be read as extended bibliographical essays, though each will contain a detailed guide to further reading which will lead students and the general reader quickly to key publications. Each book carries its own interpretation and conclusions, while locating the discussion firmly in the centre of the current issues as historians see them. It is intended that the series will introduce students to historical approaches which are in some cases very new and which, in the normal course of things, would take many years to filter down into the textbooks and school histories. I hope it will demonstrate some of the excitement historians, like scientists, feel as they work away in the vanguard of their subject.

The format of the series conforms closely with that of the companion volumes of studies in economic and social history which has already established a major reputation since its inception in 1968. Both series have an important contribution to make in publicising what it is that historians are doing and in making history more open and accessible. It is vital for history to communicate if it is to survive.

R. J. OVERY

Preface

'We stand within the continuity and community of historians – our predecessors, our teachers, our colleagues, our students – who have preceded us and taught us, who inspire and provoke us, who critique and revise [our views]. . . . We are dwarfs on the shoulders of giants' [192]. Shortly before his death, Thomas Nipperdey wrote these lines to convey his gratitude to those who had sustained him in the task of writing the most comprehensive account of imperial Germany we have today. Nipperdey's words are especially compelling in an age when scholarship is still afflicted by the publish-or-perish syndrome. How many books today begin by debunking the work of those who first ventured into uncharted territory? How many promise the latest model or interpretation, invariably guaranteed to make previous research obsolete and transform the field forever?

This state of affairs can have two particularly unfortunate consequences. On the one hand it restricts the sense of community among colleagues who must continually strive to break down barriers to fruitful scholarly dialogue. On the other hand it leaves students bewildered. The weaker students express dismay that the 'experts' cannot agree on what actually happened in history. Even the more capable ones ask why historians spend so much time explaining what *didn't* happen, or what *should* have happened. Still others wonder why established scholars so often talk past each other, why academics insist that their critics have not properly 'understood' their latest book, and why the postmodern monograph appears to dismiss history's master narrative as unknowable or *passé*.

This book was written partly to foster better communication among historians, and partly to address these student complaints. Although reading for this project increased my appreciation of the richness and sophistication of previous work on Wilhelmine

Germany, some of that richness is necessarily squeezed out of this short account, in order to bring central themes and problems into sharper focus. I particularly regret that it was not possible to deal more systematically with literature offering a comparative perspective on Wilhelmine Germany. Events since 1989 only underscore the need to consider Germany's place within an evolving Europe. I would also have liked to draw more fully on the documentary sources available. I recognise that some colleagues will question my decisions about when to emphasise traditional or revisionist approaches, when to cite certain works and not others, and when to treat one topic more fully than another. In certain chapters I have opted for depth over breadth. I hope this will increase the book's readability. It may also help establish linkages between the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres, and thus stimulate critical thought, in ways that textbooks typically cannot.

Acknowledgements

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Research in Toronto would have been impossible without the assistance of Marline Otte and Richard Steigmann-Gall: they, like other students in my imperial Germany seminar since 1987, have enriched my outlook on the subject and forced me to clarify my thinking on many points. I am also pleased to acknowledge support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Toronto. To Gordon Martel I am grateful for permission to use material that appeared in another form in his edited collection, *Modern Germany Reconsidered*. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German sources are my own, as are the graphics.

My children, Hanna and Stuart, have contributed in their own way to putting the study of Wilhelmine Germany in its proper perspective, though they have been forced to yield to the demands of the project too often. My greatest debt by far is to Helen Graham. To her this book is dedicated – undividedly.

The German Empire, 1871-1918

Kingdoms	Prussia Bavaria Saxony Württemberg
Grand Duchies	Baden Hessen Mecklenburg-Schwerin Mecklenburg-Strelitz Saxe-Weimar Oldenburg
Duchies	Brunswick Saxe-Meiningen Saxe-Altenburg Saxe-Coburg-Gotha Anhalt
Principalities	Schwarzburg-Sondershausen Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt Waldeck Reuss, older and younger lines Schaumburg-Lippe Lippe
Hansa cities	Lübeck Bremen Hamburg
Imperial Province	Alsace-Lorraine