

Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics, 1830-1933

(Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany)

Edited by **James Retallack**

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000

Opinion

“What deserves particular praise in James Retallack’s book is its inclusiveness and diversity, as it brings together authors across generations from doctoral student to full professor, and across geographical divides with fairly even numbers of contributors from North America and Germany—this marks a refreshing intellectual openness and an encouragement to young scholars that is still the exception rather than the rule.

...[A] crucial question [concerns] the role of regional history. Is it merely to respond to the concerns of those interested in the state as such? Or, if knowledge of Saxony does add to the complexity of our image of the German polity, what point does this serve...? What good is it to find ever more areas in which the state (or the area under investigation) was ‘peculiar’? (‘Yes, *but not in Saxony*’)? The greatest strength of Retallack’s book is that this question is not shied away from, but that its complexity is considered, not just in a very thoughtful introduction, but in the first part of the book.”

— Jan Palmowski, King’s College London, in “Mediating the Nation: Liberalism and the Polity in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *German History* 19, no. 4 (2001): 573-598.

“In the past few years, regional history has become a central concern of historians as they search for more nuanced views of the German past. The old approaches, quarrels, and generalizations no longer seem as compelling as they

did twenty years ago, and we are in a period of reevaluation. ... With easier access to archives in the former DDR, we now have a wealth of new material, much of it on Saxony. This volume takes advantage of that new wealth by collecting the contributions to a conference on the history of Saxony held in Toronto in 1998. ... [T]his is a valuable collection. The individual contributions hold up well on their own. We cannot be reminded too often that 'German history' is a loose and problematic concept. What's more, the volume implicitly raises an important historiographical question: if regions, like nations, are artificial constructs, are regions too merely an amalgamation of smaller parts, themselves perhaps artificial constructs? At what point can the historian stop miniaturizing?"

— Alfred Kelly, Hamilton College, in *Central European History*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2004): 442-444.

"*Saxony in German History* is more than simply a collection of articles about Saxon history.... Part 1 of the book ... is given over to four essays ... that consider the theoretical and methodological problems of 'writing local and regional history today.' ... [These are] incisive and thought-provoking pieces that ought to be required reading for anyone interested in exploring the relationship between the local, the regional, and the national. ...

Overall, James Retallack is to be congratulated for bringing together such a rich and vibrant collection of articles, each of which is testimony to the present vitality of local and regional research. And in demonstrating how and why the local and the regional are essential to our understanding of the national, *Saxony in German History* not only succeeds in raising Saxony's profile; it also acts as a valuable contribution in the continuing shift away from Prussocentric approaches to modern German history."

— Graham Ford, University of Teesside, in the *Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 2 (June 2003): 450-452.

"This is a distinguished project that will be fundamental for Saxon history as well as worthwhile for German history. ...

Overall, the main contribution of the project is to illuminate the links between national trends and Saxon politics and society. It provides solid and knowledgeable discussions of liberal, bourgeois, Social Democratic, and Nazi political cultures and social milieux. It is especially strong on the place of

bourgeois liberals between an authoritarian state and a growing Social Democratic movement before 1918, and between left and new right thereafter. ...

All the essays are of high quality. Retallack has assembled a very good group of young and senior scholars who show an excellent familiarity with Saxon archives, thus making available original work based on archives opened for sustained academic work only after 1990. Another strong point is the long historical period covered in the project, as well as the attention paid to the pre-1871 years....”

— Alon Confino, University of Virginia, in “On Localness and Nationhood,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London* 23, no. 2 (Nov. 2001): 7-28.

“[A] very useful book. ... In my opinion, the most interesting contributions—especially those [in Part I]—survey the theory and practice of writing regional history in present-day Germany and map out directions for future empirical work. ... All [contributions] bring a fresh perspective to bear on the regional/local milieu and stress the persistence of Saxon identities or provincial peculiarities.... Future students who confront the special problem of fitting Saxony’s regional or provincial experience into a national frame will find this volume not only a useful and trustworthy guide, but also the most up-to-date introduction in English.”

— Ronald J. Ross, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, in the *German Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (Feb. 2003): 158-9.

“This edited volume brings together historians ... who have succeeded in putting Saxony on the scholarly map in recent years.... Unlike many conference volumes, [this one] provides readers with a coherent analysis, at times fooling its audience into believing that this is a singular intellectual endeavour. ... [V]iewed together these scholars not only open up new terrain in terms of Saxon history, they are also wholly convincing that Germany’s history, even Europe’s modern history, must be viewed, to borrow Celia Applegate’s words, as ‘the story of intertwining, shifting subnational entities.’”

— Pamela E. Swett, McMaster University, in the *Canadian Journal of History* 37 (Dec. 2002): 549-50.

This information is provided by the [Department of History](#) at the University of Toronto.
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