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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944 by Peter Hoffmann

Review by: Peter Black

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is asserted rather than explained; to make the point would require a genuine comparative dimension in which his study is lacking. Similarly, Myers shows the importance of earlier monumental European figures of Jewish historiography such as Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow to the work of the Jerusalem school without sufficiently fleshing out the achievement of these early masters. The importance of the Jerusalem school to a later generation of Jewish historians, whose names are likely to elicit little recognition beyond Jewish circles, also needs further elucidation. Still, this is a very good book, and it fits squarely into the concerns of those historians who are increasingly attracted to the broader question of the contrast between critical history and collective popular memory.

IRWIN M. WALL

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

*Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905–1944.* By Peter Hoffmann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995. Pp. x + 424. \$39.95. ISBN 0–521–45307–0.

Biographers are said to choose their subjects because they either idolize or despise them. Peter Hoffmann leaves his readers in no doubt which impulse moved him to write about Claus Schenk, Graf von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg's "extrordinariness, both intellectual and physical" (p. xiv) leads Hoffmann to conclude that "the current hankering after a fictitious equality [of human beings] cannot make it the less fictitious." He infers that readers can only properly appreciate Stauffenberg's "whole, harmonious personality" if they accept that "individuals have different social and cultural origins, genetic inheritances, educations, positions, achievements, and even privileges, if not 'rights' in a legal sense" (p. xiv). The author accurately predicts that "some present-day observers" might be "put off" by the inference that the "assumption of the equality of all human beings" is but a "prejudice."

Based on a rich variety of unpublished wartime documents, published memoirs, private letters and interviews, and published secondary works, Hoffmann traces the factors in Stauffenberg's upbringing, profession, and philosophical outlook that motivated his attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944. While Stauffenberg's aristocratic background and training as a German officer imbued him with the ideals of honor and service to the nation, it was the poet Stefan George who gave Stauffenberg his vision of what that nation should be. Stauffenberg and his two brothers, Berthold and Alexander joined George's intellectual and personal circle in 1923. George's "Secret Germany" was a *Reich des Geistes*, ruled by great male intellects bonded by enduring love of one another's literary achievement and physical beauty. So suited to their aristocratic outlook and educational opportunities, this myth inspired the Stauffenberg brothers to "dedicate

their lives to the service of the nation," in which they "claimed, as of right, a place in the first rank" (p. 20). Hoffmann concedes that, since "they often talked in exactly the same terms as the Poet" (p. 37), Hitler and the Nazis appeared to fit, if uncomfortably, George's vision of a "secret" but genuine Germany opposed to the "external reality" that was Weimar. Though he rejected a public role in the new regime and disdained the more plebeian aspects of the Nazi appeal, George, repeatedly and unnecessarily referred to as the "Master" by Hoffmann, welcomed the Nazi regime in 1933: "for the first time" he was "hearing his views being echoed from outside his own circle" (pp. 66–67).

The Stauffenberg brothers shared George's equivocal attitude to National Socialism: they opposed it only when they realized that Hitler was not the harbinger of rule by intellectual giants like George and themselves and that his policies entailed the destruction of both "secret" Germany and actual Germany. Claus supported Hitler's run for the presidency against the "reactionary" Hindenburg and was "enthusiastic" about Hitler's appointment as chancellor (p. 69). He followed Hitler along the path of rearmament and German expansion and did not object to the internal revolution that the Nazis were implementing prior to the war. His skepticism was inspired rather by the regime's "vulgar manifestations" (p. 77): an allegation in *Der Stürmer* that Stefan George's poetry represented "Jewish Dadaism" (p. 77); the brutality of Nazi thugs on *Kristallnacht* (p. 105); and the petty bourgeois origins of Hitler and his cronies (pp. 77–78, 110). Though committed to the special status of the army in German society, Stauffenberg applauded the Röhm purge, which claimed as victims two fellow officers, Schleicher and von Bredow. His "shock and dismay" (p. 87) at SS intrigues against Blomberg and Fritsch dissipated quickly enough with the news of the *Anschluss*.

George had loathed modern, urban culture, which he perceived to be propagated in part by that "world of ants," the United States, a sentiment shared by Berthold von Stauffenberg (p. 21). Right-wing politics during the Weimar period associated Jews with urban culture. Hoffmann confronts the issue: he concludes that anti-Semitism "was . . . clearly a part of the mental furniture of the Master's circle" (p. 66). He finds no evidence of anti-Semitism in their personal relationships during the formative years of the Stauffenberg brothers, but is unwilling to conclude that there was an "absence of prejudice" (p. 27). Hoffmann notes Berthold von Stauffenberg's statement under interrogation in 1944 that Berthold and brother Claus had originally approved of the "racial principle" (p. 90). Even though they were concerned by the methods with which the Nazis implemented anti-Semitic measures, Claus and Berthold had supported expelling non-German Jews and limiting perceived Jewish control of certain professions. Hoffmann offers no analysis as to what role, if any, brother Alexander's marriage to a converted Jew played in Claus's conception of the "Jewish problem."

Claus von Stauffenberg's decision to turn against Hitler was inspired less by his opposition to National Socialist policies than by his realization that they threatened the independence and exclusivity of his "fatherland," the German army officer corps. Inadequate military preparations and profound tactical and strategic blunders had initially aroused Stauffenberg's concern and contempt; he was also bothered by the regime's increasing taste for mass murder, of which, as a general staff officer, he was probably more aware and earlier than Hoffmann (pp. 132–33) is willing to concede. Until 1942, however, Stauffenberg believed that the war served "the high aim of self-preservation," and was impressed by Hitler's "flair for military matters" (p. 132). As late as January 1942, he defended Hitler's assumption of supreme command of the Wehrmacht as appropriate to the military circumstances. Approached by von Moltke in the autumn of 1941, Stauffenberg refused to join a plot to overthrow the regime until the war against the "Bolsheviks" was won.

Hoffmann attributes Stauffenberg's decision to join the conspiracy in early 1942 to a moral response to his increasing awareness of the murder of the Jews and brutal treatment of other peoples in the occupied USSR (pp. 151, 226). Since such policies were a feature of the 1941 campaign, it is difficult to determine whether Stauffenberg's increasingly reckless expressions of opposition were, as Hoffmann argues, long-held convictions boiling over in frustration or rather a reevaluation of the future in view of the military crisis in the winter of 1942.

Based on writings attributed to Stauffenberg as well as postwar accounts, Hoffmann argues convincingly that his hero had come to believe that moral imperatives required that Hitler be overthrown. Representing the "rule of the inferior and the corrupt," Hitler had perverted the "largely correct" ideas of National Socialism, brought Germany misery and besmirched her good name. A post-Nazi regime must restore the rule of law, basic individual freedoms, and, through a just peace, Germany's honor among nations. It must halt the persecution of minorities in Germany and punish those who perpetrated crimes in her name. Weimar democracy could not be revived, however. In Stauffenberg's state, citizens would be represented by local dignitaries and national leaders on the basis of profession, although the historical achievements of the nobility were to be taken into consideration. The propertied classes would create a healthy social order based on aristocratic-rural values. Large landowners would voluntarily divide up their estates; entrepreneurs would set comfortable wage and living standards. Wage earners must realize that they could not be "exempted from the naturally dominant laws of the economy," but the state must intervene when the "accumulation of capital was in conflict with the protection of the laborers' health and ability to work" (p. 211). In foreign policy, a postwar Germany must join with other "white nations" in limiting Japanese expansion. As both its "repository" and its most effective pillar, the army, as a separate institution, would lead

the nation. Without explicitly so stating, Hoffmann concedes that such politically naive musings were unlikely to have elicited much support from the "common" people.

Having decided that Hitler must be removed, Stauffenberg worked energetically toward this end. After his return to the general staff in September 1943, he came into contact with various factions of the resistance, from Social Democrat Julius Leber to archconservative Johannes Popitz. A man of action, he committed himself to assassination at this time and was prepared, despite his battle-inflicted disability, to carry it out personally (p. 226). The undeniable moral imperative that moved him to act regardless of result is what remains most admirable about Stauffenberg. One may wince at his notion, expressed in 1944 in a "personal oath," that the "German has powers which designate him to lead the community of occidental nations towards a more beautiful life." Nor should one accept Hoffmann's inference that it was Stauffenberg's act which conferred legitimacy upon "all acts of resistance to the criminal regime" (p. 285). After the Normandy invasion, however, Stauffenberg no longer expected his coup plan to succeed. He doubted that either he or his beloved officer corps would survive the catastrophe and assumed that posterity would view him as a traitor. Yet Stauffenberg demonstrated through the assassination attempt that the "other Germany" was serious about its opposition; he thus laid the groundwork for the postwar moral stature of the conservative resistance.

Hoffmann's praise for the inspiration of the poet George on the man of action, Stauffenberg, is surely misplaced, however. Was not Hitler, perhaps, the twisted realization of George's dream of elitist, genius rule? Was not the inspiration of the poet a key factor that inspired Stauffenberg to serve so effectively the brutal and criminal regime that he only later found the resolve to overthrow? Stauffenberg had shared many of the goals that the Nazis had for Germany: destruction of Weimar and its democratic forms, expansion of the armed forces, shredding the Versailles Treaty, removing Jewish "influence" from German society, and restoration of Germany as the dominant power in Europe. Hoffmann's biography leaves his readers to wonder, however, whether his hero ever acknowledged his own tragic error in supporting the underlying assumptions that the Nazis brought to their regime in Germany. By endowing Stauffenberg with a virtually innate superiority, Hoffmann unwittingly denies him the credit for the personal moral and ethical work necessary to recognize and to attempt to redress the sins of the past. Can it be that Hoffmann's puzzling embrace of a principle of human inequality blinds him to the connection between the dream that George envisioned and the nightmare that Hitler represented?

PETER BLACK

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY