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Germany: From Modernization Model to Comparative Research
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Although there is not a single professorial chair at a Historical Institute of a German University concentrating explicitly with Victorian Studies, there exist a number of German institutions that have come to foster German research on British history in general and the Victorian epoch in particular. The reason for this significant development is to be seen both in institutional changes in post-1945 German historiography and in certain methodological trends since the 1980s.

One of the most important factors, leading to a growing interest in British and Commonwealth History and to an intensified exchange between historians in both countries, was the foundation of the German Historical Institute in London in 1976, following the foundation of a similar Institute in Paris in 1964. Both stood in the tradition of the oldest German Historical Institute abroad, which was founded in Rome in 1888 as the Royal Prussian Historical Institute. Since 1976 the GHI in London has served as a mediator between British and German scientific communities. Numerous conferences, special publication series and periodicals, many of them bi-lingual, an annual Lecture and a well established Research Prize as well as a growing number of German doctoral students, postdoctoral and senior researchers who have profited from the Institute in terms of funding and the publication of research results underline the fundamental role of the Institute. The GHI has also become crucial in training scholars who had come to work in London for a longer period and had joined the scientific staff of the institute, normally working on their German habilitation, and later returned to Germany to continue their academic careers. That institutional background helps to explain why, from the early 1980s onwards, a growing number of professional university historians in Germany focused on British history topics both in their research and in teaching.¹

In addition and often in close co-operation with the GHI, two other research institutions with a particular profile in research on modern British history and Victorian studies deserve attention. The ‘Arbeitskreis Deutsche England Forschung’, founded in 1981, organizes annual conferences and focuses on Anglo-German relations, on the history of Britain and the Commonwealth and has developed a special forum for young researchers.² Since 2004 an annual Prize is awarded to the best doctoral thesis in the field of British History and
the history of Anglo-German relations. Numerous publications have concentrated on Victorian Britain since the foundation of this research cluster. In addition there is an ‘Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society’, established in 1973, concentrating mainly on the interaction between and exchange of economic, political and social knowledge between Britain and Germany. More important with regard to Victorian studies is the ‘Prince Albert Association’. Focusing on the research of Anglo-German relations with particular reference to Coburg in the nineteenth century, the Association has published many bilingual conference volumes in a special series.

The other major factor is, to a certain degree at least, inseparable from this institutional infrastructure. Under its Director Wolfgang J. Mommsen, the GHI became, from the 1980s onwards, a major forum to test and discuss comparative analyses, mainly concentrating on comparisons between Britain and Germany in the long nineteenth century. The controversial discussion of the German ‘Sonderweg’ [peculiar path], which gained new momentum with the publication of Geoff Eley’s and David Blackburn’s book on ‘Peculiarities in German History’, from the early 1980s onwards underlined the necessity to overcome a mere German view of modern German history. Only by systematic comparisons between two or more cases would it be possible to identity, if not the German special path to modernity, then at least the political, socio-economic and cultural peculiarities in post-1800 German history. These controversial discussions clearly intensified German historians’ interest in a closer analysis of Victorian society and a critical deconstruction of some of its myths that had coined so many historiographic stereotypes of Anglo-German perceptions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Thus a solid infrastructure and innovative methodological trends combined. The result was a whole range of works which looked at Victorian Britain and Germany as different poles of modernization. These impulses have clearly stimulated German interest in the Victorian period as a point of reference in comparative analyses. In addition to views of Victorian Britain as a breeding ground for cultural modernity and the problem of the three ‘British’ nations in the nineteenth century, much attention has been given to comparative analyses of industrial societies and modernization processes in Germany and Britain since the first half of the nineteenth century. Reflecting the dominance of social history in the 1980s many studies focused on the different paths towards welfare state structures, modern trade unions and elite formation in both societies. Mirroring the different thematic fields of the ‘Sonderweg’ debate, other research projects have concen-
trated on the differences between German and British parliamentary
cultures after 1815 and the meaning of political and constitutional
reforms in both societies. In recent years a new trend away from
strictly social and political-constitutional comparative analyses towards
the interaction of politics and religion, historiographic traditions and
juridical cultures has developed.

Another important trend, thematically and often conceptually
connected with the comparative approach, can be seen in German
studies on perceptions of Germany in Victorian Britain and of British
views on nineteenth-century Germany. In more recent times this has
led to a growing interest in processes of exchange and experience of
otherness, for instance the meaning of Britain as a place of political
exile for Germans since the nineteenth-century revolutions.

Apart from these themes, which have a clearly comparative and
transfer-analytical profile, a number of other research fields can be
identified which reflect a strong and still growing interest of German
historians in Victorian Britain. Six of these fields deserve special
attention, since they allow a more representative view of the state of
German research on Victorian Britain: (I) Looking at international rela-
tions, German research has tended to concentrate on the continental
meaning of the balance of power problem and the role of Germany’s
nation-state-building in this context. More recently the question of
the relation between the public and foreign policy decision-making
in Britain, but also the peculiarities of the transatlantic relation has
attracted attention. (II) Britain’s role as an imperial power and the
question of continuity and discontinuity of the British Empire is a major
theme in German historiography on Victorian Britain. (III) Given the
historic relations between German dynasties and the British monarchy,
there is an established field of research on Prince Albert, the Coburg
background and Albert’s role in British cultural life, but also on the
personality of Victoria herself. (IV) Reflecting the main trends since
the 1970s there is a strong cluster of social historical analyses, focusing
on key concepts such as ‘property’ and ‘philanthropy’, but also on the
poor and British society being confronted with mass immigration and
integration since the end of the nineteenth century. (V) Given
the meaning of British parliamentary culture and the image of British
Liberalism for many contemporary German authors in the nineteenth
century, and against the background of the dominating paradigm of an
apparent British pioneer in terms of political institutions and parties
and a German late-comer, German historians have concentrated on a
more refined and differentiated view of these phenomena, often with
a clearly comparative profile. (VI) Lastly, there has not only been an

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interest in the Great Exhibition, the special relation between science and the state in Britain, and the development of British historiography in the Victorian epoch, but also a strong influence of culturalist approaches in German studies of Victorian Britain, based on a wide range of empirical research ranging from the politics of history and the cultures of international relations to the meaning of urban space and the culture of juridical experiences in Victorian Britain.

This overview which could – in a symptomatic rather than a systematic tour d’horizon – only focus on the main research trends since 1980, underlines how Victorian Britain has developed into a very dynamic and important field of historical research in Germany. Clearly catalyzed, if not initiated, by the controversy over a German ‘Sonderweg’ since the nineteenth century and the discussion about apparent ‘pioneers’ and ‘latecomers’ in the modernization-process, many of the German works on Victorian Britain explicitly or implicitly operate from a comparative angle. However, the premise is no longer an antagonistic model of German failures and British successes, but rather a stimulating reflection of different paths of historical experience and their historical determinants.

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Endnotes
1. See www.ghil.co.uk The GHI publishes, in regular intervals, both a Bulletin and a systematic bibliography of German works on British and Commonwealth History: Research on British History in the Federal Republic of Germany, a Systematic Bibliography.
2. See www.adef-britishstudies.de
3. See www.agf.org.uk
4. See www.uni-bayreuth.de/departments/Prinz-Albert-Gesellschaft/prinz.htm
Roundtable


16. Wolfgang Mock, Imperiale Herrschaft und nationales Interesse. 'Constructive Imperialism' oder Freihandel in Großbritannien vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982);


Identity and Reception. Polish Research on Victorian Art and Art Theory

Piotr Juszkiewicz

In Poland, the interest in the art and culture of the Victorian age became particularly intense in two distinct periods. It appeared for the first time at the turn of the twentieth century, often called by Polish cultural historians the ‘Young Poland’ period; for the second, after 1989 and in the following decades of regained political independence. In both cases, British culture attracted, or has been attracting, much attention in reference to the local problematic of cultural and national identity.

The age of ‘Young Poland’, perhaps one of the most interesting periods in the whole history of Polish culture, has been usually situated between the late 1890s and 1918. In common, to some degree, with other European countries, those three decades began with a critique of positivism, which gradually evolved toward an atmosphere of melancholy, scepticism, and metaphysical speculation. Then ‘Young Poland’ turned to an ideology of direct action placed in the context of the struggle for independence and surfacing social antagonisms. Consequently, while the main mentor of the first phase was Schopenhauer, in the latter stage he was succeeded by Nietzsche, Bergson, and Marx. In art, the evolution went from realism and naturalism to symbolism, and then to early expressionism.

Within such an artistic field, Polish artists, art theorists, and critics attempted to reconcile the autonomy of the work of art with its social appeal, particularly as regards its specific national character in the times of the country’s political non-existence. Also for that reason, the interest in British literature and art at that time became more intense than before, resulting in a number of translations of literary, theoretical, and critical texts from English into Polish, including those by John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and William Morris.1 According to Bozena