

- 4 L. A. Pérez Jr. (ed.), *Impressions of Cuba in the Nineteenth Century. The Travel Diary of Joseph J. Dimock*, Wilmington 1998, S. 95.

Roger Chickering: Karl Lamprecht. Das Leben eines deutschen Historikers (1856–1915). Aus dem amerikanischen Englisch übersetzt von Sabine vom Bruch und Roger Chickering, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2021, 689 S.

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This book begins with a short paragraph about no less than four men who went by the name of Karl Lamprecht in the small town of Jessen in the nineteenth century, and thus aims to attune the reader to the difficulties of the genre of scholarly biography, which often succumbs to the fallacy of a coherent life along theoretical insights that were, after all, only found in adulthood. In contrast to such projections of later insights, for which scholars become famous, onto the entire lifespan, Roger Chickering, who taught at Georgetown University for a long time, emphasises in his Lamprecht biography the influence of the father and the older brother, who died early in a diphtheria epidemic. From here, the author unfolds a panorama of the development of Germany and its historiography between the 1870s and the First World War, in which he places one of the best-known and most controversial scholars, whose success and failure he tries to

make sense of precisely on the basis of the early influence of parental claims. Chickering sees the persistent striving to impress parents as the key to why the pastor's son, despite sharing so many characteristics with his colleagues, stands out conspicuously among the historians of his generation.

Lamprecht is a particularly rewarding object for this kind of approach, for the material on his life and work, as well as regular self-reflections, flow abundantly. The fact that he was driven by irrepressible energy, wrote a multi-volume German cultural history on his own and inspired and co-authored several world histories, that he was a successful academic organiser and was not satisfied with the narrowed standard of the discipline in terms of political history and national history, got on the nerves of his colleagues and led him into all kinds of quarrels, which sometimes came across as methodological disputes that are still of interest today and sometimes as the lowest intrigue against his doctoral students. On the other hand, his reputation abroad was considerable and his influence on the institutionalisation of neighbouring subjects (for example, at the Kiel Institute of World Economics, the Hamburg and Frankfurt reflections on new types of universities more strongly oriented towards contemporary problems) was considerable.

His sense of mission as an innovator of historical science was by no means underdeveloped, and it earned him a wide variety of support for his successful attempt to establish a university institute for cultural and universal history that was truly up to the tasks of a global-historical perspective, along with the appropriate interdisciplinary environment.

He recognised with great clarity the two central questions that historians had to face at the beginning of the 20th century: how could one open up methodologically in a suitable way to reflect the gradual democratisation of societies whose fate would no longer be decided by the rulers alone, and how should one historically record and describe the competition of all societies (and not only the Western ones) for the appropriate ways of dealing with the global interdependence that had become indissoluble in the meantime? His answers were sometimes crude and in many places written down on the basis of hastily compiled insights of other authors. This has led many a posterity to condemn him as having unnecessarily damaged the relevant cause. Social history, which dominated especially in the 1970s and 1980s in West Germany (the so-called Bielefeld school), saw itself better equipped with its appeal to Max Weber and thought relatively little of Lamprecht.

However, it is debatable whether Lamprecht's errors of caution, his still underdeveloped access to sources for global historical considerations and his enormous energy, which probably had an intimidating effect on some of his contemporaries, are sufficient to understand why he was so consistently marginalised in Germany. First, it is striking that his opponents formed strange coalitions to cut Lamprecht off from having a greater influence on the discipline as a whole. Conservative historian Georg von Below and liberal sociologist Max Weber would not normally be thought to be in the same camp, but they were surprisingly united in their attacks on Lamprecht. Others joined in, albeit far less fervently, as the present volume shows in two central chap-

ters over 100 pages under the telling titles „For God's sake, just no more of it!“ (in the American original even more hinting at the brutal tone of the polemics: „Axes and Knives“) and „Banishment“ provide ample evidence. Lamprecht obviously stood in the way of both a continuation of traditional event-oriented and narrative rather than analytical political history and an opening up of historical science to (later classified as sociological) theorising. It was not by chance that Weber saw himself as a universal historian for some time before he conceptually separated his field and thus pointed the way to a separation of history and sociology.

A second dimension can be assumed, which has more to do with the persistence of regional academic cultures within the German Empire and their struggle for interpretive hegemony. It was no coincidence that many of Lamprecht's opponents were at home in Germany's south-west, while at the Saxon University of Leipzig, the circle supporting Lamprecht (characterised by Chickering as the „Positivistenkränzchen“) could not be divided.¹ There was more than local sociability and consideration at play here, as Chickering's cleverly chosen name suggests. The members of this intellectual circle, who did not even all belong to the same generation, were guided by similar ambitions to grasp the newly emerging global interconnectedness for their respective disciplines: Friedrich Ratzel as a human geographer, Wilhelm Wundt as an anthropologist and Lamprecht with his world history – inspired by their colleagues in the natural sciences and much further removed from normative assumptions about the superiority of Europe and its overseas settlers than the

mainstream of the German humanities and social sciences.

Positivism here was less an elaborate methodology than a willingness to engage in collecting new data from all corners of the world and preparing it for comparison. Lamprecht brought to this endeavour an openness to historical change. At a time, however, when area studies was only just emerging and in many places initially pursued colonial studies, the empirical basis for such a global-historical programme was more than thin. Lamprecht answered the problem only partially in his historical analyses, but mainly with his planning of a new science organisation and new infrastructure for his discipline inspired by experiences made in the natural sciences: first of all, the establishment of a library that provided sources and secondary literature from and about all parts of the world, secondly, the recruitment of young scholars from East Asia, Western Europe and America to broaden the knowledge base and to research with the people from the region instead solely about them. His own research trips, including the one he undertook across the USA, ended with the discovery that there might be greater historical dynamic elsewhere and that this resulted from greater openness to immigration and the foreign in general. This observation "in the field" culminated in the idea that in the ongoing and ever increasing competition between nations, the one that was most willing to learn from others was probably ahead. This positivism was clearly less normative than the attitude of many of Lamprecht's colleagues, who were convinced of the historical superiority of their own culture.

It is not surprising that these points of contention were not settled with his death, but resurfaced again and again when principles of a renewed global history had to be negotiated. Perhaps it was not so much a question of dilettantism versus professionalism, but rather of the opposition between normativity and analytical openness. In any case, the idea remained that Lamprecht had not only been guilty of his own misfortune, but had also done lasting damage to the good cause of improving historical scholarship. While in the GDR it was above all Hans Schleier who had endeavoured to rediscover Lamprecht (as an „alternative to Ranke“²), the quarantine in the Federal Republic was, with exceptions such as Luise Schorn-Schütte³, highly effective.

It was into this climate that Roger Chickering published the American original of his Lamprecht biography in 1993⁴ and contributed enormously to the objectification of the debate by making people aware of the diversity of Lamprecht's initiatives in the first place and actually describing them in a way that is saturated with sources. The three-part division of his book reflects this well: "the becoming of the historian" is followed by „the destruction of the historian“, but then an equally long section under the title "the historian lives on". The often polemical controversy between social and cultural historians was slowly dying down in 1993 and more and more works were discovering German precursors of a new cultural history.⁵ At the same time, the rise of global history began, albeit in the Federal Republic in the gesture of a new beginning that almost exclusively followed foreign, above all Anglo-Saxon, models.⁶ The fact that Lamprecht

had already formulated many of the new ideas before 1914 and that, based on his plans, the teaching and research of world-historical contexts remained a trademark of Leipzig University for a century and under different political auspices was conceded, but hardly examined for its consequences. It is only with difficulty that the new global history is freeing itself from the myth of its own rootlessness.⁷

Almost three decades after the first edition, the German translation of Chickering's excellent biography of the enfant terrible of German historiography is now available. New sources from the estate, which was thought to have been destroyed during the war, have now surfaced, but the author gives weighty reasons for saying that there is nothing lurking in it that would force him to deviate from his earlier judgements. This also has to do with the fact that the hyperactive Lamprecht often entrusted his ideas to more than one addressee – thanks to the early use of the typewriter.

Chickering has succeeded in writing a captivating biography that is a fascinating example of the acceleration of scholarly life even before the First World War and invites us to recognise the parallels to problematic situations with which we struggle today. One can only be grateful to the translator, the publisher and the Humboldt Foundation that this important book is finally available in German.

Notes

- 1 R. Chickering, *Das Leipziger Positivistenkranzchen um die Jahrhundertwende*, in: G. Hübinger/R. vom Bruch/F. W. Graf (eds.), *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900*. Bd. 2: *Idealismus und Positivismus*, Stuttgart 1997, pp. 227–245.
- 2 K. Lamprecht, *Alternative zu Ranke. Schriften zur Geschichtstheorie*. Hrsg. und mit einem Es-

say: *Der Kulturhistoriker Karl Lamprecht, der „Methodenstreit“ und die Folgen* von H. Schleier, Leipzig 1988.

- 3 L. Schorn-Schütte, *Karl Lamprecht. Kulturgeschichtsschreibung zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik*, Göttingen 1984. See also her much more recent publication of Lamprecht's correspondence with Bernheim and Pirenne: L. Schorn-Schütte/M. Ogrin (eds.), „Über das eigentliche Arbeitsgebiet der Geschichte“. *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Lamprecht und Ernst Bernheim sowie zwischen Karl Lamprecht und Henri Pirenne 1878–1915*, bearb. von M.-E. Grüter, C. Beisswinger und G. Warland, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2017.
- 4 R. Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht. A German Academic Life (1856–1915)*, New Jersey 1993.
- 5 C. Conrad/M. Kessel, *Kultur & Geschichte. Neue Einblicke in eine alte Beziehung*, Stuttgart 1998; U. Daniel, *Kompodium Kulturgeschichte. Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter*, Frankfurt am Main 2001; H. Schleier, *Geschichte der deutschen Kulturgeschichtsschreibung*, Waltrop 2002, 2 vols; M. Maurer, *Eberhard Gothein (1853–1923). Leben und Werk zwischen Kulturgeschichte und Nationalökonomie*, Köln 2007.
- 6 J. Osterhammel, *Global History in a National Context. The Case of Germany*, in: P. Vries (ed.), *Global History*, Innsbruck 2009, S. 40–58.
- 7 K. Naumann, *Laboratorien der Weltgeschichtsschreibung. Lehre und Forschung an den Universitäten Chicago, Columbia und Harvard 1918 bis 1968*, Göttingen 2018.