
The history of the nation and national identification as a field of research in German historiography has boomed in recent years. As long ago as 1995, Dieter Langewiesche, writing a research report for the journal Neue Politische Literatur, pointed out that there were so many new publications on this subject that ‘it is no longer possible to have an overview’. Inspired by Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, many historians have focused on the cultural dimensions of nation and nationalism, with particular emphasis on the history of the nineteenth century and imperial Germany. Alon Confino’s study of relations between national, regional, and local identity in Württemberg from 1871 to 1918 is thus part of a broader movement in research which examines the interplay and mutual relationship between national identity and other forms of identification. In two clearly separate sections Confino looks at how, after the founding of the first German national state in 1871, something like a broad national identity, reconciling regional with national memory, emerged in the previously independent state of Württemberg. In the first part he analyses the attempt by the National Liberals to establish the celebration of Sedan Day on 2 September as a national ritual to commemorate the war of 1870-1 in south German Württemberg. This memory emphasized Prussia’s part in the unification of Germany and therefore, as Confino points out, excluded Catholics, Württemberg particularists, and Social Democrats from the idea of the nation. The attempts by Württemberg liberals to establish Sedan Day as the permanent centre-piece of a national memory had a strong party-political character, and ultimately failed. In the second part of his book, Confino contrasts their efforts with the Heimat movement that was emerging at the end of the nineteenth century. Combining local with national identification, it built up a comprehensive understanding of nation that transcended party politics. In contrast to a centralist and elitist image of the nation, the Heimat movement emphasized the uniqueness of local identity, but it always embedded it in the framework of a broader, ‘German’ feeling of home and thus reconciled it with the national idea.
Taking the example of Württemberg Confino, with a real feel for the change from a regional to a national perspective, graphically presents essential elements of a problem addressed by recent German research, namely that of establishing a national identity in the German Kaiserreich after 1871. This is true in particular of his analysis of the *Heimat* movement, which established itself in southern Germany from the 1890s through a dense network of local heritage and tourism associations and museums of local history. The detailed iconographic analysis of the world of images of the *Heimat* movement, which Confino explores in a lengthy chapter with 300 illustrations, is particularly instructive. The stereotyped pictures found in *Heimat* books, on postcards and tourist posters, in school books and in museums of local history, reflected an idealized image of a rural or small-town life that largely denied the industrial reality of modern Germany. The traditionalist visions of landscape and nature put about by the *Heimat* movement, however, were combined with a thoroughly modern commitment to developing a tourist industry directed primarily at ‘discovering’ the ‘national *Heimat*. Confino therefore concludes: ‘Heimat thus both glorified the past and celebrated modernity’ (p. 121).

These parts of Confino’s book are especially convincing. They display a methodologically astute, differentiated argument which combines the regional peculiarities of Württemberg with national developments. Yet despite Confino’s passionate plea for more attention to be paid to the history of everyday life, his account of the local basis of the *Heimat* movement is astonishingly lacking in specificity: ‘The Heimat movement, in contrast [to the old history associations of the educated middle classes] was a wide civic movement of socially and professionally varied groups’ (p. 105). Here, and in a few other places, the reader misses the vividness with which, in the first part of the book, for example, Confino describes the local rituals of Sedan Day celebrations, strongly modelled on the festive traditions of the nineteenth-century liberal national movement.

Less convincing, however, is the argument with which Confino identifies the development of Sedan Day celebrations with the political fate of the liberal Protestant notables. He sees them as crucial to the rise and fall of the Sedan cult in Württemberg (for example, pp. 73-93). In doing so Confino is, quite correctly, rejecting the image of a rather passive bourgeoisie which subscribed to conservative and
monarchist nationalism, as used to be put forward by some defend-
ers of the *Sonderweg* thesis. Yet he himself has to admit that the de-
fenders of Sedan Day in the ‘small and medium-sized communities’
of Württemberg included members of the Protestant petty bour-
geoisie as well as the liberal bourgeoisie (p. 83). In his interpreta-
tion, however, they appear merely as ‘fellow travellers’ of the real bour-
geoisie elite that set the tone, and they are not attributed with any inde-
pendent input in shaping and keeping up Sedan Day festivities. Yet
it was the ex-servicemen’s associations, largely petty bourgeois in
character, that, with the liberal city governments, kept the public cel-
brations of Sedan Day alive until the turn of the century. This is true
at least for those regions of western, northern, and central Germany
that the reviewer and other historians have investigated in their stud-
ies of the development of the Sedan cult (see, among others, Ute
der französischen Zeit bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges (1806-1918)*,

In the light of this research, the author’s account of the decline of
Sedan Day celebrations in the 1890s is very problematic. Confino ties
it closely to the bourgeois liberal elite’s loss of power in Württemberg
in the 1890s. But in other parts of Germany that period, after the end
of the *Kulturkampf* and the Anti-Socialist Laws, witnessed a reinte-
gration of Catholics and workers in the national festive culture. Also
particularist tendencies, for example in Bavaria, seem to have
deployed. In the case of Sedan Day, this development was expressed
in the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the battle which took
place throughout Germany on 2 September 1895 and attracted gen-
ue public interest. These 1895 celebrations, which Confino does not
mention at all, can certainly be seen as evidence that popular interest
in the Sedan cult had not waned at that time. It was foreign policy
considerations *vis-à-vis* France in 1900 related to the joint military
action in China that, combined with the change of generation in the
ex-servicemen’s associations, put an end to the celebrations of Sedan
Day as a supra-regional, national festival around the turn of the cen-
tury.

On the whole, one could have wished that Confino had taken the
comment about the ‘ambiguous and often contradictory meanings’ of
‘nationhood’ at the beginning of his book (p. 3) more seriously in his
own interpretation. This weakness in an otherwise extremely stimulating, and in many respects methodologically innovative study may partly be attributable to the fact that he hardly takes account of the works that have been published in Germany since 1990. Thus this book illustrates the fundamental problem of keeping up with a constantly changing research landscape from a distance. Some of the older positions which Confino justifiably criticizes have already been overtaken by more recent work.

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