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At Home In The Commune: Liberals In The Tyrol

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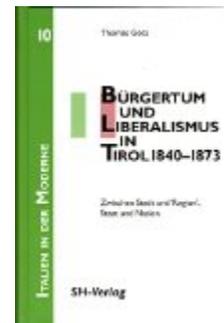
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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Thomas GÖtz. *Bürgertum und Liberalismus in Tirol 1840-1873. Zwischen Stadt und "Region", Staat und Nation*. Köln: SH-Verlag, 2001. 598 pp. EUR 68.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-89498-101-3.

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Published on HABSBURG (February, 2003)



At Home in the Commune: Liberals in the Tyrol

At Home in the Commune: Liberals in the Tyrol

Readers of HABSBURG will perhaps tolerate this reviewer's compulsion to note at the outset, some of the unintentional ironies that the appearance of this volume evokes. First of all, the title alone gives us pause for thought. As Goetz himself points out at the outset, Liberalism in Tyrol? Isn't that already a contradiction in terms? A second more general irony is that the two most impressive local studies to address issues relating to Liberalism in the Habsburg Monarchy that have appeared in the last few years – the volume under review here and Laurence Cole's study *Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland* [1] – are in fact regional studies involving that most illiberal province of all, the Tyrol. Third, is it not also ironic that Austrian liberalism has benefited from the scholarly attention of historians from everywhere but Austria? Certainly articles by Austrians here and there occasionally examine aspects of this subject, but where are the grand syntheses? Surely it must surprise reflective Austrians to learn that an historic phenomenon they have traditionally ignored should be considered a critical part of their history by foreigners from Germany to the United States to Japan?

Continuing in this tradition of foreign interventions, Thomas Götz, a German scholar situated in Regensburg, brings considerable erudition and methodological sophistication to his exhaustive study of the *Vormärz* roots and *Gründerzeit* triumphs of the liberal movement in

the Tyrol. Austrian scholarly neglect of liberalism – one might almost call it recalcitrance in the face of resurgent liberalism studies since the 1980s – has freed writers like Götz to some extent from having to engage with a significant Austrian historiography. Instead, Götz brings to this project a commanding knowledge of liberalism studies drawn from the histories of other nineteenth-century European states, particularly in Central Europe.

This is not a bad thing. The lack of a tradition of Austrian liberalism studies enables Götz to examine his Tyrolean subjects in a context that crosses present-day national borders and their historiographies. He is, at least, not handicapped by national tradition. In fact the question of what meanings to give to both the terms "nation" and "region" is the subject of considerable debate and political cleavage among his nineteenth-century subjects. In the particular case of the Tyrol, Goetz's work achieves even greater distinction than most in that it examines and compares the separate and occasionally intertwined phenomena of liberalism in both the Italian- and German-speaking regions. Not only is there far too little writing about liberalism in this part of the world to begin with, but there is no serious unified historiography that treats these two regions of the Tyrol comparatively. If this book helps to re-shape scholars' understanding of provincial liberalism in the Monarchy, it positively demands a sensible revision of the political historiography of nineteenth-century Tyrol.

The other subject of this book, the *Bürgertum*, can claim more historiographic interest in Austrian academic circles. Excellent local and regional studies of *Bürger* class formation, cultural values and social networks in several Austro-Hungarian cities and towns have significantly enriched our understanding of the social history of the Monarchy in the past twenty years. Still, Austrian scholars' unwillingness to link the rise of this new and self-conscious social milieu to a particular and important new brand of politics – liberalism – that existed at a national level as well as at a local or regional one is astonishing.

Götz himself focuses on the idea of the “long shadow of the state” (a phrase most famously invoked by Ernst Hanisch [2]) to explain why scholars find *Bürger* politics problematic. Viewing Austrian *Bürger* politics as perennially subservient to the interests of a powerful state and its far-reaching bureaucracy, many scholars assume that the *Bürgertum* never fully emancipated itself and failed to create a fully independent politics. Götz not only abandons this tired *Sonderweg* thesis for a refreshingly different story; he also makes the very emancipation of the *Bürgertum* from the State at mid century into a central part of his argument. When Goetz invokes the long shadow of the state, it is to narrate the complex ways in which the *Bürgertum* managed to free itself from a relationship of dependence and to forge an integrated movement independent of its sometime ally, the state bureaucracy.

If Austrian liberals particularly in the Tyrol appeared to have a close relationship with the central state it was because their agenda fit well with the secularizing and centralizing liberal vision for reorganizing the state. The Conservative majority that dominated the Tyrolean *Landtag* vigorously pursued a particularistic and narrowly Catholic vision for society. The liberals were forced to look to the State for allies to help them to realize their alternate visions.

But more importantly, provincial liberalism benefited from a third component of Austrian liberal policy, namely the establishment and the post-1862 reorganization of communal autonomy. It was, argues Goetz, the thwarted liberal institutions of communal autonomy established after 1848 (put into practice briefly under the Stadion constitution) along with the creation of Chambers of Commerce and a growing print media that facilitated the *Bürgertum*'s political emancipation from the state. Despite the abrogation of some of these institutions under neo absolutism, their original establishment

helped create a new political culture in Tyrolean towns that brought the economic *Bürgertum* to the fore and severely shortened the shadow of the state.

Götz's analysis ranges broadly but is most centered on an account of the integration and consolidation of different *Bürger* groups in the four cities of Bozen/Bolzano, Innsbruck, Rovereto, and Trient/Trento. The rising *Bürger* political culture in each of these four cities assumed different forms, particularly since local economies were oriented in different directions. *Bürger* interests help create *Bürger* political visions, and lent an ideological character to social or economic cleavages (state/nation, city/region, urban/rural, etc.)

The interregional commercial interests of the Italian-speaking regions for example, often made them open to *Zollverein* membership or to participation in parliamentary deliberations in Frankfurt and Vienna/Kremsier in 1848-49. Their desire to foster commercial links to the rest of Central Europe forced them to define their interests sub-regionally (in terms of a “Trentino”) against those articulated by the more parochial and conservative-dominated Tyrolean *Landtag* in Innsbruck. The latter forged a “Tyrolean” identity largely in opposition to Frankfurt or Vienna, one that rejected the nation for (or defined it in terms of) region. This common interest helped create a unified politics of liberalism in the South, as did the absence there of a *Kulturkampf*, the failed liberal struggle against conservative Catholicism that dominated events in the German Tyrol.

Both the creation of a constitution and the rise of a broader *Kulturkampf* in the 1860s brought the German and Italian liberal movements together for a brief moment during the liberal era. Both groups opposed the conservative Tyrolean *Landtag* and both sought to realize their particular agendas by strengthening the local commune and the central parliament in Vienna. The culmination of the process of integration came with the parliamentary elections of 1873. Up until this point the provincial diets had elected the central body. New legislation designed to free the Vienna parliament from political dependence on the conservative periphery (a periphery increasingly intent on bringing down the system by boycotting the central parliament) made conditions for a united liberal movement possible in the Tyrol. And in November of 1873, the liberals, both Germans and Italians, won a resounding victory. Together they sent a majority (eleven of eighteen) of Tyrol's deputies to Vienna.

This larger story of a *Bürgertum*'s assertion of its social independence and its regional political integration

constitutes the broader framework for Götz, but the real fulcrum of this book lies in his analysis of quotidian political culture in the four communes under examination. Götz's methodology here is not particularly new, but the rigorous consistency of his investigation combined with an unerring eye for the fascinating twists and turns of communal politics, produce a book that far surpasses a simple history of regional politics.

Götz in fact analyzes everything the archives will yield him, from familial relationships to economic ones, from the vagaries of local religious practice to the practice of a new liberal festival culture, from the changing exclusivities of local social, scientific and literary associations to the founding of regional newspapers, from the ups and downs of specific political careers to the creation and management of provincial networks. Nothing written (or drawn) on paper seems to have eluded the exhaustive grasp of this remarkable historian, and his inclusiveness occasionally exhausts the reader who tries desperately to remain focused on the larger issues for the more than five hundred pages it takes to traverse the period 1840-1873.

Götz, like the best practitioners of Austrian history today, tells a story that demonstrates how political cultures at the communal, regional, and state level became linked and integrated. His unrelenting focus on the commune enables him to assert new ways of understand-

ing both Tyrolean history and the history of the Empire. Those older traditions Götz critiques simply cannot stand up to the wealth of research and analysis he offers. And his regional, a-national approach to the history of the region makes his a model for historians of all parts of Central Europe in the nineteenth century.

Notes:

[1]. Laurence Cole, *Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland: Nationale Identität der deutschsprachigen Bevölkerung Tirols, 1860-1914* (Studien zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft 28, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2000). See the review by Reinhard Stauber on HABSBERG <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=213571005082565>.

[2]. Ernst Hanisch, *Der lange Schatten des Staates: Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Österreichische Geschichte, Herwig Wolfram ed., Wien: Ueberreuter, 1994).

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Citation: Pieter M. Judson. Review of Götz, Thomas, *Bürgerertum und Liberalismus in Tirol 1840-1873. Zwischen Stadt und "Region", Staat und Nation*. HABSBERG, H-Net Reviews. February, 2003.

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