

Georg G. Iggers, and James M. Powell, eds. *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990. xxii + 223 pp. Index. Hardcover, ISBN 0-8156-2469-7, \$45.00.

Syracuse University and the American Historical Association sponsored an international conference on Leopold von Ranke in 1986, the centennial of the great German historian's death. This book, consisting of an introduction and fourteen essays written by as many authors, grew out of that conference.

The four chapters that make up Part One place Ranke and his research methods in historical perspective. The five chapters that comprise Part Two deal with Ranke as an historian and teacher. The authors of the five chapters in Part Three evaluate Ranke's influence on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American historiography.

Ranke (b. 1795) received his training at the University of Leipzig and spent most of his career at the University of Berlin. As the authors point out, the name Ranke remains associated above all with his historical approach: *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (recount things as they actually occurred). Ranke's insistence on the use of written primary source materials and his rigorous critiques of those sources were perhaps his most important contributions to research methodology. In that respect, Ranke was a product of an era that revered scientific method, especially in the emerging German research universities.

By the same token, Ranke's "scientific" approach helped establish history as a university subject. The author of the book's first essay, Donald R. Kelley, discusses how "the rise of the new [empirical] science in the seventeenth century" had led to the strong belief that "it was the special destiny of Western civilization to bring myth to an end," to "erase cultural memory," and "to make history irrelevant" (pp. 3-4). Ranke countered those notions by professionalizing history and making it into a serious academic subject that included both historical research and the teaching of history within the universities.

The authors agree on Ranke's key role in establishing history in the university curriculum, but they disagree on how he accomplished that feat. For example, several authors dispute the idea, held by many later historians, that Ranke, together with Wilhelm von Humboldt, "forged a new vision of historicism that broke sharply with the . . . Enlightenment." Though "[t]his interpretation . . . provides consolation to those historians and humanists convinced of the incompatibility between the sciences and the humanities," it is false because, first, not all Enlightenment science was positivist, and second, because nineteenth-century historians, Ranke among them, did not employ the Enlightenment "model of science to establish and authorize its [their] identity" (pp. 21-22).

British author Peter Burke writes persuasively that social history roaches employed during the eighteenth century were "cut off" by deism, and "had to wait—in Germany at least—till the late twentieth century for legitimization" (p. 42). Rudolf Vierhaus argues further that critical writing emerged in the eighteenth century from "a complementary sense of theology and jurisprudence to an independent, expanding, and secularized scientific discipline." Vierhaus believes that history came into its own in the nineteenth century, "shaped in pre-democratic and pre-industrial Germany under the impact of idealistic philosophy and romantic culture." He credits Ranke with transferring "history to the stage." In this sense, he was successful, partly because he wrote political history, which has since become the dominant form of history writing. Ranke's use of the terms "dramatic" (pp. 66-68). Hence, for Vierhaus, Ranke's success in establishing history in the university curriculum resulted not from adherence to any scientific model, but rather from the dramatic nature of his writing and the extraordinarily literary quality of his writing.

Several chapters in the book take up the interrelated issues of Ranke's career, the scope of his subject matter, and his interpretations. For source material, Ranke relied heavily on the *relazioni*, a collection of official dispatches written by Venetian diplomatic ambassadors. Gino Benzoni points out that the *relazioni* are not merely dry, factual accounts, but rather documents carefully worded by a cultural elite that were intended as a literary form. Indeed, he believes that, "[i]n the final analysis, the *relazioni* say only what the [Venetian] Senate permits to be said" (p. 57).

Another author, Ugo Tucci, states that "Ranke's evolution . . . would have followed a different path had it not been for the wide availability of Venetian documents and their distinctive features" (p. 107).

As for the scope of his subject matter, Ranke lectured and wrote about national history throughout his long career. He considered the state more continuous than "society" and other "revolutionary" forces and therefore a more suitable subject for historians. However, he completed neither a comprehensive history of his native Germany nor a "world" history, despite his belief in the possibility of "universal" history. Instead, mostly he wrote histories of various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European nations. Ultimately, however, for Ranke, the "foundation of homogeneous nation-states . . . began with the French Revolution and reached its climax with the unification of Italy and Germany" (p. 125), especially Otto von Bismarck's Imperial Germany in the 1870s and 1880s. Taken as a whole, Ranke's scope remained thoroughly European.

As a deeply religious Lutheran, Ranke held definite views about historians as interpreters of knowledge. For him, " . . . the historian's task is the assessment of facts, whereas . . . Divine Providence is responsible for imparting a broad significance to all occurrences." For that reason, "Ranke distrusted the philosophy of history," and "acted" instead, "as a theological historian" (pp. 46-47). He viewed state and ecclesiastical history as inseparable. Perhaps his greatest scholarly achievement was his analysis of theological doctrines in "the context of the Reformation," and the church movement in "the context of German and imperial politics in the first half of the sixteenth century" (p. 95). In the end, despite the limitations of his sources and methods, Ranke was "in many cases" able to present "a relatively unbiased portrayal of the history of interrelated states and peoples . . . , as long as he did not deal with the rebellious lower strata of the people" (pp. 114-115).

Clearly, Ranke was a giant among historians, but he may have influenced historiography even more through his role as a professor at the University of Berlin, where he taught large numbers of students, than through his scholarly work. The authors believe that Ranke's critical methods for the evaluation of source material, which collectively represent

most enduring legacy, were probably passed on largely through his university seminars. Because he did not publish anything on that topic, the numerous descriptions and critiques of his methodology that have appeared in the last century are based largely on the remembrances of his students's lecture notes (did not survive), although some later historians have drawn inferences about Ranke's methodology from the scholarly writing of others.

Ranke was controversial in his own era, but he dominated the field so thoroughly that scholars who criticized him, primarily a very few methodologically interested German historians" (p. 112), found little success in obtaining substantial audiences until after his death. Even Ranke's most outstanding student, Jacob Burckhardt, who broke with Ranke's focus on political history and turned to cultural history approaches, continued to consider Europe the center of all important politics and culture, therefore the history worthy of study. Burckhardt and his former teacher respected each other a great deal, in part because both wanted "to preserve the heritage of Europe" (p. 88).

Since then, other historians have criticized Ranke for focusing excessively on political history to the exclusion of economic and cultural history. Ranke's critics also take issue with his heavy reliance on official documents as sources, which tended to result in conservative historical units. However, some authors in the book believe that at least some of the modern-day criticisms of Ranke and his methods, together with the new approach to history practiced by most Western historians until fairly recently, are misplaced—that "Neo-Rankeans" who followed him employed the "iron chancellor's" new nation-state (pp. 131–132). In pursuit of the "iron chancellor's" new nation-state (pp. 131–132). In pursuit of a political ideology, these followers overemphasized the importance placed on the state and themselves treated the state and nation as political, something that Ranke did not do.

Neo-Rankeans, for example, used Ranke's view of the relatedness of religion and the state to justify the state's right "to intervene in religious matters whenever necessary, if need be by force . . . They also canonized Martin Luther and Protestantism "as being the

result of an inevitable process." The Neo-Rankeans waned after Imperial Germany collapsed in 1918, but they then took up Adolf Hitler's cause. In short, some followers used Ranke's methods to create "highly partisan historiography and reckless rhetoric" for political purposes, whereas Ranke himself was not an ardent nationalist, and was "fully aware of the limitations of historical knowledge" (pp. 136–139).

Some historians of Ranke's and the succeeding generation tried other approaches, but Ranke continued, for a time, to dominate historical scholarship. For example, Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–84), who developed a more empirical approach to history and wrote a method on the subject, called Ranke the "greatest historian of our [nineteenth] century" (p. 112). Similarly, Ottokar Lorenz (1832–1904), who published on the science of history in the late nineteenth century, deemed Ranke the "admittedly greatest master of the century" (p. 117). Generally, historians did not embrace the excellent work of these men, or that of Ernst Bernheim (1850–1942), who turned against "a unilateral political history" and began to practice history as a social science around the turn of the twentieth century. Ranke dominated the historical landscape so thoroughly that, except for Marxism, "which was not permitted at the universities" (p. 123), there was little social science history in Germany or Austria until the late twentieth century.

Like the leading German historians, William Stubbs, the first "professional" historian in Britain (at Oxford University from 1866–84), broke with Ranke on a number of issues. However, Stubbs and Ranke "shared a profoundly religious sense of history as being informed, and ultimately directed, by divine providence." Indeed, Stubbs wrote that "Leopold von Ranke is not only beyond all comparison the greatest historical scholar alive, but one of the very greatest historians that ever lived" (pp. 144–145). At Oxford and Cambridge, historians tried to guard history "against those who regarded it as an adjunct of political science or sociology" (p. 149). British historians remained conservative and loyal to Ranke's model, in part because of the serious difficulties they encountered in their efforts to professionalize history in that country.

History and politics were closely related in American universities, as evidenced by the popular motto: "History is past politics, and politics are present history." In the United States, scientific advances increasingly challenged the authority of "divine providence," while the Civil War, reconstruction, and industrialization created a need for "the discovery of fundamental historical principles upon which to base current political action." Historians, "as members of a respectable, educated class which revered popular democracy," sought to "train a leadership class" of people in the lessons of history" (pp. 158-159). The leading American historians in the 1870s and 1880s, many of whom had substantial European training in philosophy, relied heavily upon Rankenianism, fueled by social Darwinism, to establish their empirical methods of history.

The next generation of American historians, most of whom had been trained in the United States and were less sophisticated philosophically, passed their teachers in their "desire to attain the modern authority of science" (p. 166). They led an upheaval in the 1890s that resulted in a group forming the American History Association in 1904 to form the American Historical Science Association.

In a strong concluding chapter, one of the book's editors, Georg G. Iggers, takes on the task of comparing Rankenian history to science. He believes that Ranke did not succeed in turning history into a science, mainly because "[c]hanges in concepts of historical inquiry occur differently" than Thomas S. Kuhn's paradigmatic mode of scientific changes. Iggers sets that "factors of ideology and politics" directly influenced historical search and these in turn influence the questions and answers, as well as methodology. Whereas many of Ranke's followers were "openly committed politically . . . in pursuit of national, political, and religious aims," Ranke himself "assumed the givenness of an essentially conservative order of things," even as he "proclaimed his impartiality and objectivity" (pp. 11-172).

Moreover, unlike scientists, who wrote for each other, Ranke and the professional historians who followed him "wrote primarily for an educated public," not fellow historian specialists (p. 172). Hence, Rankenian history

was not technical, something that remains characteristic of most historical writing to this day, with the exception of quantitative history.

American Rankenians were especially positivist, but, by 1914, historical approaches had become much broader throughout the West, at least outside Germany. Iggers believes that "the Rankenian tradition lived on in the way that professional historians worked with sources," but that new sensibilities led them to a broader range of subjects and new interpretations that required new types of sources and analytical techniques. He believes that "[i]n a fundamental sense, the Rankenian tradition and that of its German successors came to an end," because "the structure of the modern world" changed, and "Ranke had been too deeply rooted in a pre-democratic age" (p. 179).

Music education historians can learn much from the history of historiography. Most modern music education historians received at least part of their training from musicologists, and they undoubtedly have been influenced by musicological research methods, scope, and interpretations. The field of academic musicology began in the new German research universities in the second half of the nineteenth century—a period in which Rankenianism was in full sway. Concerns about philosophical and methodological issues continue to rage in the history profession, and currently musicologists and ethnomusicologists are discussing them as well. To date, music education historians have paid little attention to these issues. A study of the philosophy of history, together with the necessarily related methodological concerns, could provide new insights and lead to a wider range of interests for music education historians.¹

This book is not a comprehensive history of historiography. Rather, it contains engaging, even-handed summaries of some of the old debates among historians and their critics and some new discussions of the old issues involved viewed through the lenses of modern sensibilities. The editors and authors avoided extended discussions of pre-Rankenian historiography, Marxist history, feminist history, and the myriad other types of history that have developed or re-emerged since Ranke's era.

¹Jerre T. Humphreys, "The Content of Music Education History? It's a Philosophical Question, Really," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (forthcoming); and Jerre T. Humphreys, "Expanding the Horizons of Music Education History and Sociology," *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 7 (1996-97): 5-19.

vertheless, because it deals with a segment of historiographical practice that clearly has had a profound influence on music and music education historiography, this book would make a good starting point for conservatively trained music education historians who wish to assess the identity of historical philosophies, topics, methods, and results, both old and new.

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