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Prof Marcuse

History 133A

Source Exploration Summary

1. Jacob Burckhardt, “On German Sentiment during and after the War with France” (1870-72), at: *German History in Documents and Images,* “Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany (1866-1890),” <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1737>, accessed December 1, 2015

The document includes four different letters that Jacob Burckhardt wrote to Fredrich von Preen, who was working at the University of Berlin at the time (Preen was a politician at the time and an old acquaintance)

Jacob Burckhardt:

Swiss historian of art and culture who was especially concerned with the Enlightenment and its ideals.

Born in Basal (Switzerland) to a Protestant clergyman, Burckhardt studied theology but ultimately decided against become a clergyman himself. Burckhardt then studied art and history at the University of Berlin (and then later at the University of Bonn), where he published his first works and made a name for himself.

Despite being offered the “renowed chair of history” at the University of Berlin several times, Burckhardt preferred to remain in Basel, Switzerland, because he felt that, “In Basel, I can say what I want.”

These letters — dated Sept 27, 1870, Dec 31, 1870, April 26, 1872, and Dec 31, 1872 — chronicle Burkhardt’s evolving appraisal and impression of the Franco-Prussian War throughout its entirety.

These letters were written to Friedrich von Preen, a government official who was one of Burkhardt’s friends and close confidents for over a decade (by the time these particular letters were written.

In the letters, Burckhardt seems impressed with the Germans’ ability to unify and organize, but is openly trepid about the potentially disastrous consequences as well.

He repeatedly describes his burgeoning uneasiness regarding the German desire to become a great military and political power in Europe after its victory over France (which was considered a huge challenge to the conventional balance of power in continental Europe).

Specifically, Burkhard is wary of what he calls the “new politics” of a unifying Germany, which could potentially require an “absolutist regime” to offset the serious social and political implications of universal man suffrage and the “rising tide of militarism in state and society.” He lamentingly asks Preen at one point, “Oh, my dear friend, where will it all end?”

1. Original German text reprinted as Letters (I-IV) from Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) to Friedrich von Preen (1823-1894), September 17, 1870; December 31, 1870; April 26, 1872; and December 31, 1872 in Jacob Burckhardt,*Briefe*, ed. Max Burckhardt, 10 vols., vol. 5, 1868-1875. Basel: Schwabe and Co., 1963, pp. 110-12, 118-19, 159-61, 181-82.

* The original text, comprised in German, has been printed and distributed several times and was most recently printed in 1963; copies of these publications are held at Basel University in Switzerland.
* Source of English translation for excerpts I-III: Alexander Dru, editor and translator, *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955, pp. 143-44, 145-46, 151-52, 156-57. Excerpt IV was translated by Erwin Fink.
  + - It was translated to English by Alxander Dru in 1955. Per a Worldcat search, seem to a good number of copies of the translation made: there were 29 different editions, the book is currently held at 608 different libraries (including UC Santa Barabara’s library!), and new hard copies are still even available for order off Amazon.
    - However, an electronic version of his letters are not available on Google Books, Amazon, or Kindle (because its still in print). Likewise, none of Jacob Burckhardt’s writings could be produced through a Melvyl search of the University of California’s Digital Library.

1. John R. Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity.* London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000.

* Although enjoying some prominence during his own life, Jacob Burckhardt has more modernly been criticized as both pessimistic and antidemocratic.
  + For example: In an article written by Ludwig Marcuse, he is described as “the great Swiss cultural historian and philosopher.” Marcuse challenges critiques who consider Burckhardt to be anti-democratic or pessimistic, instead characterizing his writings and thoughts on Bismarckian unification of Germany as “prophetic.”
* This book examines Burckhardt’s trepidation regarding the stark social, political, and cultural transformations occurring in the aftermath of the 1848 Revolutions.
* While Hinde discusses much of Burckhardt’s writing, he is careful to focus on some of Burckhardt’s lesser-known writings, including his many correspondences, providing invaluable insight regarding Burckhardt’s positions.
* Hinde writes, “Instead of bracing political power, as his colleagues had done, Burckhardt expressed deep reservations about the growing dominance of the nation-state and refused to see it as an ethical force. Indeed, Burckhardt, who viewed Bismarck’s aggressive wars of unification with alarm, continued to support the small state, condemning power as evil.”

1. Richard Franklin Sigurdson, *Jacob Burckhardt’s Social and Political Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004

* Richard Franklin Sigurdson, in his 2004 biographical portrait of Burckhardt and his teachings titled *Jacob Burckhardt’s Social and Political Thought*, expands on Hinde’s assessment of Burckhardt as augural. Sigurdson has this to say about Burckhardt:
  + “Burckhardt, more clear sighted than any other thinker of his time, gives the first answers to our problem, which he understood at its first appearance. In the optimistic illusions of the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution [Burckhardt[ had already perceived the germ of the great disease – the mistaken striving for the unattainable happiness of the masses of mankind, which then shifted into a desire for profits, power, and a general striving for living well. So there came about… the loosening of social ties and ultimately the creation of new but very powerful ties by those men of violence… who, supported by military organizations, forced the masses back again into discipline and obedience and a renunciation of all their former longings for freedom.”
* Sigurdson is urging his reader to “bring together the human requirements for private autonomy, creativity, individuality, and self-discipline…with the equally important needs for justice, fair treatment, and a solidarity of human interests.” He is using Burckhardt’s positions (regarding the socio-cultural political transformation of the late nineteenth century) to demonstrate a commitment to the former while simultaneously arguing for an equal commitment to the other.

1. Alan S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stewart Mill, and Alexis De Tocqueville*. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers.

* In his 1992 piece of work, Alan S. Kahan argues that Burkhardt — along with other prominent thinkers John Stewart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville — subscribes to a brand of liberalism known as “aristocratic liberalism.” According to Kahan, aristocratic liberalism is “a distinctive discourse within the European liberal movement in the period 1830-1870 that…. combined the classical and civic ideal of positive liberty with the modern ideal of negative liberty and diversity.”
* However, Kahan is careful to point out that while they were committed to these concepts, their support for diversity was limited to their own particular understanding of the Aristotelian notion of the human *telos*.
* This examination of Burckhardt’s personal variety of liberalism sheds light on his trepidation regarding the rise of European liberalism in the era following the French Revolution and the Revolutions of 1848.