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FORUM: HOW CLASSICS WAS AND IS SHAPED BY SCHOLARS

It is characteristic of our post-structuralist age not only to analyse existing institutions in a deconstructive manner, but also to review the underlying concepts and structures that were and are shaped by its actors. That this equally applies to the research object, Graeco-Roman (and overall, Western) antiquity, and those who researched it as ancient historians and classicists, follows the conceptualization of History as an academic and scientific discipline as formulated by Johann Gustav Droysen, who emphasized in his *Outline of the Principles of History* (*Grundriss der Historik*) that historical research aims at understanding the past under the limitations of present sources, the therein stored and thus discoverable frameworks, and the "moral world" forming the present researchers (Droysen 1897, 11–12, §§ 5–7 = 1882, 8–9, §§ 5–7; cf. Günther 2022). In the field of *Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, the careers of researchers experiencing and forming their field (and beyond) from late German imperial through Weimar and National Socialist to post-war times had been neglected for quite a time until Volker Losemann's seminal study (Losemann 1977; cf. his collected papers in 2017) broke the silence that was generally exercised until then. Though many studies have emerged in the meantime, the long-lasting impact of those who built Ancient Studies after 1945 needs to be studied. After all, institutional structures, students, and sometimes even "Schools" emerged from their lead and influence. Uwe Walter's review of a recently published study on the controversial scholar Helmut Berve sheds light on what can be achieved by a careful examination of archival sources, and what remains to be done to understand what shaped, and also directed, the development of our field in the 20th century and, arguably, beyond.

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In the English-speaking world, the German ancient historian Helmut Berve (1896–1979) is best known for his two-volume scholarly first work *Alexander's Empire on a Prosopographical Basis* (*Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage*, 1926), which is still considered as a solid and rich reference work in Alexander studies. Probably less familiar outside of German-speaking Ancient History today is his thoroughly worked late opus *Greek Tyranny* (*Die Tyrannis*

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bei den Griechen, 1967, also in two volumes). His *Greek History* (*Griechische Geschichte*, 2 vols., 1931 and 1933, revised 1951–1952) was also never translated into English. It was widely read in Germany, while a late Italian translation prompted Arnaldo Momigliano to write a sharp philippic.[1]

Berve was a central figure in classical studies in Germany during National Socialism and after 1945. He also had considerable influence due to his pupils of the 1930s, some of whom were intellectually outstanding; in addition to Franz Hampl, Hans Rudolph, and Wilhelm Hoffmann, these were above all Hans Schaefer and Alfred Heuss. From several points of view, his vita can serve as an example of the splendor and misery of Ancient History in Germany: once leading in the world, but increasingly forfeiting this rank due to jitterinesses that often led to ideologisation.[2]

Losemann (see preface above) lists Berve's career in the most concise form: "Studied history, classical philology, archaeology and history of art at Breslau 1914–1919, Marburg 1919–1921/22, Freiburg i. Br., Munich and Berlin. Doctorate 1921 at Munich, 1924 post-doctoral habilitation in ancient history, also Munich. From 1927 prof. ord. of ancient history at Univ. of Leipzig. 1943–1945 prof. ord. at Univ. of Munich; dismissed. 1949–1954 prof. sup. at Munich, 1950/51–1954 teaching contract at Hochschule Regensburg. 1954–1962. prof. ord. at Univ. of Erlangen."[3]

Why can it be fruitful to deal with Berve? In the history of the academic discipline of Ancient History, he stands for an aestheticized image of Antiquity (especially the Greeks) that excludes the Ancient Near East, also for an internal and external academic activism as a National Socialist since 1933, and as an example of the reintegration of compromised representatives of the discipline in post-war Germany. Previous publications on him have dealt primarily with his external career path, as well as with his work, especially the aforementioned *Greek History*. Stefan Rebenich presented the first penetrating studies on an archival basis, and he also supervised Jasmin Welte's thorough and solid Bern doctoral thesis.

Welte sensibly organises Berve's life and career stages in the six individual chapters: the years leading up to his surprising appointment to Leipzig (1896–1927: A youth between war, art and science, pp. 27–52); his rise to a leading specialist (1927–1936: Striving for power and influence, pp. 53–148); the peak of his career, culminating in his appointment to Munich (1936–1943:

[1] Momigliano 1959 (1966). – In the following text, German-language quotations and headings have been translated, with a few exceptions, to facilitate understanding.

[2] For an initial overview of Berve, see Losemann 2014.

[3] Ibid.

Combining politics and scholarship, pp. 149–204); loss of reputation and striving for reintegration (1943–1949: Dismissal and rehabilitation, pp. 205–262); the successful "second career" (1949–1967: Post-war period – continuing work and cultivating networks, pp. 263–320); and the period as a respected emeritus professor who was, however, increasingly overtaken by the development of the discipline (1967–1979: Doyen of ancient history, pp. 321–329).

Through her in-depth archival studies, the author sharpens and differentiates Berve's established image. She does not drown in the material and does not spread it out unduly. Moreover, she has convincingly solved a well-known problem of such doctoral theses: beginners are usually unable to independently judge the validity even of older research and syntheses, as they lack depth and research experience in the respective discipline itself. Nevertheless, Welte does not avoid judgement; she allows contemporary voices of experts to have their say in reviews, which often have already measured the strengths and weaknesses of the work dealt with quite well. In the process, different positions are sufficiently expressed. Berve himself wanted to pave the way for "his" own, new Ancient History in the 1920s and 1930s in several major reviews – among others, of the *Cambridge Ancient History* and K.-J. Beloch's *Griechische Geschichte*.

One of the book's strengths is that Welte does not simply string together like pearls on a chronological thread the stages of Berve's life and career as well as her – highly exhaustive, sometimes amusing – archival findings of files and correspondences. She rather identifies continuous patterns that go a long way towards explaining Berve's astonishing success, as we shall see. Berve showed himself to be extraordinarily gifted in forming personal networks and thus being able to build on support in various constellations – appointments; political-academic cabal in the Nazi era; exculpation and reintegration after 1945. The indications of his talent for networking include several places of study with well-known representatives of the field, influential sponsors, later various circles ("Kränzchen") within and outside the university, furthermore *Das neue Bild der Antike* (2 vols., 1942) as a large joint venture uniting many renowned scholars within the framework of the "war effort of classical studies" ("Kriegseinsatz der Altertumswissenschaften") as well as several successful academic pupils (see above). His network helped Berve, not least with many certificates of harmlessness ("Persilscheine"), when he sought to defend his reputation in the denazification proceedings. Welte draws on Pierre Bourdieu for her analysis of the academic field; she usefully distinguishes between university power, academic prestige, and intellectual prominence (p. 17) and attests to Berve's early development of an intellectual and social sense for the right investment at the right time (pp. 63–64).

Berve's fixation on great individuals who shaped their times and drove things forward, always to be addressed as aristocrats or with an aristocratic character, also remained constant. The early as well as the late tyrants, the "Princely Lords in the Time of the Persian Wars," Pericles, Alexander, Sertorius, Sulla, Caesar, who are often dealt with in teaching, as well as Augustus – they could all be placed in the same horizon of understanding. In some cases, this was conducive to historical knowledge; Berve, for example, characterized tyranny as a culmination of aristocratic forms of intercourse and placed Athenian politics around 500 BC between the poles of personhood and statehood. In other cases, however, this orientation led to a hollow veneration of leaders, especially in essays on individual ancient figures aimed at a broader audience.

For all her efforts to create continuous lines, Welte is nevertheless always at pains to reflect on the fiction of a coherent life course as a problem. But the early stampings of Berve's thinking are evident: from hitherto unpublished texts of the student presented by her, which are, by the way, scary to read, Welte is able to name his critique of an allegedly rationalising and "cold" science that was fixed early on and called up again and again later. His "youthful turn to inwardness, to feeling, experience, intuition and the soul, in turn, but also the demand for values are later found in his scientific work, most impressively in his *Greek History*" (p. 62). He thought little of Stefan George and his circle; Nietzsche and Spengler had a stronger influence on his view of history. Welte rightly recognizes a continuity of cultural pessimism since the 1920s in Berve's public presentations after 1945, when he repeatedly mused on the "decline and fall of the ancient world" in the wake of the emerging Cold War. In 1948, for example, he wrote to Wolfgang Schadewaldt (p. 262): "But on the whole, the procession of *Gleichschaltung* is irresistible, and Western science and Western humanity can no longer be saved. May at least the downfall be worthy!" In a presentation he asks rhetorically whether "the Greek heritage, instead of becoming effective as a formative factor in our existence, is not being robbed of its human values by managerialism, business acumen and sensationalism" (p. 261). Accordingly, in 1954 he wanted to recognize in imperial Rome a "mixture of peoples, massification, assimilation" (p. 260).

In retrospect, Berve's success can be called astonishing. Basically, he owed this to two qualities that had been established in the academic discipline since time immemorial, qualities that were quite contrary, but powerful in their own right: he mastered both overwhelming rhetorical skills and a solid source positivism. Innovation and methodological guidance, on the other hand, are largely absent. The basic patterns of his historical interpretation of the Greeks were very old: the tribes as a passe-partout of the explanation had been brought up a hundred years

earlier by Karl Otfried Müller, the "agonal spirit" of the Hellenes came from Ernst Curtius and Jacob Burckhardt, the formative power of the country's nature as well as the aesthetic dimension of Greek culture in general had also already been emphasized by Curtius. On the other hand, Berve allowed himself to be carried along by widespread contemporary ideas. After the First World War, the student, like many others, demanded the abandonment of the paradigms of the nineteenth century which were now dismissed as Positivism and Historicism. In its place he sought to establish a life-serving science of Antiquity that was at the same time politically determined by a sense of community. In this he was quite in harmony with Victor Ehrenberg, whom he soon fiercely opposed for other reasons, even with vile anti-Semitic outbursts.

In comparison to some of his academic teachers and pupils, Berve's education was one-sidedly aesthetic. Although he also studied Classical Archaeology and Art History, he made no effort to learn Ancient Near Eastern languages and ignored neighboring disciplines that were sensitive to categories and concepts, such as Law and Sociology. He also largely ignored themes which were opened through newly discovered sources, such as reconstructing the practice of rule and administration from inscriptions and papyri or drawing conclusions from coins and monuments about the self-portrayal and self-image of the ancient actors.

Even concepts central to his interpretation of the Greeks, such as tribe, nation, or community, remained vague. Circular reasoning in explanatory operations (cf. pp. 73 and 78) points to the lack of deeper epistemic training. Also, he ignored concrete-material fields of the historical process such as economy and political institutions. Terminological vagueness later made it easier for Berve to name the same thing differently, to speak of "essence" ("Wesen") to experts and increasingly of "race" ("Rasse") to a wider audience. Nor was it a contradiction for him to postulate "the obligation of incorruptible cognition," since the "study of antiquity could fulfil its function in the whole of the people" not by "cheaply responding to fleeting fashions and opinions of the day, but only with honest, unflinching work" (p. 168). On the other hand, he pretended to have a "relationship full of life" ("blutvolles Verhältnis," p. 67) to the object of research and to grasp intuitively the "spirit" and the "atmosphere" of a historical formation which seemed to be precious by its values.

Berve entered the big stage with a paradox: the above-mentioned, extensive habilitation thesis *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage* was a rather reluctantly completed compulsory exercise assigned to him by his teacher and mentor Walter Otto in Munich. However, it was precisely this exemplary piece of source-saturated positivism that earned the author the prestigious chair in Leipzig in 1927 at the age of just thirty-one and established his high academic

reputation in one fell swoop. He then built a bridge to the public through the aforementioned *Griechische Geschichte*. In it, Berve's rhetorical talent came to the fore, and he found his very own style that suited the time: a prose that was at once austere and uplifted by emotion, that demanded faith and allegiance. At the same time he drew wonderful vignettes (and introduced the term "archaic" to Ancient History).

There is no doubt that Berve was a doubly good teacher and was also appreciated as such: to the large audience in the lecture hall he offered impressively compelling descriptions, while to the highly gifted scholars whom he soon attracted to Leipzig he left plenty of freedom to seek their own individual paths. He liked to surround himself with young people, and students were encouraged to go their ways.

Early on, Berve's efforts to expand his field through research flagged; even his studies on Miltiades (1936) (which are still worth reading) were along well-trodden paths. This also applies to the well-known book on Sparta (1937), which is worth keeping alongside Victor Ehrenberg's *Realencyclopädie* article of 1929.[4] For in the new "Führer" state, Berve, who had joined the Nazi party on 1 May 1933 primarily for career reasons (pp. 119–122), felt urged to achieve a leading position for his part. As speaker and author, he praised ancient leaders, extolled the Spartans as a master race; as dean and rector, he led his university into the Nazi state. This did not exclude controversies with functionaries and administrative agencies of the polycratic system as well as with the faculty, as Welte impressively demonstrates. Berve was concerned with a certain kind of autonomy of academic research, with undisturbed working conditions, and with the claim to select the best according to his standards. He rejected the "scientifically" anthropological doctrines of race because they attacked the interpretive sovereignty of the hermeneutical science of History, which was sacred to him; tribe, people, and state as well as fragments of a racial psychology sufficed as interpretive categories for him (cf. pp. 106 and 220).

Welte's study sheds a brighter light on Berve's post-war career, which was previously only known in its main features. Although Berve remained much in demand as an expert and advisor for the publishing house C. H. Beck in Munich, his Chair and thus a continuous income were lost for several years. A lectureship at the Philosophical-Theological Academy in Regensburg helped him overcome

[4] Ehrenberg 1929. Welte quotes from a letter by Walter Otto to his pupil Berve at the start of 1939. During a visit to England, he regretfully noted that "the leading foreign scholars, on whose judgement you also set great store, began to 'write you off' as a scholar, so to speak" (p. 197). Berve replied that he intended to "conclude the period of publications intended for wider circles and to devote myself for the time being only to pure research work, where, in my opinion, countless tasks set by the present are waiting to be solved" (pp. 198–199). He did not fulfil this promise, if it was meant seriously at all.

the greatest material shortages of the first post-war years, but Berve did not receive a full professorship again until 1954. In Erlangen he was once more able to instruct a number of academic pupils who were also successful. Academically, he returned to his beginnings twice over: his book on Greek tyranny, which is still valuable today, was based on thorough source work and several preliminary studies, especially on Sicily. Here, too, Berve paid tribute to the aristocratic go-getters who had already so fascinated the ancient Greeks and to whom he, too, felt attracted at an early age. His documented self-image and inability to question earlier ways of acting and writing[5] fit with this diagnosis. Berve shared this conviction with many members of his generation: he saw his own existence as an intellectual continuum that was only broken by unfavorable external circumstances and through no fault of his own.

In its genre, this is an exemplary book because the author pays fair tribute to Berve's academic achievements and limitations and does not attempt to exorcise National Socialism once again with the help of his person. Connoisseurs will appreciate the many wonderful finds of hitherto undiscovered sources from university archives and correspondence, as well as the list of publications (pp. 341–354), which aims to be complete. However, Welte has missed one thing: although there is a photo of the young Professor Berve on the front cover, otherwise there are no pictures at all. This is a pity because contemporary witnesses emphasize the unusual outer appearance of the dynamic man. For Berve himself his portrait was obviously part of an aesthetic self-dramatization; this applies to the thirty-year-old as well as the seventy-year-old.[6]

[5] Welte's observations (pp. 253–255) regarding a revision of the essays and speeches republished in the collection *Gestaltende Kräfte der Antike* (1949, extended 1966) are revealing; according to this, the "revision" announced in the preface consisted mainly of "making linguistic adjustments, which, however, did not change the content and conception of the contributions." All too often, questionable vocabulary and references to time were left in place. "Berve did not even make a superficial retouching, which is why one still finds words like 'Herrenmensch', 'Herrenschicht', 'Herrenvolk', or 'blutsmäßig'." Unfortunately, the author has neglected to compare in detail the *Griechische Geschichte*, republished in 1951–1952, with the original edition.

[6] Two of these photographs can be found on the back cover of the paperback edition of *Greek History* (3 vols., 1959–1960), another in the collection *Gestaltende Kräfte der Antike* (see above, n. 5).

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