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Karl Heinrich Pohl, Gustav Stresemann. Biografie eines Grenzgängers, Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 2015, 352 S., ISBN 978-3-525-30082-4, EUR 49,99.

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One would think after the publication of Jonathan Wright's highly acclaimed »Gustav Stresemann. Weimar's Greatest Statesman« (Oxford 2004) and Ludwig Richter's authoritative »Die Deutsche Volkspartei 1918–1933« (Düsseldorf 2002) that there would be little to say about Gustav Stresemann's life or political career that had not already been said. The sheer volume of secondary literature on Stresemann is indeed enormous, and his life and career have been covered from a variety of perspectives, both laudatory to hagiographic and critically unsparing. On balance, however, history has treated Stresemann well, with plaudits for his diplomatic accomplishments as the forerunner to European unity at the same time that his role as a domestic political leader has come under greater critical scrutiny.

Yet for all that has been written on Stresemann's life and career, Pohl offers a refreshingly new perspective in his recently published »Gustav Stresemann. Biographie eines Grenzgängers«. He takes issue with the way in which Stresemann has been lionized in most of the secondary literature on the Weimar Republic and uses an approach that is strongly influenced by psychology and psychiatry to understand why Stresemann was so driven to accomplish all that he was able to achieve. Pohl devotes particular attention to Stresemann's early life, his years and accomplishments as a student, his entry into politics in Saxony as a syndicate for local business interests, and his role in the Saxon National Liberal Party. He shows a particular interest in Stresemann's accumulation of cultural capital, his circle of male friends and mentors as a student and in his early professional life, and his curious affinity for Germany's Jewish bourgeoisie. The picture that emerges from all this is that of a young man driven by a sense of social and personal inferiority to escape the lower middle-class world into which he had been born through academic success, the attainment of what the Germans call »Bildung«, and the embrace of politics as the arena in which he finally sought to establish himself. Stresemann's early life was one of constant self-validation, and it had a lasting impact on his career both as leader of the German People's Party (DVP) and German foreign minister in the Weimar era.

Pohl's book offers an original and innovative reassessment of Stresemann and provides a compelling reassessment of his place in the history of the late Second Empire and Weimar Republic. In this respect, it represents an important contribution to the growing body of literature in the subfield known as psychohistory or psychobiography. Pohl's interpretation of Stresemann as a *Grenzgänger* who

constantly sought to overcome the barriers of the world into which he had been born – his father, after all, had been a bottled beer salesman who managed to work his way up into the lower echelons of Saxony's entrepreneurial middle class – is particularly enlightening. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the many ways in which Stresemann both as a student and a mature politician tried to demonstrate the accoutrements of the bourgeois high culture with which he sought to be identified. One only needs to think, for example, of his 1924 brochure on Goethe and Napoleon to see this aspect of Stresemann's character at work, both to affirm his bona fides as a representative of the best of German culture and to use culture as a way of breaking the diplomatic deadlock that had developed in Germany's relations with France. The metaphor of a *Grenzgänger* works well to explain Stresemann. For not only did he succeed in breaking out of the lower middle-class milieu into which he had been born, but he broke one barrier after another on in moving from the world of Saxon interest politics into that of Saxon liberalism, from the state to the national stage prior to the outbreak of World War I, and finally to the status of Weimar's preeminent statesman.

It is important, however, to point out in this context that by far the greatest part of Pohl's book deals with the period before 1914 and that it contains relatively little on Stresemann's career as Weimar's foremost statesman. Only one chapter and 75 pages are devoted to Stresemann's career as DVP party chairman and German foreign minister. This is not a deficit or omission but the result of a deliberate choice on the part of the author to concentrate on those aspects of Stresemann's life that played a formative role in his psychological and social development, that is, those years before he became a figure of truly national format. Even here there are nuggets of information and insight, particularly with respect to the domestic and diplomatic ramifications of the Locarno negotiations, that make this part of the book well worth reading. But anyone who hopes to discover new information about Stresemann's accomplishments as DVP party chairman will almost certainly be disappointed by Pohl's willingness to defer to Richter's expertise on this aspect of Stresemann's public life. Pohl sees little point in going over the terrain that Wright and Richter have covered so exhaustively in their respective monographs but focuses on those aspects of Stresemann's life that Wright has tended to neglect. On balance, this is a judicious decision that works well for Pohl.

Pohl's work represents an important contribution to the existing body of secondary literature on the man whose life came to be inextricably linked to the tragic fate of the Weimar Republic. By availing himself of insights derived from psychohistory and psychiatry, he elevates the discussion of just who Gustav Stresemann was to an entirely new level. The scholarship is consistently of the highest quality and based upon exhaustive research in the relevant archival sources. At the same time, Pohl is fully cognizant of the most recent literature on Stresemann, the late Second Empire, National Liberal politics both before and after the Great War, and the shortcomings of Weimar democracy. While it will never replace Wright's study as the definitive Stresemann biography – and that was never his intention in the first place – Karl Heinrich Pohl's work will definitely take its place in the existing body of

Stresemann literature as an innovative and informative work that deserves serious and widespread scholarly attention.