



Preface to the English Edition

Looking back from a present-day perspective, the nineteenth century seems very distant. It appears to be a strange, at times even exotic epoch. Many elements of the early modern period still lived on throughout it, and there was much continuity to previous centuries, particularly in its everyday life. At the same time, it was the fundamental changes in nineteenth-century Germany that resulted in the advent of classical modernity before it lapsed into a profound crisis triggered by the wars, the dictatorship, and the catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century. And when this crisis period was finally over, modernity has continued to develop, but with its frame broken and in a modified and more self-critical mode.

The nineteenth century laid the foundations that buttress contemporary Germany. With industrialization, capitalism became the all-important system that guided the economy (and also to some extent society), and, notwithstanding many fundamental challenges and transformations that struck deep roots, capitalism has lived on. The creation of the German nation state on a constitutional basis and the beginnings of a social welfare state were achievement of the nineteenth century. Whereas they have undergone change since then, yet they survived deep crises and continue to shape the present. The nineteenth century saw an explosive rise of the sciences that persist to this day, contributing to the transformation of the planet with consequences that are both beneficial and destructive. The nineteenth century was an epoch of emancipation, over which freedom made great progress and democratization began. However, it was also a century of deeply rooted inequalities and new dependencies, and the impact of both can be seen to this day. With respect to international relations within Europe, it has been argued that the nineteenth century was more peaceful than the previous one and the century that followed. Yet at its beginning, Napoleon swept the European continent with a disastrous war, and it ended in 1914 in the catastrophic World War I. The nineteenth was also the European century, meaning that the region reached out into the rest of the world and, through colonialism and imperialism, made large parts of the

globe subject to its metropolises. The German Empire, which had been founded in 1871, had a hand in this expansion. It will be shown that at the same time it offered the space and the resources for a remarkably fruitful development of the sciences and the arts with transnational radiation and recognition.

The nineteenth century has brought much progress, but at huge costs. It led to fundamental civilizational gains but also to simultaneous sudden and steep declines, revealing the profound contradictions of classical modernity that left their mark on those decades. In most respects these were basic changes which were not specific for Germany, but defined, to some extent, the fate of Europeans and beyond. But they can be identified, described, and understood when we study German history in the long nineteenth century.

The original version of this book first appeared as volume 13 of *Gebhardt's Handbuch der Deutschen Geschichte*, tenth edition published by Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, in 2001. Its expanded and thoroughly revised edition was published in 2021, again by Klett-Cotta, under the new title *Kampf um die Moderne: Das lange 19. Jahrhundert in Deutschland*, covering the period from the late eighteenth century to World War I.¹ For this translation it has been updated in the light of most recent research. The text has been expanded while the notes have been shortened. I am deeply grateful to Volker Berghahn who not only translated the text, but also provided important advice for revising it. The book is designed to provide an introduction to and clarify the most important and basic concepts. It gives a short survey of the basic lines of German history. It does so in comparative perspective in order to make the country's peculiarities visible in at least a broad outline. The book examines the century as an epoch and deals with its inner connections and peculiar features in comparison to the periods that came before and after. The era is viewed as one in which the basic elements of classical modernity slowly asserted themselves against more ancient structures and traditions. The book is an analytical essay and not a detailed narrative of specific events. However, the most important data, decisions, and events are listed in a chronological overview (timeline). The book is based on a close reading of the relevant secondary literature of the past decades, not just the last years. It reflects the most recent state of research. Not all readers will want to explore this latest research further, but whoever is interested in it can find relevant details in the extensive endnotes and in the bibliography, which mainly consists of English-language titles.

Within this framework, this book aims to demonstrate how older feudal, corporate, and absolutist powers and structures continued to exist. They shaped societal life, but their influence weakened. This book stresses the innovations of the nineteenth century, which is the century of industrialization and nascent capitalism. It is also a century of accelerating demographic growth and massive migration. And it is also the age of spreading secularization and the rise of the nation state and nationalism. At the same time, it produced trans-

national interconnections and extensive globalization, even if these trends got lost again in the age of the two world wars and reached pre-1914 levels again only in the 1970s. The nineteenth century was an age of the bourgeoisie and of bourgeois culture that gradually became dominant. But it was a bourgeois century that continued to be shot through by pre-bourgeois forces. It was divided by class conflicts and gender inequalities, and yet this was the epoch in which the foundations were laid for a civil society. These foundations were almost destroyed by the dictatorships of the twentieth century, yet they saw a renewal and fortification in recent decades, even if its promises were not always fulfilled. This means that the bourgeoisie, its strength and its limits, and the genesis of a strong civil society constitute central features of the nineteenth century in Germany that this book endeavors to analyze.

During that century, the country became a constitutional state based on the rule of law. It displayed the beginnings of democratization and of an early social welfare state. However, a parliamentary-democratic system emerged in the German Empire only in the hour of its collapse. Up to that point, it was the established institutions, the ruling conservative elites, and the attendant mentalities that withstood with remarkable inflexibility the pressures for change and reform. These and other German peculiarities have been debated for several decades under the question of “Sonderweg—yes or no” (special path into the twentieth century?). The results of these debates will be taken up in this book, although it views the German development not as a “Sonderweg” (special path), but as a variation to developments elsewhere in Europe as it developed many varieties inside its walls. The first chapter, though, starts with the great changes that conceptions and images of the nineteenth century have been undergoing in the past decades and recent years.

Note

1. Jürgen Kocka, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert: Arbeit, Nation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 2001); idem, *Kampf um die Moderne: Das lange 19. Jahrhundert in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 2021; paperback ed., Bonn 2022).