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0521531217 - Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s

Edited by Hartmut Lehmann and James van Horn Melton

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

Edited by Hartmut Lehmann,
with the assistance of Kenneth F. Ledford

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THE GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

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FROM THE 1930S TO THE 1950S

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HARTMUT LEHMANN

and

JAMES VAN HORN MELTON

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Preface

Like the history of seventeenth-century England, and of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century France and the United States, the history of twentieth-century Germany is characterized by severe political upheavals and drastic changes, such as those in 1918–1919, 1933, 1945, and most recently 1989. These changes affected politics primarily, but they also had a noticeable effect on scholarship, not least of all on the field of history.

The German Historical Institute's first conference, held in December 1988, dealt with "German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States from 1933 to the 1970s." On that occasion, we discussed the intellectual impact and the scholarly achievements of those German historians who lost their positions in Germany after 1933, whose careers were disrupted by the Nazi seizure of power, and who were forced into exile. There were about one hundred historians – persons with a PhD in history who made this discipline the focus of their professional lives – who had to leave Germany after 1933. The papers delivered at the conference, as well as a catalog containing biographical and bibliographical information on the refugee historians, have appeared as volumes in this series.

In sheer numbers, many more historians remained in Germany after *Machtergreifung*, *Reichstagsbrand*, *Ermächtigungsgesetz*, *Bücherverbrennung*, *Gleichschaltung*, *Röhmputsch*, *Rheinlandbesetzung*, *Anschluss*, and *Kristallnacht*. So far we have only a vague notion of how their careers were impinged upon by the rise and fall of National Socialism and by the events of 1933 and 1945. As always, there was no uniform pattern of change, but there are certainly some remarkable trends.

When James Melton asked me whether the German Historical Institute would take an interest in questions of twentieth-century German historiography, I responded without hesitation. We quickly

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agreed that it was a worthwhile challenge to reconstruct and piece together the paths of continuity of Central European historiography from the 1920s to the 1950s – paths that we have sometimes heard about, that we sometimes suspect or assume, but about which we still know far too little. What ensued were lively and, in my view, very rewarding discussions, first with James Melton, and then, after we had conceived a plan for the conference, between the two of us and the potential contributors.

Some may wonder why we have chosen to approach a topic laden with *Sozial- und Strukturgeschichte* via biographical avenues. After debating the possible analytical routes, we decided that by examining the careers of individual historians we could best ensure that the varieties within the stream of continuity – the full range of feasible continuities – would be spelled out and discussed.

It is my pleasure to thank the History Department of Emory University for its hospitality during the conference, and Professor Kenneth Ledford for helping to prepare the papers for publication and for assisting in the publication of this volume. I am particularly grateful to James Melton for his advice and guidance, and Patsy Stockbridge of Emory University.

We dedicate this book to the memory of Felix Gilbert, in whose Princeton office we first met and who encouraged us to go ahead with this project. The conference on “Paths of Continuity” was one of the last Felix was able to attend. He spoke from notes on the state of historical scholarship in Germany in 1945. Much to our dismay, he was unable to prepare a manuscript for inclusion in this volume.

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