

Nationale Totenfeiern in Deutschland. Von Wilhelm I. bis Franz Josef Strauß, eine Studie zur politischen Semiotik, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1990. 349pp.

Following in the footsteps George L. Mosse and others, Dr. Ackermann investigates the many national and state funerals in Germany, which have led one foreign observer to remark: the Germans celebrate 'more state funerals and state mournings than all the rest of the inhabited earth'. But it emerges that under the monarchy such great occasions were confined to royalty and that only four took place under the Weimar Republic. In the Third Reich, above all the faithful followers of Hitler received these honours, officers, SA leaders, and party bosses, but also publisher (Bruckmann, who had helped Hitler early on and an ex-abbot. Even when the dead were victims of a car or aeroplane accident they had sacrificed themselves by an *Opfertod* for National-Socialist Germany and would continue their glorious activities in Valhalla. As Hitler pronounced in 1936, outdoing the verse of the Horst wessel Song: 'Our dead...march with us, not only in spirit but alive.' With his aversion to religious ceremonies, guidelines of 1937 stipulated that civil and religious services were to be separate. There also was the usual competition as to who was to arrange such official occasions, until finally Goebbels was successful against all rivals in taking over the arrangement at least for civilians.

The most interesting sections of the book concern National Socialist mythology and quasi religion; they add much to our knowledge of the Third Reich. But there also are detailed descriptions of the funerals of Rathenau (who was *not* murdered by right-wing students), Ebert, and Stresemann; and, earlier, of William I who in 1888 was hailed as 'prince of peace' and 'arbiter of Europe'-contrary to all evidence. Hindenburg on his death in 1934 became a 'saint'; when he was buried at Tannenberg the elaborate ceremony was entirely military in character. Even men hostile to Hitler were honoured by state funerals, such as his old enemy Ludendorff (not *von*) or General Rommel who committed suicide under threat of arrest and trial and was too popular to be ignored. In the years 1933-44 there were 66 such ceremonies: in the Federal Republic there were 36 in the years 1954-90, and 22 in what used to be the DDR-not a bad record. But interestingly enough in the Second World War the word 'state funeral' assumed a pejorative meaning, for many Germans became suspicious and thought of foul play. This is an interesting study, carefully documented and full of fascinating detail. But why do the Germans cherish state funerals?

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F.L.CARSTEN

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