

Heinrich Ritter von Srbik and "Gesamtdeutsch" History

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HEINRICH Ritter von Srbik, the foremost Austrian historian in the interwar period, made important contributions to knowledge of the materials and the facts of nineteenth-century Germany history as well as to the interpretation of that period. No historian of Germany can properly ignore his interpretation of that period. Yet no serious attempt has been made to evaluate his historical thinking and to appraise his extensive contributions to German historical literature. The one exception to this neglect followed his death in 1951 which occasioned the customary obituary notices of his career and work.¹

This lack of attention may be readily, if only partially, explained. With the collapse of Germany in 1945 Srbik's school of thought became wholly extinct. Closely related to this are unpleasant memories of the thirties and forties, including Srbik's involvement with National Socialism, which have made for an understandable reluctance, on the part of many, to dredge up what might best be left buried in the past. Srbik's work, nevertheless, is of an undeniable importance that calls for critical appreciation of the Austrian historian's achievement.

Srbik was born in Vienna in 1878. After completing the course of instruction at the Theresianum, he enrolled in the University of Vienna in 1897 and one year later entered the *Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*. Under the tutelage of Alphons Dopsch, Engelbert Mühlbacher, and Oswald Redlich, he underwent a rigorous apprenticeship in medieval history. After completing his dissertation under the guidance of Redlich, Srbik became increasingly concerned with social and especially economic history. In this change the largest influence was that of Dopsch,

¹ Of these, the three which have been most useful are: Wilhelm Bauer, "Heinrich Srbik (1878-1951)," *Neue Österreichische Biographie ab 1815*. Vol. XII: *Grosse Österreicher* (Zurich, 1957), 171-193; Adam Wandruszka, "Heinrich Ritter von Srbik," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, LIX (1951), 228-236; and Werner Näf, "Heinrich Ritter von Srbik," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CLXXIII (1952), 95-101. Bauer's article originally appeared as an obituary notice in 1951 in the *Almanach der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*.

the medievalist. This shift of interest away from political history is also attributable to the preoccupations of his period: the Austrian *Staats- und Reichsproblem*, the difficulty of creating a viable state out of the disparate nationalities of Danubia, was a burning issue in turn-of-the-century Austria. Many believed economic integration to offer the solution and Srbik shared this belief. And, interestingly enough, the period on which he did much of his research, the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, was a time in which the economic unification of the Habsburg empire was much discussed.²

For a few years after his doctorate he served as an assistant in the *Institut*. Then, in 1907, on the strength of a monograph on the early eighteenth-century Austrian export trade, Srbik was appointed a lecturer in the University of Vienna. He remained there until 1912 when he accepted a call from the University of Graz. The First World War interrupted his teaching career. With the entry of Italy into the conflict, Srbik entered the army and served with distinction as an artillery officer on the Tyrolean front. Upon demobilization in 1918 Srbik returned to Graz where he had meanwhile been made professor of modern and economic history. A permanent post at Vienna was offered in 1922.

Srbik's early career and writings are only of passing interest. His prominence in the historical profession is associated largely with his postwar labors that reveal a major shift of interest. But to understand the post-1918 achievement of this historian requires an examination of these interrelated aspects of his work: his formation of a new historical frame of reference for the study of German history; his careful attention to methodological approach; his views of historical causation; and finally concerning the function of the historian he advanced ideas that eventually involved him with National Socialism.

Srbik's particular contribution to German historiography was a frame of reference. His *gesamtdeutsch* concept was advanced in

² In chronological order his pre-1918 books in social and economic history are: *Die Beziehungen von Staat und Kirche in Österreich während des Mittelalters* (Innsbruck, 1904); *Der staatliche Exporthandel Österreichs von Leopold I bis Maria Theresia: Untersuchungen zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte Österreichs im Zeitalter der Merkantilismus* (Vienna, 1907); *Wilhelm von Schroeder: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Staatswissenschaften* (Vienna, 1910); and *Studien zur Geschichte des Österreichischen Salzwesens* (Innsbruck, 1917).

opposition to the *kleindeutsch* and *grossdeutsch* schools, and offered a new vantage point from which to examine German history. The understanding of these terms, and their differences from one another, will be facilitated if we envisage three Germanies: the political, the historical, and the ethnic or linguistic.

“Political” Germany, the Germany depicted in an ordinary atlas, refers to that territory delimited by the political frontiers of 1871 and united under Prussian auspices by the wars of 1866 and 1870. Since this unification was completed with the exclusion of large numbers of ethnic Germans, the Austrians in particular, this region is referred to as *Kleindeutschland*, that is, “small” Germany. And the historians who defend the solution of the German problem by the unification of Germany under Prussian and Hohenzollern leadership are described as the *kleindeutsch* school of historiography.

“Historical” Germany, by way of contrast, was the Germany that existed prior to 1866, the area of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and, after 1815, of the German Confederation. Although considerable portions of Austria and Prussia were within these boundaries, “historical” Germany, like the “political,” did not include all German-speaking people. The Germans in Transylvania, for example, were excluded. This Greater Germany, led by Austria and the Habsburg dynasty, had its advocates in the *grossdeutsch* school.

Third, there was ethnic Germany, *Gesamtdeutschland*, an area roughly defined as including all Germans in Middle Europe, whether they were in a relatively homogeneous bloc, as in the western part of the region, or intermingled with other nationalities as in the eastern but contiguous zone. This area included — in contrast to *Kleindeutschland* and *Grossdeutschland* — all those who spoke the German language. Since no political order had even been coterminous with this linguistic region, it was a cultural or ethnic territory. It was with this “Germany” that Srbik concerned himself.

This *gesamtdeutsch* concept, as Srbik envisaged it, has two aspects, the all-German and the mid-European, which together form the core of Srbik’s interpretation of German history presented in all of his post-1918 works. The first of these aspects, the all-German, stands in contrast to the pluralism, the shapeless multiplicity, of the German past and particularly to the dualism of its leading powers, Austria and Prussia. Srbik sought a common de-

nominator. This newly fashioned frame of reference embraced a broader geographical area that included numerous independent political units and so the state no longer was, as it had been in *kleindeutsch* and *grossdeutsch* historiography, the primary object of study. This geographic region of several states provided a theme that made for something common, a unity: it was inhabited by Germans. In this view the ethnic group, the *Volk*, replaces the state as focal point.

Srbik especially deplored the fact that the *kleindeutsch* and *grossdeutsch* views perpetuated the discord and disunity that had plagued German history. The *kleindeutsch* school failed to understand the problems faced by the Habsburg dynasty and to grasp the significance of Austria's peculiar mission in southeastern Europe. The *grossdeutsch* view, in turn, was hostile to the Bismarckian solution of the unification problem. It questioned Bismarck's sincerity and idealism, saw "only violence, perfidy, and illegality at work"³ and attacked Prussia for destroying the old Reich. Regrettably, in Srbik's view, the strictures of the two schools directed respectively against Austria and Prussia caused inter-German antagonism and made history a legacy of ill feeling. His *gesamtdeutsch* concept, he hoped, would allay the antagonisms, and the emphasis on what Germans shared would help to bridge, if not overcome, the deep political, cultural, and religious divisions expressed in such contrasts as *Grossdeutsch-Kleindeutsch*, Austria-Prussia, Habsburg-Hohenzollern, South Germany-North Germany, and Catholic-Protestant.

Srbik's reluctance to think exclusively in terms of the state is indicative of the other aspect of the *gesamtdeutsch* concept—the mid-European. There is here a state of tension between national and supranational ideas. Srbik was interested in uniting all Germans and thought also in terms of a universal German mission in *Mittleuropa*.

Mittleuropa, as Srbik defined it, is that region in Central Europe bounded in the North by the Baltic, in the South by the Adriatic, in the West by the Rhine and its tributaries, and in the East by a line drawn roughly between Riga and Odessa.⁴ It is

³ Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Deutsche Einheit: Idee und Wirklichkeit vom Heiligen Reich bis Königgrätz*, 4 vols. (Munich, 1935-1942), IV, 468.

⁴ Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Mittleuropa: das Problem und die Versuche seiner Lösung in der deutschen Geschichte* (Weimar, 1937), p. 5.

not a region of uniform characteristics. The western area of this *Mittleuropa*, according to Srbik, is uniformly German, while the territory approximately bounded by a straight line from Danzig to Trieste and the easternmost limits of Middle Europe is a transitional zone of many disparate national groups. Apart from the Germans in the west, no single area in the region has an entirely homogeneous group that may be the basis for creating a viable state. As these special conditions of the eastern zone were not suited for a state consisting of one nationality on the West European model, another solution had to be sought.⁵ For Srbik a decisive consideration was that only the Germans, though not always in a majority, were to be found throughout eastern *Mittleuropa* and only they could unite the area. They were the common factor, and to them Srbik ascribed the supranational mission of uniting all the peoples of the region.⁶ But to carry out this historic mission for which he vaguely sketched a supranational organization, the German people themselves had first to be united. Here appears the close interdependence of the national with the supranational in Srbik's thought.

This *gesamtdeutsch* concept, of course, was not something that suddenly occurred to Srbik. It was the product of a long process whose roots can be traced in Srbik's youth and early training. Several elements, all inextricably intertwined, contributed to the development of this belief.

The formative influences of Srbik's home were a major factor in the shaping of his ideas. There is, after all, something of the *gesamtdeutsch* concept apparent in Srbik's own heritage, which included South (Austrian) and North German family backgrounds. His father, Franz, an imperial civil servant, was of old-Austrian stock, although the patent of nobility was of recent origin. As the surname indicates, the paternal line is probably of Czech rather than German origin. This is all the more likely since the Srbiks

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39; *Deutsche Einheit*, I, 339 and 373; and especially Srbik's "Zur gesamtdeutschen Geschichtsauffassung: ein Versuch und sein Schicksal," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CLVI (1937), 232-237.

⁶ Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Geist und Geschichte vom deutschen Humanismus bis zur Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1950-1951), II, 238; Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, "Die Reichsidee im Wandel der Geschichte," *Das grössere Reich: Grossdeutschland am Anfang des IX. Jahres Nationalsozialistische Staatsführung* (Berlin, 1943), p. 5; and Hans Kohn, "AEIOU: some Reflections on the Meaning and Mission of Austria," *The Journal of Modern History*, XI (Dec., 1939), 516.

came from Frauenberg, Bohemia, before settling in Vienna. But by education, profession, and preference the family was German. On the other hand, Srbik's mother, Walpurga, was a Westphalian, the daughter of the historian Wilhelm Heinrich Grauert who for a time had taught at the University of Vienna.⁷ Srbik had a certain sense of being *both* Austrian *and* Reich German, of being, as it were, *Gesamtdeutsch*.

Srbik's views were influenced as well by his experience as a student at the university. It is of some consequence that Srbik, although of aristocratic background, preferred to join a *Burschenschaft*, the "Gothia,"⁸ rather than the most elitist and, incidentally, particularist dueling corps (*Korps*). The fraternal *Burschenschaften*, by way of contrast, were nationalistic and Pan-German. Then, too, the bitter nationality conflicts in Vienna which Srbik experienced as a student could only serve to reinforce his German national convictions.⁹ To a large extent, then, the ideas expressed in his *gesamtdeutsch* theory were molded in his youth.

Srbik's new historical concept can also be traced to the influence of his teachers at the university. Dopsch, for example, caused Srbik to abandon political for economic history and even more important was his influence on Srbik's views about the national and supranational mission of the Germans. Dopsch had long expounded the theme that the barbarian conquests had constituted the Germans as the residuary legatees of the Roman Empire. As heirs of Rome the Germans had to preserve the *pax Romana* and the *pax Christiana*. The "first Reich [the Holy Roman Empire] was more than a state," for it "was imbued with a peculiar metaphysical idea, and the German people, for hundreds of years, were the bearers of a special mission as the core and protector of the occident." In that capacity, Srbik continued, they "had to fulfill a mission which extended beyond their own living space."¹⁰

Intimately related to this thinking was Srbik's own Austrian and Christian heritage. In his ideas on *Gesamtdeutschland* there is something reminiscent of Felix zu Schwarzenberg's "Empire of

⁷ Srbik wrote a biography of his grandfather entitled *Ein Schüler Niebuhrs: Wilhelm Heinrich Grauert* (Vienna, 1914).

⁸ Wandruszka, "Srbik," 230.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Srbik, "Reichsidee," pp. 5-6. This same idea is expressed even more harshly in *Deutsche Einheit*, IV, 483.

Seventy Millions." The Austrian background of his thought is further revealed in its strange intermingling of nationalism and supranationalism. The multinational Habsburg empire represented both an attempt to create a state and a supranational organization uniting the various nationalities of the Danube basin. This concern provides the link between Srbik's early writings in economic history and his later preoccupation with the *gesamtdeutsch* approach. The universalism and universalist claims of Christianity, Catholicism in particular, also affected Srbik who throughout his life remained a devout Catholic. Certainly this religious belief is a central thread in his view of *Mittleuropa* and the mission of Germany, the heir of imperial and Christian Rome.

None of these developments or influences is alone sufficient to explain Srbik's formulation of the *gesamtdeutsch* concept. Indeed, it is the First World War that provided the major stimulus. The War impelled Srbik to embark on an entirely new tack in his historical investigations. His earlier work had been largely in economic history, and he now abandoned that interest in favor of the formulation and propagation of his *gesamtdeutsch* conception of German history. 1918 was the watershed for this change. The destruction of the Dual Monarchy undermined the cultural, political, and social position of the Germans in the succession states, and left Vienna, the former imperial capital, to degenerate into a museum of past glories. Disheartened by the disappearance of this old world, fearful for the newly created *Auslandsdeutschen*, and surrounded by the depressing environment of the Austrian capital, Srbik found it impossible to resume his previous existence. By upsetting his intellectual equilibrium, the War forced Srbik to seek a new orientation. The political and social problems that plagued Danubia after the War compelled him to reevaluate the German mission in *Mittleuropa*. Obsessed with this problem, Srbik began to consider the whole question of German unity and the reorganization of Middle Europe.

But if the War destroyed the old world, it also indicated to Srbik, in dim outline at least, the direction of the new. The War fostered, accelerated, and intensified a new sense of unity among all Germans. In Austria and Germany the War rekindled that consciousness, never entirely lost, that both peoples were really one, that both, linguistically and culturally united, shared a common inheritance and destiny that transcended the state frontiers by which

they were physically separated.¹¹ The War also provided the impetus for the development of the *Mitteleuropa* concept. The Central Powers sought to counter the strategic effects of the Allied naval blockade by increased political and economic cooperation.¹² This wartime experience engendered a new synthesis of German nationalism and mid-European federalism.

After this impact of the War on his thinking, Srbik in the twenties and thirties began slowly to formulate his *gesamtdeutsch* concept. All of his post-1918 writings and statements represent a continuous and coherent development of the *gesamtdeutsch* concept of German history.

Srbik's first postwar work, which resulted in his call to Vienna, was *Wallensteins Ende: Verlauf und Folgen der Katastrophe*.¹³ This study represents the first significant departure from his previous work in economic history. The choice of subject is significant. On the most superficial level, of course, stands the parallel between the Thirty Years' War and the First World War. But there is a deeper, more complex explanation for Srbik's concern with Wallenstein. For Srbik the enigmatic figure of this seventeenth-century *condottiere* was explicable in vague *gesamtdeutsch* terms. Wallenstein, Srbik implied, was Czech by birth but German by education and preference, Protestant by baptism but Catholic by conversion. His ability to straddle national and religious lines, his desire to submerge the antipathies that divided the peoples of Middle Europe, meant in a very profound sense that Wallenstein — like Srbik himself — was a *gesamtdeutsch* man. Thus the underlying assumptions of the *gesamtdeutsch* concept, although never stated explicitly, can be discerned in this work.

The *gesamtdeutsch* idea further unfolded in 1925 with the publication of Srbik's two-volume biography of Metternich, generally regarded as his masterpiece.¹⁴ The impressive reputation which he thereby acquired unquestionably allowed him to speak with greater authority in subsequent years and to reach a far wider audience. Srbik's *Metternich* revolutionized the historical assessment of the Austrian chancellor. Here, of course, this work will be considered only in relation to Srbik's *gesamtdeutsch* theory. In

¹¹ *Deutsche Einheit*, IV, 482.

¹² Srbik, *Mitteleuropa*, p. 38; Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague, 1955), p. 82.

¹³ (Vienna, 1920).

¹⁴ *Metternich: der Staatsmann und der Mensch*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1925).

this study, Srbik approached with renewed interest Metternich's German and mid-European policy.¹⁵ Metternich, in Srbik's opinion, had among all his contemporaries, formed the clearest picture of *Mittleuropa* where, in the eastern fringe at least, the West European concept of the state was not applicable. Metternich's achievement, as long as it endured, represented the last significant effort before 1914 to organize all of Germany and *Mittleuropa* under a supranational organizational scheme.¹⁶

The desire to find a *via media* — a *gesamtdeutsch* approach — upon which all German historians could agree proved elusive throughout most of the twenties. In an attempt to settle this problem, a Historical Congress was convened at Graz in September, 1927. Representatives came from Austria and Germany to formulate a common approach to the writing of German history. Srbik himself addressed this gathering.¹⁷ No consensus was reached but Srbik's remarks reveal his preoccupation with the problem of formulating a *gesamtdeutsch* frame of reference.

Srbik continued to grapple with this problem. Finally, in a lecture delivered to a meeting of teachers and educators in Salzburg in September, 1929, Srbik gave his *gesamtdeutsch* concept the benefit of theoretical exposition.¹⁸ He described the background of the concept, discussed problems of methodological approach, and defined the task of a *gesamtdeutsch* historian.

By this time he had begun to acquire a following which loosely organized itself into a "*gesamtdeutsch* school" of historiography. The leading members, besides Srbik, were the German Wilhelm Schüssler and the Austrian Harold Steinacker. Lesser figures were Erich Keyser and Gustav Roloff. As time wore on the *gesamtdeutsch* approach attracted more adherents — Helmut Rössler, for example — and began to intrude into the writing of German history.

The outstanding treatment of German history in terms of this concept is Srbik's controversial *Deutsche Einheit: Idee und Wirk-*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 43 and 46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 542-543.

¹⁷ H. W., "Der Grazer Historikertag," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXXXVII (1928), 416-417; Oscar J. Hammen, "German Historians and the Advent of the National Socialist State," *The Journal of Modern History*, XIII (Jun., 1941), 180-181.

¹⁸ This address was published under the title "Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung" in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, VIII (1930), 1-12.

lichkeit vom Heiligen Reich bis Königgrätz (German Unity: Idea and Reality from the Holy Empire to Königgrätz), published between 1936 and 1942.¹⁹ These four volumes and the theoretical exposition of the *gesamtdeutsch* approach made in 1929 are so closely interwoven that the two must be considered together. In *Deutsche Einheit* Srbik sought to explain why the Germans had never achieved national unity. Although this work, in keeping with Srbik's principles, is ostensibly a study of the German people as a whole, in point of fact it largely dwells on the problem of Austro-Prussian dualism and uses this rivalry as a focal point. As such, *Deutsche Einheit*, with the exception of the first volume, is largely diplomatic history. This diplomatic emphasis may partly be explained in that the documentary evidence upon which the study is mainly based were the newly published materials from the foreign ministry archives in Berlin and Vienna.²⁰

In his Salzburg lecture, Srbik paid special attention to methodological approach. And this approach is carefully implemented in *Deutsche Einheit*. Srbik's methodology, relying on the extensive use of documents, is characterized by unusual thoroughness in the employment of such evidence and by scrupulous attention to the strictest academic standards. In fact, Srbik acquired a mastery over his materials seldom attained by historians.

But if Srbik relied heavily upon documentary evidence in his methodological approach, he did so not without misgivings. He readily acknowledged that the facts, the details of the past, could be gleaned from the written sources. But he questioned if this work alone was sufficient. The accumulation of facts, he said, could only provide a mere mechanical explanation for an event in the past. It was possible, in other words, to learn how an event happened but not why. According to Srbik the real determining force is the power of an idea — an idea standing above the individual as it were — and having a life of its own.²¹ This idea is difficult to discern in the documents. But from his study of the broad German historical record, Srbik concluded that there was discernible

¹⁹ The first two volumes appeared in 1935 while volumes III and IV were published in 1942.

²⁰ These materials were gathered together in *Die auswärtigen Politik Preussens, 1858-1871*, 9 vols. in 10 (Oldenburg i. O., 1933-1939) and *Quellen zur deutschen Politik Österreichs, 1859-1866*, 5 vols. in 6 (Oldenburg, i. O., 1934-1938). Srbik himself edited the Austrian series of documents.

²¹ "Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung," pp. 9-10.

progress in German history. The ultimate goal of this progress, he argued, was German unity. Srbik, however, was compelled to focus on the *Idee*, the idea, of German unity, because the Germans never had been brought together.²²

This peculiar approach suggests the influence of *Ideengeschichte* as formulated by the historian Friedrich Meinecke. *Ideengeschichte*, in the tradition of German idealism, is the interpretation of history in terms of a conflict between the spiritual-moral (*Geist*) and political power (*Macht*). Borrowing Meinecke's categories, Srbik described the gradual unfolding of German history through conflict between idea and reality, or *Idee* and *Wirklichkeit*, as the subtitle of *Deutsche Einheit* indicates. For Srbik the spiritual-moral force was the *Reichsidee*, the concept of German unity. Political power or *Macht*, as Srbik defined it, signified Austro-Prussian dualism, particularism, and religious animosity. This *Reichsidee*, as idea in conflict with reality, forms the constantly recurring theme in *Deutsche Einheit*. Over the course of time this *Reichsidee* was gradually transmuted into the modern feeling of national consciousness. Srbik sought to demonstrate that the idea of a Reich, of unity, was actually stronger than reality, that the idea of the Reich was eternal and universal.

Srbik's methodological approach is also distinguished by the attempt to omit value judgments. History, he noted, was not a court of law to declare guilt or innocence or to apportion praise or blame, but a science by which one sought to comprehend and understand the past.²³ Judgments, he argued, would only deepen the gulf between the various sections of Germany and perpetuate the discord which for so long had shattered the nation.

If Srbik eschewed the making of value judgments, he was of necessity compelled to look for some kind of law of historical causation. In spite of his admonition to the contrary at Salzburg in 1929,²⁴ Srbik's fourth volume of *Deutsche Einheit* gave cautious articulation to a law of causation in German history. There emerges in *Deutsche Einheit* a kind of historical determinism, an organic law of existence which seeks self-protection for a state and its people.²⁵ Size of territory, among other things, is a condition for

²² *Deutsche Einheit*, I, 147.

²³ Srbik, *Metternich*, I, 50. This idea is more fully elaborated in "Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung," pp. 5 and 8ff.

²⁴ "Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung," p. 6.

²⁵ IV, 462ff.

survival in the realm of power politics. The German nation, then, of necessity had to grow or die. German historical growth was the inexorable march toward the unity of all Germans in Middle Europe.

Because of this law of explanation, Srbik believed he could avoid the making of value judgments in *Deutsche Einheit*. Even such a controversial event as the exclusion in 1866 of Austria from Germany — the climax of *Deutsche Einheit* — is treated as a tragic necessity, the consequence of this ineluctable force. Srbik contended that by 1866 the German Confederation under Habsburg leadership was unable to safeguard German interests. Both the Confederation and the dynasty were burdened with obsolete structural forms and outmoded concepts that impeded the necessary modifications which changed times and circumstances demanded.²⁶ Employing the biological metaphor, Srbik claimed that the Confederation was a sick body whose life could be preserved only by a terrible amputation — the removal of Austria as a diseased limb from the German body politic.²⁷ As a result of this operation the remainder of Germany could revitalize itself, recoup its strength, and thereby enhance its security. But pervading this entire analysis is the notion of an organic necessity.

There is in Srbik's concept, therefore, the implication of the presence of a dynamic process, a determinism in German history that stands above and beyond an individual's control. The situation is far more important than individual choice. Great turning points, like 1866, are more the issue of destiny than of personal guilt. And if profound needs stimulated change and determined the appropriate political form, it is not for the historian to blame or to praise; his task is to understand.

If the direction of German history, as Srbik perceived it, was toward the creation of *Gesamtdeutschland*, then the exclusion of Austria at Königrätz, together with the founding of the German empire in 1871, could not be the climax of that historical process. To meet ever-increasing demands for power on the international scene, the German empire ought to have sought accretion of strength through the inclusion of those Germans and their territories left outside the Reich frontiers created in 1871. Instead, the Bismarckian Reich became ossified. According to Srbik, it

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 464.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 468.

failed to adapt itself to changing circumstances. He implied that a direct consequence of this failure was the German defeat of 1918. The German empire, Srbik argued, was not condemned to destruction because it rejected democracy or because of alleged incompetence among Bismarck's successors. Nor could the collapse be solely ascribed to Wilhelmian Germany's imperialist policy. For Srbik none of these explanations sufficed. The explanation, in his opinion, was that *Volk* and State remained separate entities, that ethnic and political Germany were not coterminous. Consequently, Germany lacked the necessary internal stability and the territorial base of Middle Europe, prerequisites for a successful imperial policy.²⁸ The reverse of 1918, however, was in Srbik's opinion only temporary, for he inferred that the ideal of German unity had finally been realized in Hitler's Germany.²⁹

This belief in the ideal of German unity led Srbik, in 1929, to define a twofold task for the *gesamtdeutsch* historian: the scholarly-scientific and the national-political. The scholarly-scientific dimension of the historian's task is Srbik's reaffirmation of his belief in the freedom of inquiry. The historian must investigate the past with integrity and impartiality and must maintain an uncompromising respect for academic standards,³⁰ an admonition familiar to all historians.

But if the scholarly-scientific dimension offered nothing new for the historian, the national-political aspect was novel. According to Srbik the *gesamtdeutsch* historian must help to build the new Germany as a leader in the vanguard of the national movement. He had the duty to overcome old antipathies and encourage the expansion of the identity of people with the state.³¹ He must, Srbik concluded, create a common national consciousness by creating a common historical consciousness.³² German historical writing, in short, must serve the national cause. The historian, while maintaining his academic integrity, was to delineate national objectives which the political sphere would realize.³³ The *gesamtdeutsch* approach not only investigated the past, but prepared the future, as appears in *Deutsche Einheit*, where Srbik stressed not

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 480-481; Srbik, *Mitteleuropa*, 34.

²⁹ *Deutsche Einheit*, IV, 483.

³⁰ "Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung," p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

only the German role in *Mitteleuropa* and the desire for national unification, but also the shortcomings of the *kleindeutsch* solution and indicated what remained to be done.³⁴

It was precisely this curious national-political task that brought Srbik and his ideas into conjunction with the National Socialist movement. There was in this *gesamtdeutsch* approach, in this desire to inculcate national feeling into the German people through the medium of historiography, an interconnection between historical writing and political activity. Because his historical theory called for the reorganization of Middle Europe, Srbik lent his support to the Nazi government which seemed prepared to implement his views.

In order to induce — and reward — Srbik's collaboration, the National Socialist regime presented him with numerous honors. In early 1935, for example, Srbik was offered the chair of modern history at the University of Berlin. This position, previously held by Hermann Oncken, had fallen vacant as a result of a Nazi purge of the faculty.³⁵ If his friend Meinecke had not informed him of the circumstances under which this offer was made, Srbik in all probability would have accepted. To his credit, however, he refused.³⁶ In the autumn of that same year, in an address before the newly founded *Reichsinstitut für die Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands*, the Nazi historian Walter Frank singled out Srbik on behalf of the government for special congratulations.³⁷ With *Anschluss* in March, 1938, Srbik not only was appointed a member of the German Reichstag, but he became President of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Two months later, in May, Srbik was accepted as a member of the Nazi Party.³⁸ In addition to these "distinctions" Srbik's sixtieth birthday was celebrated by a *Festschrift*. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the leading Austrian Nazi, "promoted" its publication.³⁹

Despite warnings from other historians, Srbik did not disasso-

³⁴ Paul Sweet, "Recent German Literature on Mitteleuropa," *Journal of Central European Affairs*, III (Apr., 1943), 15-16.

³⁵ Gerhard Ritter, "Die Fälschung des deutschen Geschichtsbildes im Hitlerreich," *Deutsche Rundschau*, LXX (Mar., 1947), 19.

³⁶ Bauer, "Srbik," p. 181.

³⁷ Frank's address was printed under the title "Zunft und Nation" in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, CLIII (1935). See p. 16.

³⁸ Bauer, "Srbik," p. 184.

³⁹ *Gesamtdeutsche Vergangenheit: Festgabe für Heinrich Ritter von Srbik zum 60. Geburtstag am 10. November 1938* (Munich, 1938).

ciate himself from the Nazis until it was too late. During the winter of 1935-1936 he delivered a series of lectures, resounding with political overtones, on Austria's role in German history.⁴⁰ This was followed in February, 1937, by a lecture at the University of Cologne on the concept of *Mittleuropa*.⁴¹ It can be argued that these lectures were based on sound, meticulous and extensive scholarship. But when considered in the context of the time, other, less honorable, implications could and, in fact, were drawn. More reprehensible, however, was the fact that Srbik countenanced, if he did not encourage, persecution and conquest; persecution, when as President of the Academy of Sciences, he permitted the purging of its Jewish members;⁴² conquest, when in the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, he welcomed the seizure of Bohemia and Moravia.⁴³

As time wore on, Srbik became increasingly disenchanted with National Socialism. After 1940 several relatively minor disputes between Srbik and the party led to a growing estrangement which culminated in the search of his home by the Gestapo in 1944.⁴⁴ Like so many idealists, moreover, who entertained great hopes for the *Anschluss*, Srbik's expectations were gravely disappointed. He preferred an arrangement which would have inaugurated the reorganization of *Mittleuropa* and the reconstitution of the Holy Roman Empire in a new form.⁴⁵ Instead, Austria, a great European power within the memory of Srbik, was relegated to the position of a mere province in Greater Germany. No recognition was given to what was, in Srbik's opinion, Austria's mission in south-eastern Europe. He came to realize that the *Idee* and *Wirklichkeit*

⁴⁰ These lectures appeared in print under the title *Österreich in der deutschen Geschichte*. I have used the third edition (Munich, 1938).

⁴¹ Published as *Mittleuropa: das Problem und die Versuche seiner Lösung in der deutschen Geschichte* (Weimar, 1937).

⁴² Richard Meister, *Geschichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, 1847-1947* (Vienna, 1947), p. 182. Meister, while stressing Srbik's opposition over other issues, is curiously silent about his behavior in this important affair.

⁴³ "Mittleuropa unter deutscher Führung" (Berlin edition), March 19, 1939, p. 9.

⁴⁴ For the details of these disputes, see Meister, *Akademie der Wissenschaften*, p. 182; Wandruszka, "Srbik," pp. 232-233. In the summer of 1944, after the failure of the officers' attempt to kill Hitler, Srbik's home was searched by the Gestapo. Certain documents falling into the hands of the secret police indicated that Carl Goerdeler had visited Srbik in 1938. See Bauer, "Srbik," pp. 186-187.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Benedikt, ed., *Geschichte der Republik Österreich* (Munich, 1954), 414.

of German unity had not merged in the Third Reich, for at no time in its history had the German people been more divided — divided by suspicion and terror. And finally, as a devout Christian, Srbik could not but be dismayed by the ever-mounting depravity of the Nazi regime.

This deterioration in Srbik's relationship to the Nazi movement was exacerbated by his increasing awareness of the distortion of his values by the Nazis. The conscious and cynical misuse of his name and his *gesamtddeutsch* ideas caused him profound anxiety. Exploiting the *gesamtddeutsch* themes for their own purposes, the Nazis found not only justification for territorial aggrandizement in *Mitteleuropa*, but also a useful propaganda theme for inculcating unity among the German people. Contrary to Srbik's intentions, the Nazis sought not German leadership in Middle Europe, but supremacy based on brute force.

The total effect of these developments was to drive Srbik, after the publication of *Deutsche Einheit*, into the refuge and solace of his study. He continued to work during the remaining war years, and although he remained aloof from the Nazis, his later wartime writings were still imbued with a deep sense of German nationalism.⁴⁶

The end of the war saw him in retirement at Ehrwald in the Tirol. He was not allowed to teach after 1945, but he was permitted to write and publish. During these postwar years until his death, Srbik remained in relative obscurity, his reputation tainted by his relationship to the Nazis. This period, as Srbik himself described it, was a time of "purification" or "purging of the soul,"⁴⁷ during which he felt compelled to reexamine his historical principles in the light of his recent experiences.

This reexamination was accomplished through a study of German historiography. In a major work entitled *Geist und Geschichte vom deutschen Humanismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Spirit and History of German Humanism Until the Present),⁴⁸ in part published posthumously, Srbik sought to trace the development of German historical thought. While denouncing Nazi excesses, he attempted to salvage his *gesamtddeutsch* concept from the condem-

⁴⁶ See, for example, his *Wien und Versailles, 1692-1697: Zur Geschichte von Strassburg, Elsass und Lothringen* (Munich, 1944).

⁴⁷ Näf, "Srbik," p. 95.

⁴⁸ (Munich, 1950-1951).

nation of everything associated with National Socialism. Srbik argued that the *gesamtdeutsch* point of view evolved independently of the Nazi movement; that it was rooted in the Austrian environment with its tradition of the *Sacrum Imperium* and in German universalistic thought.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he stressed the scientific character of his theories and studies as opposed to the distortions of Nazi propaganda.

Despite his criticism of Nazism, Srbik's postwar reappraisal did not produce any marked change in his historical outlook. He clung tenaciously to his *gesamtdeutsch* concept. He did not participate in that movement among the historians of his country, who, chastened by the *Anschluss* and the war, turned inward and sought a narrower approach in the writing of history which emphasized a unique Austrian identity separate from Germany as a whole.⁵⁰

The *gesamtdeutsch* concept, together with its adherents, passed into oblivion in spite of all Srbik's efforts. But even though the concept was contaminated by National Socialism and has proven ephemeral, it does deserve a critical evaluation, both on the practical and the theoretical levels, as to its importance in German historiography.

Insofar as the *gesamtdeutsch* concept was actually implemented in the writing of history, it has left its mark. When employed by skillful hands, such as those of Srbik in *Deutsche Einheit*, it extended the horizons of German history. In part, this is due to Srbik's encyclopedic knowledge and thoroughness, qualities not peculiar to the *gesamtdeutsch* method. But beyond this much of Srbik's criticism of the old schools of historiography — the *kleindeutsch* and the *grossdeutsch* — was valid.⁵¹ These used the states and the dynasties as the primary units for study. The *gesamtdeutsch* concept, in contrast, succeeded in breaking away from this outmoded view. Srbik not only sought to appreciate the foreign policies and the relationships between the German states, but he also attempted to penetrate beneath the surface of the political

⁴⁹ Srbik, *Geist und Geschichte*, II, 347.

⁵⁰ In 1949 Srbik published *Aus Österreichs Vergangenheit: von Prinz Eugen zu Franz Joseph* (Salzburg), a collection of essays. With but one exception, all these essays had been published previously. That Srbik permitted their republication, unrevised, is evidence that his historical views remained unchanged.

⁵¹ For a classic example of the *kleindeutsch* view, see Erich Marcks, *Der Aufstieg des Reiches: Deutsche Geschichte von 1807-1871/78*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1936). *Deutsche Einheit* is much the better account.

order to find the mainsprings of those policies, to those movements of ideas, to the hopes and aspirations of the German people, which conditioned the environment in which statesmen formulated their plans. *Deutsche Einheit*, then, placed German history, especially the struggle for national unity, in a new light.

But if the *gesamtdeutsch* concept in practice produced certain beneficial effects, as a theory it by no means represents a revolution in historical technique. Srbik's concept was provocative of new study insofar as it questioned the conventional picture of nineteenth-century German history with its focal point on the struggles between states and dynasties. On the other hand, it represented a basically futile attempt to combine two contradictory aims; the fusion of German nationalism with mid-European federalism. Srbik claimed for the Germans what he denied other Middle European peoples — the right to a nation state. Furthermore, the *gesamtdeutsch* theory became a procrustean bed wherein German history was forced — distortions were inevitable. It is highly conjectural, after all, if many of the scattered pockets of ethnic Germans, separated from the mainstream of German culture for centuries, can successfully be fitted into an all-embracing view of German history, especially for the more modern period. Another disadvantage was the tendency of the concept to become ahistorical. The ideal of German unity took on for Srbik a metaphysical dimension which could not be grounded in historical reality.⁵² Srbik tended to read into the past those national frustrations, hopes and aspirations which properly belonged to his own day, to inter-war Austria — Vienna in particular — and Germany. And, as we have seen, the *gesamtdeutsch* concept itself was a response to

⁵² Srbik has frequently been criticized for his style which also contributes to the metaphysical spirit that pervades much of his writing. *Deutsche Einheit*, like all of his work, is abstract, diffuse, and complex. But if Srbik's style is involved, it is capable of conjuring up vivid images. In describing such a prosaic task as the examination of documentary evidence, for example, Srbik wrote of viewing "die Strömungen der Vergangenheit auf ihre Quellgründe hin" ("Gesamtdeutsche Geschichtsauffassung," 6). The imagery in these few words is striking, for Srbik does not employ the customary word, *Quellen*, for documents. Instead, he coins the word *Quellgründe* by combining the word *Quelle*, meaning both "source" and "well" or "spring" with *Grund* which means both "basic" and "ground." Hence Srbik, consciously striving for literary affect, calls forth the vision of the past as a stream of time emanating or welling up from a spring in the ground. At its best, then, Srbik's style is poetry, at its worst it becomes overly abstruse leaving an obscure and turgid impression.

such feelings. As such, the concept was but a passing phenomenon, a kind of historical curiosity, of that period. Indeed, one dimension of the *gesamtddeutsch* approach, the mid-European, lost all relevance with the expulsion of the Germans from *Mitteleuropa* after 1945. Any rationale for the theory therefore vanished with developments since the Second World War. Difficulties such as these seriously detract from the theoretical value of the *gesamtddeutsch* concept and make it useless as a historiographical technique for the present-day historian.

The *gesamtddeutsch* concept was difficult to implement. Srbik himself was unable to sustain his theory throughout the four volumes of *Deutsche Einheit*. Despite his law of historical causation, for instance, designed as it was to allow for the suspension of value judgments, Srbik occasionally allowed his own Austrian prejudices to emerge. He was particularly harsh in his treatment of Frederick the Great whom he accused of being ultimately responsible for the destruction of the old German Reich. Contrary to the intent of his concept, Srbik aroused the ire of the *kleindeutsch* historians.⁵³

If Srbik's contribution to the theory of German history is no longer relevant, the question remains: What lessons, if any, can the present-day historian draw from Srbik himself? We have seen that although Srbik was a meticulous historian he was politically blind. He courted and incurred opprobrium through his involvement with National Socialism. Srbik became involved with a political movement that usurped, exploited and perverted the nature and purpose of his *gesamtddeutsch* concept. Srbik was aware that his history had a political objective, but he sincerely believed that it was based on the most scrupulous and extensive research and firmly grounded in humanitarian principles.⁵⁴ He was not fully conscious of letting himself in for more than he expected. Shy, retiring and aloof, Srbik was primarily orientated toward intellectual matters. In the tradition of German idealism he was more concerned with the cultivation of the mind, an interest mirrored

⁵³ See Erich Brandenburg, "Deutsche Einheit," *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, XXX (1936), 757-770 and Fritz Hartung, "Preussen und die Deutsche Einheit," *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte*, XLIX (1937), 1-21 for criticisms of *Deutsche Einheit* and the *gesamtddeutsch* concept. Nettled by their remarks, Srbik retorted in his "Zur gesamtdutschen Geschichtsauffassung."

⁵⁴ Näf, "Srbik," p. 95.

in the very title — *Geist und Geschichte* — of his last major work, than in mundane affairs. The Nazis, however, twisted and distorted all German traditions and views, even the most noble, into something diabolical. That kind of horror never occurred to Srbik. Nor could it, for what he encountered was unprecedented. In the end he was unable to meet the crisis presented by a totalitarian regime. Srbik succumbed to the lure of National Socialism; his nationalism and sense of mission so narrowed his view that he was unable to examine in a critical fashion Nazi policies and the possible implications of his *gesamtdeutsch* ideas. His vision of a new European order, fashioned and led by Germany, made his conscience blunt and insensitive. He was not so naive as to believe all was serene in Hitler's Germany. But he rationalized his doubts away.⁵⁵ In this sense Srbik failed in his most difficult task. Herein lies the lesson of his career. For it is here, in the contemplation of Srbik's life and tragic fate that the historian can learn, profit, and derive some degree of self-understanding.

⁵⁵ Wandruszka, "Srbik," p. 233. At the time of the Munich crisis, Srbik, while expressing concern, nonetheless acquiesced and hoped that the passage of time would mellow the Nazi regime.