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Mary Fulbrook

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# *A Concise History of Germany*

SECOND EDITION

MARY FULBROOK



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## PREFACE

A book such as this is infinitely easier to criticise than to write. The attempt to compress over a thousand years of highly complex history into a brief volume will inevitably provoke squeals of protest from countless specialists, who see their own particular patches distorted, constrained, misrepresented, even ignored. Yet a brief history of such a large topic can make no attempt at comprehensiveness. At best it can provide an intelligent guide to the broad sweep of developments.

These limitations are indeed partly inherent in the nature of historical writing, which cannot be a simple matter of recounting an agreed narrative, but rather must be a process of imposing an order on the mass of material – and on the interpretations of that material – which comes to us from the past. But it is particularly the case for a concise history of Germany that some brutal decisions about selection and omission have had to be made. While readers will all have their own views on the matter, the author has had to make particular choices. In terms of space devoted to different periods, the book operates on the landscape principle: things nearer to the observer loom larger, are perceived in closer detail, than the mistier general views of the distant horizons. Thus chapters generally deal with progressively shorter periods of time as the present is neared. Within the general landscape surveyed some features appear more important than others. The problem of ‘teleology’ is well known to historians: there is a tendency to notice particularly features pointing towards the present, explaining developments partly in terms of

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*Preface*

their consequences (whether or not participants were aware of their ‘contributions’ to historical ‘progress’), and to ignore turnings that led nowhere. While there has been a healthy reaction against this in recent historical writing, it is still the case that certain developments appear more important from the point of view of current concerns than do others. And all authors inevitably have their own particular interests, enthusiasms and blind spots, however hard they try to be balanced and objective in coverage. There is also the particular problem, in relation to the history of ‘Germany’, of the limits of what is held to be its proper subject matter. In this volume the history of Austria has had to be considered only insofar as it was an integral part of ‘Germany’ at different times, or interrelated with the history of modern Germany since 1871. Austria, while perhaps the most obvious, is not the only area to suffer in this way: the boundaries of ‘Germany’ have been extremely changeable over the centuries.

A wide-ranging work such as this must rely heavily on researches undertaken by others, and represent a synthesis of existing knowledge and often quite conflicting views, while yet developing a coherent overall account. The author is painfully aware of gaps and inadequacies in the present analysis, but hopes at least that in presenting a broad framework which spans the centuries two useful purposes will have been accomplished. This book may present a basis and stimulus for subsequent more detailed exploration of particular aspects; it may also serve to locate existing knowledge and interests of readers within a wider interpretive framework. The book is intended as a form of large-scale map which can be used as a context for finer investigation of details along the way.

I am tremendously grateful to my colleagues and friends who have read and made valuable comments on parts of the manuscript, saving me from factual errors and inappropriate interpretations. I would like in particular to thank the following for their painstaking efforts to improve the text: David Blackbourn; Ian Kershaw; Timothy McFarland; Rudolf Muhs; Hamish Scott; Bob Scribner; Jill Stephenson; Martin Swales. Obviously, I alone am responsible for the inadequacies which remain. The work benefited from a small grant from the UCL Dean’s Fund enabling me to spend some time combing libraries, museums and archives for suitable illustrative



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material. The choice of appropriate illustrations was almost as difficult as the construction of the text, and raised as many problems of selection, interpretation and omission. Discerning readers will notice that illustrations of personalities and familiar sights have generally been demoted in favour of representation of broader themes and more remote periods or places. Finally, I would also like to thank my husband and my three children for being willing to spend innumerable summers wandering around central Europe in search of aspects of the German past.

## PREFACE TO THE UPDATED EDITION (1992)

First of all, I would like to thank Dr Werner Schochow of Berlin for pointing out to me some errors of detail which crept unnoticed into the first edition, and for suggesting certain amendments to the index. I am extremely grateful to him for his close and careful reading of the text, and the trouble he took in providing detailed comments and suggestions.

I have also taken the opportunity to put discussion of West Germany into the past tense (East Germany having already suffered that fate at the time of the first edition). While much of what was 'West Germany' has of course passed over into the enlarged Federal Republic after unification in 1990, nevertheless united Germany is a new entity, and it would be prejudging its development in a quite a-historical fashion to suggest that what was true of the pre-1990 Federal Republic will continue to obtain in the new, rather lop-sided united Federal Republic, which faces both new domestic challenges and a changed European context.

Mary Fulbrook

London, October 1991

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION (2004)

For the Second Edition, I have made a number of minor changes throughout the text, to reflect the changing viewpoints of the present, and the implications of recent scholarship. A new chapter

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*Preface*

has been added on Germany since 1990. The bibliography has been drastically pruned and substantially updated. But I have chosen not to tinker dramatically with the main body of the book, which has now proved its usefulness as an accessible overview for a wide range of readers across the English-speaking world and in a number of foreign translations.

Mary Fulbrook  
London, March 2003