

STAUFFENBERG: A FAMILY HISTORY, 1905–1944 by Peter Hoffmann. *Cambridge University Press* 1995. xii + 424 pp.

This book is a timely translation of *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder*, first published in Germany in 1992. Cambridge University Press have made a valuable contribution to English historiography of the Third Reich in commissioning this translation. Along with recent studies of Adam von Trott zu Solz, and the autobiographical reminiscences of Christabel Bielenberg it opens intriguing avenues into the study of the German resistance movement. Hitherto, many Anglophone historians have tended to argue that the significance of internal resistance movements was overrated; a judgement which the political circumstances of a divided Germany did little to call into question. German unification has now allowed a recovery of certain aspects of German national history; this book is a significant contribution to that process. It will obviously be an indispensable aid to anyone interested not only in German opposition to Hitler, but also to those interested in the intellectual genealogy of those who found themselves increasingly alienated from the Nazi ideological vision of Teutonic life and culture.

Peter Hoffman has produced a number of monographs on opposition to Hitler and has proved the breadth and depth of his appreciation of the subject. However, authors do not necessarily make the best translators of their own works. One criticism which might be levelled against Hoffman's work, is that the brilliance of its argument is not always reflected in its rather leaden English prose. Those who persevere with the text and who can endure the occasionally pedestrian rhythms will find much to enlighten and repel them.

Claus von Stauffenberg's name is most closely associated with the plot to kill Hitler. It was Stauffenberg who placed the briefcase packed with high explosives under the conference table in Hitler's East Prussian bunker. Hitler's fortuitous survival ensured the execution or suicide of 154 known victims of Nazi vengeance, including Stauffenberg's elder brother, Berthold, hanged on a meat hook in the Plotzensee Prison, along with many other representatives of German noble and military families, and the Jesuit Father Alfred Delp. The Stauffenbergs were Catholics, although not fervent in the practice of their religion. Undoubtedly, recourse was made by the plotters to the Catholic teaching on the morality of tyrannicide. Owen Chadwick, in his *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 1986) has suggested that Pius XII may even have known of plans for Hitler's assassination and might even have agreed to mediate between Germany and the Allied Powers should such a plot have been successful (p 274).

Hoffman's book provides more than a simple chronological account of the progressive revulsion of a significant part of the *Wehrmacht* with horrors of Nazism. It uncovers a complex intellectual, social and

religious pattern of responses to a Germany reeling from defeat in the Great War, and the savage punishment of Versailles. The Stauffenbergs were members of that class of military and courtly families who were attached to the royal courts which were constituent states comprising the German empire. Claus von Stauffenberg's family lived, until 1918, in the palace of the Kings of Württemberg. The end of empire meant the fall of the German kings; after centuries of the noble tradition of service the family suddenly found themselves attempting to locate their identity and purpose in a new and distinctly unattractive environment.

A major strand of this book is devoted to the intellectual genealogy of the Stauffenberg brothers. A key role was played by the Rhinelander poet Stefan George. George's poetry displays a concern with the greatness of the human personality played out against the backdrop of a religious-humanist interpretation of European tradition. He achieved a profound and unshakeable influence over several generations of idealistic and aristocratic young men. Three of the Stauffenberg brothers remained devoted to him and to his memory throughout their lives. George's devotion to them is seen in his carrying with him copies of their poetry always.

The name Stauffenberg, with its echoes of the Hohenstauffen and the glories of the medieval German imperial past and its knightly caste of noble and brave warriors, caused something of a stir in the George circle. It was not long before they were at its heart, being seen as the physical and intellectual embodiment of the true German genius. In many ways they were understood to be symbols or manifestations of that 'secret' Germany, as it was called, that existed within the soul of the nation to surface occasionally when the people faced a profound trial. Its character was definitely romantic in tone and similar rhythms can be found in Hölderlin, Schiller and Heine.

Peter Hoffmann renders accessible and intelligible a key event in modern German history. He also shows, with keen scholarship and acute analysis how Stauffenberg's Germany and that of Hitler, although sometimes drawing on related cultural memories, are the direct antithesis of each other. However, the collapse of Germany in 1945 also ensured the demise of Stauffenberg's elitist and somewhat ethereal vision of a mystical German community. It is significant that there is a dispute over his last words, hurled into the air before his summary execution by firing squad. Did he say *es lebe das geheiligte Deutschland* (Hallowed Germany lives) or did he say *es lebe das geheime Deutschland* (Secret Germany lives)?

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