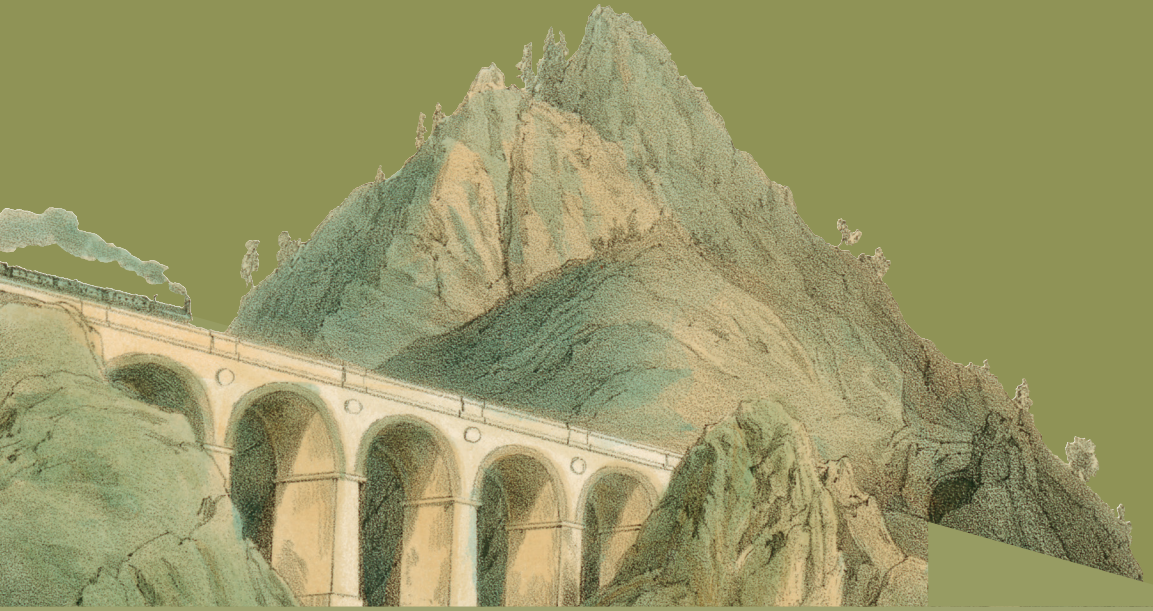


Niederösterreich im 19. Jahrhundert



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A Regional History of the Long Nineteenth Century

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A Regional History of the Long Nineteenth Century

Two volumes with a total of 1,800 pages, fifty essays and even more contributing authors: an enormous effort and a hefty tome, at least to hold. Such a large-scale undertaking requires careful justification. We might first point to the sparse extant literature on Lower Austria in the nineteenth century, before outlining the present work's core considerations and guiding questions and considering the potential for further research.

Hitherto, there had not been a monographic synthesis or collected volume on Lower Austria in the nineteenth century. Of course, overall surveys on the history of Lower Austria have also included the nineteenth century, a particularly noteworthy book being the *Geschichte Niederösterreichs* (History of Lower Austria) written by Karl Gutkas in the 1950s. It first appeared as a single volume in its third edition, in 1973, and was reprinted several times well into the 1980s.¹ In view of a lack of alternatives and due to its immense thematic range, it is still drawn on and cited by the scholarly literature. Gutkas also edited the *Landeschronik Niederösterreich* (Chronicle of the Land of Lower Austria) published in 1990.² A work heavy on events, as the chronicle genre would suggest, it was last updated by the collected volume *Spurensuche* (Search for Traces) in 2017. This compilation declares itself to be primarily a “representative book about Lower Austria” and thus contains a good many illustrations and texts revelling in the beauty of the region. It nevertheless also features some nuanced studies of its environmental, economic, social, and political history.³

Three collected volumes on Lower Austria in the twentieth century were published in 2008.⁴ They are clearly the closest we have to the present project, and take a similar approach in bringing together a large number of authors to produce a multifaceted social history. There has been no such pooling of resources for the nineteenth century. There is, however, a work published in three volumes between 2004 and 2006, *Niederösterreich. Eine Kulturgeschichte von 1861 bis heute* (Lower Austria: a

1 Karl GUTKAS, *Geschichte des Landes Niederösterreich* (7th edition, Vienna 1984).

2 Karl GUTKAS (ed.), *LandesChronik Niederösterreich* (Vienna, Munich 1990).

3 *Niederösterreich. Eine Spurensuche*. Ed. by Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung, Abteilung Kunst und Kultur (Vienna 2017).

4 Stefan EMINGER and Ernst LANGTHALER (eds.), *Niederösterreich im 20. Jahrhundert: 3 vols.* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2008); co-editors were Oliver KÜHSCHELM (vol. 3: Kultur) and Peter MELICHAR (vol. 2: Wirtschaft). This publication also resulted from a project conducted at the NÖ Landesarchiv from 2006–2008.

Cultural History from 1861 to the Present Day).⁵ Adopting a broad understanding of culture, editor Manfred Wagner clearly sought to examine the subject in its entirety by integrating contributions on political, economic, and social history. Another of the most recent collected volumes to deal with Lower Austria in the nineteenth century is *Ein Land im Zeitraffer* (A Land in Time Lapse), spanning from 1848⁶ to the present day. While it makes a discernible attempt to produce a history of modernity in Lower Austria, as a publication accompanying an exhibition and limited to just 150 pages, it necessarily offers a somewhat low-resolution picture. Like Wagner's *Kulturgeschichte*, the *Zeitraffer* omits the less researched first half of the nineteenth century. The same holds for a history of wealth in Lower Austria and Vienna published in 2020.⁷

The present work does not offer a narrative from start to finish like Gutkas' *Geschichte*; it is neither a chronicle nor an artifact of representation in the mould of *Spurensuche*. Our two volumes are not just limited to the second half of the nineteenth century. Nor are they excessively brief. Readers will nevertheless note topics and aspects that receive only marginal treatment or none at all. In part, this is due to the fact that whatever editors of collected volumes may be looking for, they have to adapt their wishes to the available research. However, the selection of themes and approaches still reflects editorial decisions favouring certain perspectives.

In order to make such decisions, it was necessary to find a suitable structure (1.) and periodisation (2.) and bundle regional history by developing common guiding questions (3.). Together with the analytical merit of the individual essays, this will hopefully make the publication a catalyst for further historical research that in drawing on sources from Lower Austria raises questions whose scholarly significance goes beyond this particular region.

1. Structure

The first volume pursues a history of regional state-building, focusing, as its title suggests, on *Herrschaft und Wirtschaft* (Rule and Economy). The “master narratives” of Lower Austria, which mainly concentrated on the Middle Ages, privileged the

5 Manfred WAGNER (ed.), *Niederösterreich. Eine Kulturgeschichte von 1861 bis heute* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2004–2006).

6 Stefan EMINGER, Elisabeth LOINIG and Willibald ROSNER (eds.), *Ein Land im Zeitraffer. Niederösterreich seit 1848* (St. Pölten 2012).

7 Cf. Andreas WEIGL, *Von der Existenzsicherung zur Wohlstandsgesellschaft: Überlebensbedingungen und Lebenschancen in Wien und Niederösterreich von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2020).

topic of the “formation of statehood in the territories”.⁸ Our volume thus takes on a traditional task, albeit with a critical impetus and a focus on the nineteenth century.

Recent literature in the field of global history has re-emphasised the connection between state-building and the formation of markets, military and entrepreneurial expansion, and bureaucratic and economic elites.⁹ This literature responds to the crises resulting from a liberalisation and globalisation heralded as the state’s withdrawal from the economy. Hence historical research has become increasingly interested in how statehood took on its various forms;¹⁰ attention has shifted from the nation state, which long seemed to be an endpoint of history, including Austrian history, to alternatives from both the past and the present, such as empires, multinational states, and the European Union.¹¹ Discussions on the failure of the Habsburg Empire or the apparent inevitability of its failure are now unmistakably linked to the concern that steps taken towards European and global integration could be countered by re-nationalisation.¹²

Today, more is again expected – or feared – from the (nation) state. Hence there is an urgent need to trace the historical formation of state power, including as a question of the local and regional presence of the state and its bodies and partners – all the more so because the nineteenth century saw the creation of many institutions that multiplied points of contact between the state and its subjects: the communes, the districts (*Bezirke*) and the *Land*, the principal territorial bodies of the state. But schools or transport infrastructure, foremost the railway, also date back to the nineteenth century and allow us to experience local and regional state activity to this day.

The second volume, on the other hand, focuses on society. It takes its clues from social (structural) history and historical anthropology. The title, *Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft* (Society and Community), inverts that of a famous book: with his work

8 Christine REINLE, “Meistererzählungen” und Erinnerungsorte zwischen Landes- und Nationalgeschichte. Überlegungen anhand ausgewählter Beispiele. Werner FREITAG, Michael KIESSNER, Christine REINLE u. Sabine ULLMANN (eds.), *Handbuch Landesgeschichte*. (Berlin, Boston 2018) 56–71.

9 Cf. Peer VRIES, *Ursprünge des modernen Wirtschaftswachstums. England, China und die Welt in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen 2013); Jürgen KOCKA, *Geschichte des Kapitalismus* (Munich 2013).

10 Bob JESSOP, *The State: Past, Present, Future* (Cambridge 2016); Patrick JOYCE and Chandra MUKERJI, *The State of Things: State History and Theory Reconfigured*. In: *Theory and Society* 46/1 (2017) 1–19.

11 Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, *The European Model and Imperial Contexts*. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 2/2 (2004) 157–181.

12 Steven BELLER, *What has the empire ever done for us? The surprising legacies of the Habsburg monarchy, and the lessons for today’s European Union*. In: *Eurozine* (3.11.2017), www.eurozine.com/what-has-the-empire-ever-done-for-us/ (5.2.2018); John DEÁK, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford, Cal. 2015).

of 1887, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*¹³ (Community and Society), Ferdinand Tönnies introduced a distinction to the nascent scholarly discipline of sociology that in many guises has been used to analyse modernity ever since. Tönnies used the term community to characterise the small framework of the village with its tight social contacts, while he considered the city, with its vastness and anonymity, as a characteristic site of society. Tönnies also observed that development seemed to be taking a certain direction: the age of the community was coming to an end. This juxtaposition was accompanied by a whiff of nostalgic regret from which we seek to distance ourselves; hence the inversion “society and community”. At the same time, we take up a formula that was rooted in the sensibilities of the nineteenth-century and reflected the experiences of Tönnies and his contemporaries. ‘Disembedding’ and re-embedding – that is, the return to the small scale – constitute the ongoing dynamics of modernity. By examining them in regional constellations, we have endeavoured to write a regional history of modernity.

The volume focuses on large social groups and their lifeworlds, relationship networks from the family to clubs, and everyday practices from serving on a club committee to writing a diary. The chapter “Die Metropole und das ‘flache Land’” (The Metropolis and the Countryside) specifically examines relations between Vienna and the regions forming today’s Lower Austria, but these relations also feature in many other chapters of both volumes. Folk music, monuments to the emperor, and municipal museums are three examples of a politics of culture and memory conveyed by associations and local dignitaries. They integrated a local social fabric while also combining it with collective identities that lay beyond the concrete experience of small groups, such as the empire, the people, or the nation. The British political scientist Benedict Anderson famously termed these large, ideologically charged constructs “imagined communities”.¹⁴ Yet another kind of community, communities of consumption that oscillated between educational aspiration and expectations of entertainment, are the basis for the business of the cultural sector represented here by theatre and cinema. In the case of the latter, the long nineteenth century saw the introduction of a new medium to rural regions.

Each of the two volumes thus has its own focus, but there is also a certain overlap in their perspectives. For instance, family ties cannot be reconstructed without considering questions of governmental power and economic aspects. Bequeathing property was a significant function of the family, and hence the Church and state authorities regulated access to marriage and to ‘legitimate’ offspring in a way that excluded people without property well into the 1860s. Conversely, the Christian Social, Social

13 Ferdinand TÖNNIES, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Abhandlung des Communismus und des Socialismus als empirischer Culturformen (Leipzig 1887).

14 Benedict ANDERSON, *Die Erfindung der Nation*. Zur Karriere eines erfolgreichen Konzepts (2nd edition, Frankfurt am Main 1993).

Democrat, and Liberal political parties were both large imagined communities and local experiences of community – and of enmity.

2. Periodisation

Paul Nolte entitled an essay of 2006 “Abschied vom 19. Jahrhundert” (Departure from the Nineteenth Century).¹⁵ The nineteenth century was the preferred period of the new social history of the 1970s and 1980s; it was considered the “century of society” and modernity in its paradigmatic form, it was the prehistory to the present, and its relevance was immediately obvious. Of course, the nineteenth has long since become the century before last. For that reason alone, it has no longer attracted quite the same interest from historians. However, the nineteenth century unquestionably remains a relevant field of study if the argument can be made that it was in this period that society emerged as a distinct form and that it was a crucial epoch of modernity and modernisation – perhaps even when they began.¹⁶ This line of argument was lent impetus by the monumental works of global history by Chris Bayly and Jürgen Osterhammel, who identify a fundamental “transformation of the world” in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ More recent books on the history of Europe have taken the same approach.¹⁸ The most relevant to Lower Austria, however, is Pieter Judson’s history of the Habsburg Empire.¹⁹

Judson’s much-discussed work considers over 150 years that largely coincide with the long nineteenth century of our book – departing from the calendar unity that has become commonplace in historiography.²⁰ The expanded nineteenth century ends, predictably, with the First World War, as a result of which two *Bundesländer* (federal states) emerged from the crown land of Lower Austria. Certainly, many developments continued from the nineteenth century irrespective of this state-political caesura. However, it seems even more difficult to decide when to begin the long nineteenth century as a period of investigation. Many of our authors identify elements that can be traced back to the eighteenth century. On the one hand, the authors observe how

15 Paul NOLTE, Abschied vom 19. Jahrhundert oder Auf der Suche nach einer anderen Moderne. In: Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft 22 (2006) 103–132.

16 Cf. Discussion Forum: The Vanishing Nineteenth Century in European History? In: Central European History 51 (2018) 611–695.

17 Christopher Alan BAYLY, Die Geburt der modernen Welt: eine Globalgeschichte 1780–1914 (Frankfurt am Main 2006); Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts (Munich 2011).

18 Richard J. EVANS, Das europäische Jahrhundert: ein Kontinent im Umbruch, 1815–1914 (Munich 2018); Willibald STEINMETZ, Europa im 19. Jahrhundert (Frankfurt am Main 2019).

19 Pieter M. JUDSON, Habsburg. Geschichte eines Imperiums, 1740–1918 (Munich 2017).

20 Eine differenzierte Auseinandersetzung mit den Problemen der Periodisierung: OSTERHAMMEL, Verwandlung, 84–128.

early modern institutions, practices, and ideas continued to have an impact: from the role of the estates (*Stände*), the system of manorial dependency (*Grunduntertänigkeit*), the right of domicile (*Heimatrecht*), and poor relief to concerns over wood shortages that resulted in forestry regulations. On the other hand, many essays describe the emergence of state power over society (*Durchstaatlichung*) that began before 1800. In the 1780s, reformist absolutism reached its zenith under Joseph II. He was already building a state that would reach into the villages, but failed due to the disparity between his ambitions and the resources at his disposal. When pressure mounted due to the wars with France, in 1811 the Habsburg state slid into bankruptcy. However, the same year of crisis saw the introduction of the General Civil Law Code, a powerful instrument for shaping social relations as the relationship between the state and society, between the state and citizens. The territorialisation of state power was considerably accelerated, in particular by the land surveys and registries under Francis I, the administrative restructuring in the aftermath of the revolution of 1848, and the increasing infrastructural capacities in the last third of the nineteenth century. Additionally, administrative processes, political mobilisation, industrialisation, family life, everyday religiosity, architecture, and the perception of landscapes followed different rhythms, both longer and shorter. On the other hand, some topics, such as the revolution of 1848 in the countryside and the Home Front²¹ in the First World War, are bound up with narrower and clearly defined periods, and hence the periodisation of the respective studies must be adjusted accordingly.

3. Guiding questions

The two volumes are joined and entwined by our guiding questions. These are questions of (a) forms of power, (b) levels and spheres of investigation, and (c) modernisation and modernity:

(a) Forms of social power must be examined, be it within authorities, companies, associations, or families. Networks of power structured social relations, and power is a key sociological and historical category. Examining the question of power struck us as more important than agreeing on a single definition, which would hardly have been fruitful given that the work has over fifty authors. Hence we ask: who has power and how is it distributed? Where is it productive and where is it restrictive? Is it gentle or brutal? Does it operate via persuasion or compulsion? However, by means of orientation, the authors were pointed to a broad sociological interpretation provided by Michael Mann's *The Sources of Social Power*.²² Many of the authors have taken up

21 Achim DOPPLER, Stefan EMINGER and Elisabeth LOINIG (eds.), *Fern der Front – mitten im Krieg. Niederösterreich 1914–1918* (St. Pölten 2014).

22 Michael MANN, *The Sources of Social Power*, 4 vols. (Cambridge 1986–2013); only part of the extensive work is available in German translation. It has also been published in four volumes: Michael

some of Mann's ideas, while even more of them have taken their own paths in considering questions of social power.

A striking characteristic of the period under investigation was the abovementioned growth of the state, which increasingly penetrated rural areas.²³ The creation of district offices in 1753 or the expansion of the network of priests under Joseph II were early steps in this direction. Following the revolution of 1848, the aristocracy lost its rights to feudal rule; instead, the communes were constituted as autonomous administrative bodies. In 1861, the diet became a Lower Austrian parliament. What had been the remit of the *Kreisämter* (circle offices) in the first half of the century was now taken over with greater intensity by the *Bezirke*, the new district authorities; they served as a link in the chain between the central bureaucracy and the local level, on which commune representatives now operated – elected on the basis of a suffrage that privileged property and education. The state thus increasingly became something tangible for the people. They encountered it in manifold forms, be it locally, via the gendamerie and the postal service, or on the mid level via the *Bezirkshauptmannschaft* (district administration) and the *Bezirksgericht* (district court), and election campaigns for the commune councils and the *Land* and imperial diets. It began to provide social benefits, namely accident and health insurance for the industrial workers, incepted in the 1880s. When the (central) state was taking on a new form that was also more clearly defined for the population, the *Land* was also taking shape: it was surveyed by the land register (1817–1824),²⁴ and scholars walked its length and breadth in the name of topography and regional geography.²⁵

(b) The levels and spaces of investigation should not just be determined locally and limited to the region of Lower Austria. It is also important to show their interplay with the state as a whole, international developments, and global relations and entanglements. How was the local combined with overarching developments and constellations on the mid and macro levels?

Contemporaries often voiced their impression that “the entire political and social life of Lower Austria possesses in Vienna the ultimate hub absorbing everything from all directions”.²⁶ This raises an important question for research on the region

MANN, *Geschichte der Macht* (Frankfurt am Main, New York 1990–2001). For a more detailed introduction to Mann's perspective, see the essay by Oliver KÜHSHELM, *Staat, Land und Gesellschaft. Soziale Macht vom Verwaltungsbudget bis zum Erdäpfelkeller*.

23 Jörg GANZENMÜLLER and Tatjana TÖNSMEYER (eds.), *Vom Vorrücken des Staates in die Fläche. Ein europäisches Phänomen des langen 19. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 2016).

24 Elisabeth LOINIG and Renate STOCKREITER (eds.), *Vermessung – Grenzen – Gerechtigkeit. Der Franziszeische Kataster und seine Vorgänger* (St. Pölten 2017).

25 Cf. for instance Franz Xaver SCHWEICKHARDT, *Darstellung des Erzherzogthums Oesterreich unter der Enns*, 34 vols. (1831–1841).

26 *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Niederösterreichischen Statthalterei* (Vienna 1897) 113; cf. Elisabeth LOINIG, Stefan EMINGER and Andreas WEIGL (eds.), *Wien und Niederösterreich – eine untrennbare Beziehung? Festschrift für Willibald Rosner zum 65. Geburtstag* (St. Pölten 2017).

and it would thus have been ahistorical and nonsensical for an examination of the crown land of Lower Austria to omit Vienna as its capital, as a European metropolis, and as one of the world's largest cities around 1900. However, the big city has always attracted more interest from researchers than the countryside with its villages and small towns, and hence our book places the emphasis on the rural regions in considering the reciprocal relationships between the metropolis, small towns, and village structures. But rural areas, then known as “das flache Land”, should not be reduced to a mere counterpart and point of contrast with Vienna; they were much more diverse than the expression suggests, and their settlements and regions operated in exchange not only with the capital, but also with each other. While the metropolis often served as a hub, that was not always the case.

For the history of statehood, efforts to increase centralisation and the central administrations have always received a lot of attention, less so the regional formation of the state as represented, in the case of the Habsburg Empire, by the crown lands – with all their subordinate administrative structures, the *Kreise*, *Bezirke*, and communes. While relations between the centre, Vienna, and the peripheral crown lands have repeatedly been the focus of studies, for instance on Dalmatia and especially Galicia, Lower Austria has primarily been examined via the metropolis as the seat of the central administration. The present volumes can do much to bridge this lacuna.

Hence the spotlight is on the social spaces of a multifaceted crown land and its sub-regions: from agricultural to industrial areas; from the metropolis of Vienna with its two million inhabitants to the small towns; from spa gardens to village squares; from churches and offices to workshops, stables, and housing blocks; along transport routes, in family ties and in the networks of clubs and enterprises, the administration, and parties. In this way, the focus is placed on large-scale developments and people's experiences, on structural pressures and scope for agency, all of which are manifested in their local, regional, and superregional connections.

(c) When we think of the nineteenth century, we also think of a “transformation of the world”²⁷ by the railway, telegraph communication, newspapers, mass production and mass parties, asphalt roads, water pipes, the electric light, savings banks, and cooperatives. To what extent did regional society enter modernity, and when did it happen? Was it with the expansion of the state stretching back to the policies of (enlightened) absolutism, with the processes and consequences of industrialisation that emerged in the eighteenth century, or was it not until the development of mass politics, mass production, and mass consumption from the 1880s onwards? Did modernisation constitute progress, as liberal elites claimed, or was it the decline that conservatives feared? Progress was everywhere, thought the communal dignitaries, the German Liberals, and later the Christian Socials too. They understood it to mean civil liberty, but “bürgerliche Freiheit” was above all liberty for the middle

27 OSTERHAMMEL, *Verwandlung* (Munich 2011).

classes – or for the petty bourgeoisie and peasants at a push, but not for women and not for workers. Women’s and workers’ movements fought hard for more rights. Associations, ranging from singing and reading clubs to organisations for the beautification of the village, mobilised society. At the same time, they could equally spread and foster dogmatic attitudes; while for Jews it was an age of gradual emancipation, this development was soon arrested by a radical anti-Semitism. In Lower Austria, a German popular nationalism agitated against people of Jewish origin and speakers of Slavic languages. The many ambivalences of modernisation and modernity clearly emerge.

Looking back, Stefan Zweig wrote of an “age of security”.²⁸ But the security of the nineteenth century always came at greater cost to the underclasses than to the elites. Revolutions, wars, strikes and lockouts, nationalist riots, patriarchal rule, and official and military violence are part of a regional history of social power. The manmade catastrophes of the twentieth century were not without warning. Was the nineteenth century the run-up to an “age of extremes”?²⁹

More recent research has usually regarded the twentieth century as *the* age of modernity, focusing on enormous violence, world wars, and genocide on the one hand and on the formation of affluent societies on the other. In contrast, it is worth asking what made societies modern by returning to the nineteenth century.³⁰ The two volumes on Lower Austria seek to provide a history of regional society examining the intensification of social power. The project thereby investigates the regional history of modernity, although continuities from the early modern period repeatedly come to the fore. Without revealing too much of the individual studies’ assessments, it is abundantly clear that modernisation implied an intensification of social power. The state and a growing number of authorities and companies, but also private enterprises, clubs, and parties were able to mobilise more people and more resources, to achieve more, and destroy more than was the case in the early modern period.

The volumes are intended to awaken interest in readers searching for information on the history of Lower Austria in the nineteenth century. Ideally, they will encounter a regional field of research characterised by the analysis and testing of questions that are also of historical and societal relevance in contexts beyond Lower Austria.

28 Stefan ZWEIG, *Die Welt von gestern* (Frankfurt am Main 2017 [first published 1942]) 14.

29 Eric J. HOBBSBAWM, *Das Zeitalter der Extreme. Weltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, Vienna 1995).

30 Cf. NOLTE, *Abschied*.

