

Kocka, Jürgen

Book Review — Digitized Version

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Business history review

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Suggested Citation: Kocka, Jürgen (1976) : [Rezension] Hermann Kellenbenz, Klara van Eyll: Die Geschichte der unternehmerischen Selbstverwaltung in Köln 1797-1914. Köln: Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv zu Köln, 1972, Business history review, ISSN 0007-6805, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Vol. 50, Iss. 1, pp. 104-106

This Version is available at:

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DIE GESCHICHTE DER UNTERNEHMERISCHEN SELBSTVERWALTUNG IN KÖLN 1797-1914. By *Hermann Kellenbenz and Klara van Eyll.* Köln, *Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv zu Köln e.V.*, 1972. Pp. 271. DM50.

Reviewed by Jürgen Kocka
Professor of History
University of Bielefeld

The German *Industrie- und Handelskammern* (formerly: *Handelskammern*) are self-administrative bodies of local commerce and industry (excluding most of small business), closely regulated by legislation. Some of them developed out of eighteenth-century merchants' associations, but most originated in the nineteenth century, and often responded to legislative initiatives of the German states. Their history displays strong variations reflecting local and regional differences in economic, political, and legal conditions. On the occasion of an outstanding anniversary, many of these chambers of commerce have sponsored and commissioned historical accounts of their developments, and sometimes professional historians wrote them. In some instances — as in Ludwig Beutin's history of the Hagen chamber, in Wolfram Fischer's account of the Essen chamber, and in this new treatment of the Cologne case, here under review — substantial pieces of literature have resulted, covering the history of the organization and its personnel but also much of the

economic, social, and even political history of the specific city and region.

The early development of the Cologne chamber was deeply influenced by French occupation (beginning in 1794) and Napoleonic legislation. From 1814 on, the Rhineland, with its well developed economy, belonged to Prussia, being her most advanced part in many respects. The history of the Cologne chamber reflects the changing Prussian economic policy which slowly increased the tasks of the chambers in the course of the nineteenth century. It shows the problems of a well established, liberal Rhenish business community within a state whose power center was Berlin and whose power structure continued to be dominated by semi-feudal, bureaucratic and military elites. It also reflects the changing situation, composition, and policy of a business community which had traditionally centered on commerce, banking, and insurance, which continued to do so, but which now, in the course of advancing industrialization, saw a growing number of industrialists in its ranks and tried to come to terms with the ensuing tensions. The multi-faceted policy of the chamber, its internal discussions, memoranda, reports, petitions, and publications inform about businessmen's attitudes, interests, and actions at the grass roots, with reference to many issues in economic policy, community self-administration and local development, social legislation, and other fields of public interest.

This well researched and beautifully illustrated account is based on the rich documentary materials in the Rhenish-Westfalian Economic Archives (Cologne), which was founded by the chambers of Cologne and other nearby cities in 1906. Later the archives became closely connected with Cologne University (which grew out of a business-supported business college and which has shown closer relations to the business community than most other German universities). Both authors have been (or still are) engaged in the direction of these archives. The book is divided into three parts, which treat the periods 1797-1814, 1814-1870, and 1871-1914 successively. Each part contains a sketch of German economic policy, a thorough account of the local economy, a detailed description of the organizational developments and the policy of the chamber, and accurate biographical information on its presidents and secretaries, who in most cases were successful local businessmen. There is also a list of the 341 members of the chamber between 1797-1933, i.e. a substantial cross-section of the Cologne business community (including name, years of membership, branch, and firm). Useful indices facilitate access to the rich materials of the book.

In general the account is well informed, careful, and correct, apart from some minor problems (e.g.: Was the right to vote in chamber elections in 1831 tied to an annual business tax of at least 12 — on p. 81 — or at least 20 *Taler* — on p. 82?). The authors' attempt to treat the chamber's history within its local and national context must be welcomed, although the treatment of the overall framework is not always satisfactory. To say that the city's constitution in the early modern period was "democratic" (p. 11), and that the Christian faith was "abandoned" in the years of secularization (p. 20), is wrong or at least very misleading. Normative notions enter in an uncontrolled way when the authors state (in their

final overview of the interwar period) that social legislation developed "too quickly" in Germany after 1919, and that this is shown by comparison with Western Europe (p. 222). But the clearest limitation of the book is its highly descriptive nature. If the authors had asked and answered explicit questions, if they had tied their account clearly to the issues debated in economic and social history, and if they had used some of the many studies on other cities' chambers for explicit comparison, they would have greatly enhanced the value of their book for the economic and business historian. They would also have achieved more in terms of identifying the specifics of developments in Cologne by separating them from more general developments observable in all or most other local communities as well. One would hope that a second volume will follow on the period since 1914, and that it will avoid some of these weaknesses.

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