

Wolf D. GRUNER, *Der Wiener Kongress 1814/1815*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014, ISBN 978-3-15019-252-8, 261 p.

A foreign historian visiting German bookstores might well be astonished by the popularity of small books on more or less general topics, important events and significant personalities of German as well as European history for which it is difficult to use an expression other than a pocket book. Even more surprising might be their often high quality, which seems to be due to the fact that their authors are usually among the leading experts on the topics they cover. This also is the case of the book reviewed here, a pocket book in the real meaning of the word given its small size, on the Congress of Vienna written by German historian Wolfgang Dietrich Gruner and published by the Reclam publishing house exactly two hundred years after the beginning of this well-known and significant event with considerable influence over the course of modern European history.

Gruner belongs to the older generation of historians for whom knowledge of facts based upon the study of not only scholarly literature but also the vast quantity of primary sources housed in many archives is something natural and not merely a matter of curiosity. This latest monograph is established on the same solid foundations that Gruner has based all his voluminous work on 19th century German and European history to which he has dedicated most of his career. With this in mind, it is no surprise that so small a book should contain such a wealth of content and that the reader will get on 261 pages more than might be expected at first sight, something that cannot be immediately revealed from its text where the references are limited to the absolutely necessary minimum in the text much like the list of archives and secondary sources used for writing it. This was a necessary compromise to save space, but it in no way devalues the high scholarly quality of the work.

The content of the book is dedicated to diplomatic negotiations and factors influencing their course and outcome, while the numerous social events and love stories so typical for the congress but actually not so significant for its

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diplomatic agenda have been entirely omitted. The concentration on what was actually important helps to maintain the coherency of the narrative divided into six main chapters (there actually are seven numbered chapters but the first one is an introduction). The first chapter presents the most important factors determining the progress of European society and politics from 1750 to 1830, by which Gruner establishes the historical framework for the congress itself. With the explanation of the complexity of this process it becomes all the more obvious how difficult a task was laid before the participants of the congress. The second chapter prepares the path to the congress with the analysis of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era from 1789 to 1814. The third one introduces the views of the members of the anti-Napoleonic coalition before their meeting in Vienna on how a post-war system ensuring stable and long-lasting peace was to be established. The fourth chapter, by far the longest one, forms the core of the whole book with the explanation of the course of the congress; the fifth one explains its importance for the further development of European affairs. No less interesting is the final, sixth, part of the book dealing with the evaluation of the congress by the contemporaries as well as historians.

What must be assessed in a highly positive way above all is the fact that the text is in no way a mere presentation of facts but a highly analytical piece offering an explanation of the complicated negotiations and their results upon numerous external as well as internal factors. It is true that this approach places considerable demands on the reader – despite the fact that the language used is easily readable and the whole story is well-arranged, something not easy owing to its complexity – but it definitely makes the book a highly valuable and scholarly, mature contribution to the topic that could hardly be achieved without the already mentioned erudition of its author.

The role of every review is not only to commend but also to criticise. In this case one could offer more words of praise but few of reproach. If there is any shortcoming then, probably, it is the predominant concern for Central Europe, namely Germany, and its significance in the negotiations at the

congress, whereas some other affairs and areas would seem to be sidelined, which is an easily understandable feature of the book owing to Gruner's particular focus on German history during his long academic career. It is, however, difficult to label this "German" accent as a real failing because one must entirely agree with the author that German affairs played the crucial and by far the most discussed role at the congress. Accentuating them can thus be regarded as historically well-founded.

In short Gruner's latest book is an excellent contribution to the research work on not only the Congress of Vienna but also early 19th century history in general and a valuable piece for not only scholars but also the general public. Both get more than might appear from the small size of the book that in no way corresponds with the high quality of its content. This monograph definitely merits a prominent place in a book-case and it can be taken for granted that it will not be overshadowed by other books, even those bigger in size, on the same topic.

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