

## Moral Economy



### LEKTÜREN / LECTURES

## OFF TOPIC: ONCE AGAIN KARL BOSL AND THE THIRD REICH

2016/01/13 | JÜRGEN FINGER | HINTERLASSE EINEN KOMMENTAR

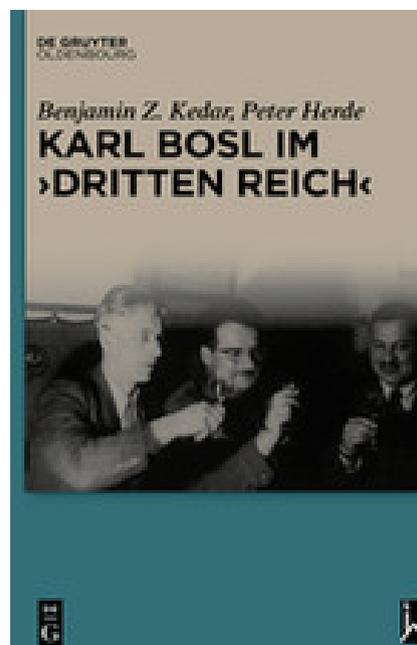
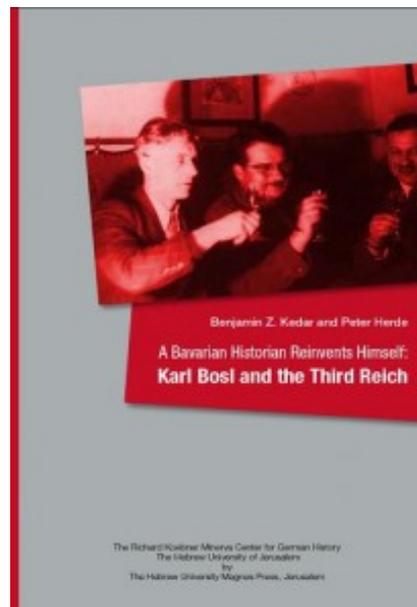
Three years ago, I wrote a review on Benjamin Z. Kedar's and Peter Herde's "Karl Bosl and the Third Reich" (2011).<sup>1</sup> Extensively they treat his early biography as a teacher and scholar and deconstruct his strategies of self-portrayal in the years and decades after 1945. In the end of 2015, Kedar and Herde finally have published an extended and revised German version, containing supplementary sources and a long commentary on the discussion they provoked in German and especially in Bavarian academia.<sup>2</sup>

Finger, Jürgen: Book Review: A Bavarian Historian Reinvents Himself: Karl Bosl and the Third Reich. In: German History, first published online April 9, 2013

doi:10.1093/gerhis/ght024  Full Text html – Full text pdf; Print: 31,3 (2013) pp. 436-437.

After refreshing my former reading experience and skimming over the chapter on the reception of the first edition, I came to the conclusion, that my review still is valid and appropriate and can apply to the new edition, too.

The epilogue on the German discussion shows exemplarily, how the discussion of sources and context, the critique of an argument and it's reformulation can advance research. Although, sometimes the discussion proved to be inadequate, casually drifting into allegations and personal attacks against the authors. But the exchange of scientific arguments, based on source critique, seemed to prevail. Kedar and Herde extensively and – as far as I can verify it – accurately report the critique and react by discussing empirical findings and giving supplementary information. This chapter sure is worth reading for all, who know the English edition.



Sure, I do know that the choice of title and cover illustration ranks among the prerogatives of the publisher, in this case de Gruyter Oldenbourg. However, it is unfortunate that the German publisher and the authors omitted the intelligent and accurate subtitle of the original edition “A Bavarian Historian Reinvents Himself”.<sup>3</sup> A second, minor observation concerning the covers refers to the slight change in the main title: “Karl Bosl and the Third Reich” vs. “Karl Bosl im „Dritten Reich““, which – sure enough – should not be overestimated. But from a history of bilateral relations (Bosl–NS)<sup>4</sup> the focus thereby shifts to the biography of a single person within a dictatorial political system – once again underlined by the shortfall of the subtitle. The publisher’s choice is irritating, as the denazification of Karl Bosl and his autobiographical self-construction represent not only a major part of the book but also, in my opinion, the essential contribution to research.

Remarkably, the vivid discussion of the last years even emphasized the interest in the isolated case of Karl Bosl and his behavior as a scholar and civil servant before 1945. In doing so, the analytically more interesting question of forms and (un)conscious strategies of self-(re)invention during and after a fundamental political, social and autobiographical crisis – i.e. the collapse of the National Socialist regime and the occupation of Germany – became less important. The latter perspective goes beyond the pure individual case and it does not per se contain a moral verdict. I thus maintain the assumption I made at the end of my first review:

*„Apart from this particular constellation, the pattern that emerges from Bosl’s biography and especially his flexibility after 1945 was regrettably only too common in postwar German academia and society more broadly. Bosl’s ‘legend’ is also the legend of numerous representatives of the educated middle classes (Bildungsbürgertum) and especially of quite a few young academics who began their career in the 1930s, rewrote their own biographies after 1945, swiftly advanced in the young German democracy, and shaped their disciplines for decades.“<sup>5</sup>*

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Vorschaubild: Professoren der LMU auf dem Weg zur Grundsteinlegung (Ausschnitt), Vorlage: [LMU München](#).

1. Kedar, Benjamin Z.; Herde, Peter: A Bavarian Historian Reinvents Himself: Karl Bosl and the Third Reich. Jerusalem (The Hebrew University Magnes Press) 2011. 162 pp. \$25.00 (paperback) ISBN 965-493-564-7. [[↗](#)]
2. Kedar, Benjamin Z.; Herde, Peter: Karl Bosl im „Dritten Reich“. München (de Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2015. 226 pp.

print-ISBN 978-3-11-041256-7 . Other formats [online with paywall](#). For the epilogue on the reception and discussion of the first edition cf. 181-212. 

3. The citation of my first review in GH mixes up title and subtitle. It follows the sequence on the cover overlooking the fact, that the second part of the title has been accentuated typographically. 
4. Cf. the title and subtitle of: Finger, Jürgen; Keller, Sven; Wirsching, Andreas: Dr. Oetker und [sic!] der Nationalsozialismus. Geschichte eines Familienunternehmens 1933-1945. München (C.H. Beck) 2013, especially the notion of „wechselseitige Beziehungsgeschichte“ (history of reciprocal relations) with National Socialism (13). 
5. Finger, Book Review, 437. 



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