

**Wolfram Siemann, Metternich.
Staatsmann zwischen Restauration und
Moderne, München: C. H. Beck Verlag,
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A brief biography of Prince Metternich, the important early 19th century statesman, appeared in bookshops in the spring of 2010. Written by German historian and professor at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Wolfram Siemann, its small format and scant 128 pages could easily lead to its being overlooked or give the impression that it is just one of many books on the personality allegedly too well-known for anything new or original to be said about him. Together with the popular format it might lead to the suspicion that the author decided to take advantage at the last moment of two recent anniversaries connected with Metternich: 200 years since his nomination to the post of the Austrian foreign minister (1809) and 150 years since his death (1859).

It would, however, be unfortunate to be misled by such a first impression because in the rather limited space of this small book Professor Siemann presents new information and in many respects new insights into the personality usually assessed so unfavourably – Metternich is still rather often branded as a liar, deceiver, blind reactionary, and arch-enemy of nations and human rights. The principal reason for such an interpretation is the fact that his life and work have not been thoroughly researched. Of course, many books on his life and period have been published and some of them are first-rate, but such a positive evaluation is usually found only in specialized literature, for example, on diplomatic history. Such publications could not, however, entirely revise the one-sided, negative portrayal of Metternich's character and achievements depicted in the 19th century. Biographies of Metternich usually have the character of a compilation and have mostly been written from secondary sources, sometimes in an effort to elaborate with the inclusion of a few documents from Metternich's published correspondence, which, however, represents just a fragment of the preserved archival heritage.

Siemann's short biography naturally cannot be such a revision and it is not its purpose, but it represents an important step towards this goal. The information it presents is the result of years of research carried out primarily in Czech, German and Austrian archives. For example, Professor Siemann is the first historian to have read all the documents housed in Metternich's archive as well as in the archive of his family in the Czech National Archive in Prague and the documents relating to his landholdings in Bohemia and the Rhineland. This research broadened Siemann's considerable knowledge of German and Austrian history of the 19th century, which has been the principal objective of his entire professional career.

This wide exploratory base is clearly apparent in his book, which is in no way "one of many", and despite its brevity it belongs to the best that have ever been written on the topic. Siemann convincingly and in an engaging manner presents Metternich as a statesman whose opinions resulted from conservatism and not from reactionary narrow-mindedness and in many respects were logical. This positive evaluation is in no way a superficial eulogy but the result of a deep analysis based upon the critical appraisal of the collected facts and an extraordinary knowledge of the given period. A proper understanding of this period is entirely necessary for the correct evaluation of Metternich's opinions and deeds, as British historian Alan Sked has recently proved in his book *Metternich and Austria: An Evaluation* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, New York 2008).

Whereas the main importance of Sked's book lies in the refutation of many clichés concerning Metternich's time, Siemann mainly focuses on Metternich himself. He leads the reader through Metternich's long life: from his youth, when the conservative thinking of the young noble from the Rhineland formed, through his forced departure from his native land to Vienna and his long career at the top of the administration and finally to his fall and last years. As for Metternich's functioning at the Austrian foreign ministry and chancellery, Siemann naturally deals with Metternich's activities in both the diplomatic as well as the domestic affairs of his time. A rather interesting chapter is also dedicated to the general appreciation of Metternich in public.

Siemann's book offers to a great extent an original and in my opinion correct portrait of Metternich, whose extended biography will be published by the same author around 2013. Until then, this one may cause the reader to reflect on the period that was of great importance to the further development of modern European history and the personality who considerably influenced it. As it is, historians still owe Metternich a reappraisal be-

cause there is a great deal that has still not been said about him and much of what has been said needs revision. That such a reevaluation is overdue is clear when one considers the extent to which Metternich is generally and paradoxically perceived more negatively than Napoleon I Bonaparte, who was responsible for protracted wars leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths, and who answered Metternich's plea for peace and thus to spare the lives of so many soldiers with the words: "A man like me shits on the lives of a million of people." (Ein Mann wie ich scheidet auf das Leben von einer Million Menschen. P. 48) We can only hope that other historians will follow Siemann's example and will desire to bring something new to the topic upon thorough and objective research, even in brief essays that are, as Professor Siemann has proved in his short but significant book, sometimes more useful than lengthy but superficial studies repeating deep-rooted clichés.