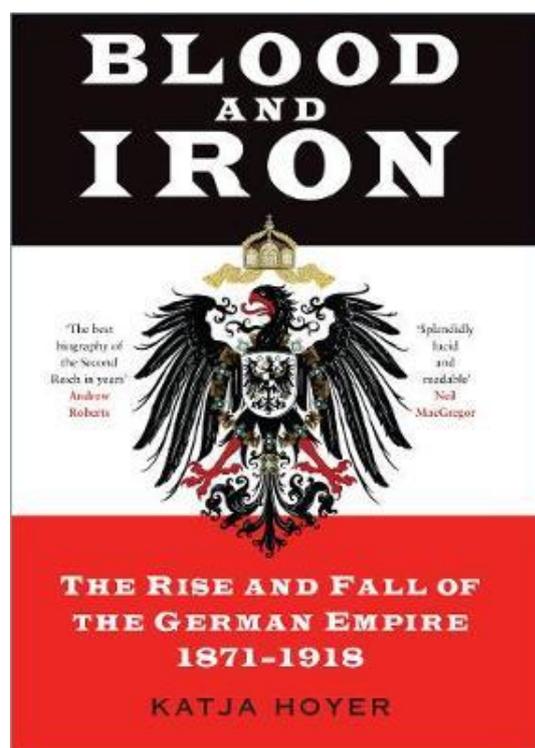


BOOK REVIEW: This recent publication by Katya Hoyer has been subject to much critical



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acclaim and deservedly so in my view. This is a very lucid account of the Second Reich, very well researched and readable covering a period of historical complexity in great detail and entertaining prose. We are given a very cogent argument that what started in Versailles Hall of Mirrors in 1871 need not of ended in disaster of the Great War. Before 1871 Germany was not a nation but a concept in the mind of its founder Otto von Bismarck. How would he bring 39 individual states together under a 'Kaiser' convincing Prussians, Bavarians, Rhinelanders and Saxons et al to become German?

Bismarck that pivotal figure in the creation of a unified Germany recognised in his 1862 speech that it would take a war to unify the German people and that view proved as accurate before 1871 as after. Forging a new nation state in the fires of war against Denmark, Austria and France he created a Germany whose only binding experience was conflict against purported enemies which was not necessarily confined to the external. He considered socialists as being opposed

to a national identity declaring them to be 'enemies of the state' thus perpetuating the struggle of all Germans against common enemies. Bismarck followed the risky strategy of perpetuating the struggle against common enemies including other Germans, in order to preserve his new Germany. It is of note that Bismarck thought Wilhelm II 'a hothead' and is no real surprise that Bismarck and Wilhelm quickly clashed over the issue of German unity. They both recognised that common economic and cultural ground was not enough to hold the Second Reich together but Wilhelm found Bismarck's solution of Germans battling each other repugnant. Lacking Bismarck's political skills Wilhelm argued that Germany must fight for it's 'place in the sun' amongst the great nations e.g. Britain and France believing an empire on a par with Britain and France would lead to internal unity a flawed strategy that lead ultimately to the destruction of the Second Reich and more immediately the departure of the 'Iron Chancellor'. There had never been a Germany without the 'Iron Chancellor' and an uncertain future dawned with Wilhelm quickly discovering that the divisions caused by religion, class, geography, culture and ethnicity to name but a few could not be overcome by force of personality and 'royal charisma'. At first shocked when WW1 broke out in 1914 Wilhelm still saw opportunity for to finally bring all Germans together declaring on 1st August 1914 'today we are all German brothers and only German brothers'. Research has dispelled the myth of widespread euphoria at the outbreak of the war there was an initial feeling that the fatherland had to be defended but the price was to prove too high in blood and iron for the young German state and the Second Reich was destroyed where it all began – in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles.

There is an extensive bibliography and comprehensive index with notes referred at the page footer where relevant. I thoroughly recommend this book to both the general and specialist reader alike filling as it does a significant gap in the understanding of the German Empire.

MARTIN WILLOUGHBY