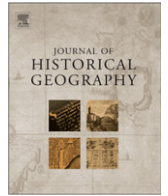




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Review

Peter Meusbürger and Thomas Schuch (Eds), *Wissenschaftsatlas of Heidelberg University: Spatio-Temporal Relations of Academic Knowledge Production*. Knittlingen, Bibliotheca Palatina, 2012, 129€. p. 392.

Dedicated students of higher education can draw on a large and disparate range of commemorative university histories, often specially commissioned to celebrate significant anniversaries. Although some of these volumes have serious intellectual objectives, many are exercises in public relations with ambitions that extend no further than the coffee tables of wealthier alumni. Most rely on conventional, often dry historical narratives and the most predictable of illustrative material.

This magnificent volume on Heidelberg university, a translation of the 2011 German original, is the perfect antidote to these less inspiring university histories, and reveals the influence of a recent 'geographical turn' in intellectual history, especially as this relates to early modern Germany, as well as a deep awareness of a much longer dialogue, more obvious on continental Europe than elsewhere, between historical geography as a research technique and the history of ideas as a body of knowledge. The volume's consistently spatial perspective is indicated by the German word '*Wissenschaftsatlas*', an untranslatable expression left in its original form in the English title. The decision to present Heidelberg's fascinating history in the form of an atlas reflects the training of the editors, Peter Meusbürger and Thomas Schuch, who are both geographers, as indeed is the university's current rector, Bernhard Eitel, who contributes a well-crafted preface. Meusbürger, formerly the university's pro-vice chancellor and currently a distinguished senior professor, is internationally renowned for his work on the geography of education. This volume is a fitting tribute to the approach Meusbürger has pioneered, applied to the university he has served with distinction for almost three decades.

The atlas, beautifully designed by the publisher, is divided into more than 100 concise, elegantly translated chapters written by a team of around 130 scholars and scientists. Hundreds of carefully selected black-and-white and colour photographs enliven the text, alongside more than 100 newly constructed thematic maps of various sizes, formats, and colours. These maps, prepared by the same team of cartographers at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig that produced the 12-volume National Atlas

of the Federal Republic of Germany between 2000 and 2007, offer remarkable insights into the university's internal and external geographies and bring its complex history vividly to life.

The opening section, roughly half the volume, reviews the key historical periods and themes from the university's foundation in 1386 until 1945, though several chapters in the second and third sections, on the post-war reconstruction and more recent developments, also provide longer historical analyses, notably those by Meusbürger, Honeck, Birkenmaier, Probáld, Schamoni, and Siefert on the international students that flocked to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Heidelberg from elsewhere in Europe, the USA, Russia, and Japan. There is a great deal of new historical research here that highlights the university's centrality to the major European religious and intellectual transformations from the reformation and counter-reformation through the rise of romanticism and nationalism to the upheavals of the first and second world wars. Many important episodes are re-told as exercises in historical geography, including Baar-Cantoni's study of the impact of Luther's 1518 Heidelberg 'disputation' on European protestant thinking, Neumaier's analysis of the city's late seventeenth-century destruction by the armies of Louis XIV, Berger's contribution on the intimate social geographies of nineteenth-century student fraternities, and Demm's discussion of Alfred Weber's network of disciples.

The chapters on the twentieth century, specifically Moritz on the admission of women, Wolgast and Osten on the first world war, and Freihöfer on American contributions to the university's reconstruction after 1918, are especially important. The essays by Eckart, Moritz, Mußgnug, Scharholz, and Sellin on the Nazi period, when almost a third of the university's staff were dismissed, and on the denazification purges during the American occupation after 1945, provide unflinching, often moving commentaries on the university's darkest era.

This is an extraordinary achievement, the best single volume history of a major university ever published. It sets a new benchmark for studies in higher education while simultaneously highlighting the value of an explicitly geographical perspective.

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