

Kieval traces the eventual incompatibility of certain narratives of Jewish criminality—local (social) knowledges about Jewish difference that drew upon Christian texts and traditions and that were then mobilized to serve political ends—with “discourses of modern legal procedure, scientific method, and the self-consciousness of political and social elites” (223). While those narratives facilitated the initiation of the process, the attempts to appropriate the authority of scientific culture and expertise to sustain the accusations ultimately ran into the inability of the evidence, repeatedly subjected to forensic examination, to confirm them. Drawing upon Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s concept of sociology of knowledge, Kieval concludes that while the narrative of ritual murder could still serve as a clarion call of Jewish danger and immutable Jewish difference, it had to accommodate the new rules of the juridical order to confront that danger and difference. Once the narrative of Jews’ alleged need to murder non-Jews became naturalized, severed from its salvific meaning, the accusation became a “most impoverished vessel” (228) to explain the world the accusers inhabited and, by implication, to mobilize a counter-worldview to the rule of the scientific and bureaucratic order. *Blood Inscriptions* is a worthy addition to the extensive scholarship on these trials specifically and on ritual murder accusations more generally.

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Der Rathenau mord und die deutsche Gegenrevolution

By Martin Sabrow. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2022. Pp. 334. Cloth €30.00. ISBN: 978-3835351745.

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Commissioned to memorialize the hundredth anniversary of Walther Rathenau’s assassination on June 24, 1922, Martin Sabrow’s book is a revised version of the dissertation and short book he published in the mid-1990s. Here Sabrow takes advantage not only of the secondary literature that has appeared since then but also of new archival sources in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History in Moscow. Sabrow’s central thesis is that the assassination of Rathenau, a prominent German Jew who had been serving as foreign minister since the previous October, had less to do with the wave of antisemitism that swept Germany since the last years of World War I than with the conspiratorial ambitions of a small group of right-wing activists whom Hermann Ehrhardt had assembled under the aegis of a secret organization known as the Organization Consul (*Organisation Consul*, O.C.).

Rathenau was not the only prominent German to be targeted for assassination by the handful of terrorists who had been recruited by the Organization Consul. In late August 1921, two assassins had murdered Matthias Erzberger, a former Reich minister of finance who was reviled by the Right for having signed the armistice in November 1918. This was followed in June 1922 by an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Philipp Scheidemann, a prominent Social Democrat who had earned the wrath of the radical Right by virtue of his strong support for Germany’s new republican system. And Rathenau’s assassination would be followed by an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the prominent Jewish publicist Maximilian Harden, who had attracted the enmity of the Right by switching his loyalties from the monarchy to the republic as editor of the highly regarded journal *Die Zukunft*.

What Sabrow does is to trace all of these atrocities back to the counterrevolutionary aspirations of Ehrhardt and those who had been recruited into his service. Ehrhardt had served with distinction as a naval officer during World War I and did his best to suppress the mutiny that erupted within the German navy with the collapse of the Hohenzollern monarchy in early November 1918. Unequivocally opposed to the system of government that emerged from the Weimar National Assembly in the spring of 1919, Ehrhardt began to organize his followers into a secret organization – the Organization Consul – that sought the republic's violent overthrow and the establishment of a more authoritarian form of government. Here, Sabrow makes an important observation with respect to the social pedigree of those whom Ehrhardt attracted to his crusade, namely that the overwhelming majority came from privileged backgrounds but had spent the formative years of their lives at the front and thus lacked the education, skills, and experience to find their way in the civilian world left in the wake of the war and revolution. They were, in other words, profoundly alienated from the world in which they found themselves and saw in Ehrhardt an opportunity to find meaning and purpose in their otherwise impoverished lives. Nowhere is this observation more astute than in the case of the two men who murdered Rathenau, Hermann Fischer and Erwin Kern.

The immediate assumption was that Rathenau had been targeted for assassination because of his Jewish identity. This, in turn, afforded the German judicial system a convenient explanation for Rathenau's assassination that effectively blinded it to the larger conspiracy of which the murders of Erzberger and Rathenau, as well as the unsuccessful efforts to kill Scheidemann and Harden, were all a part. What was really at stake – and here Sabrow is particularly critical of the German judiciary for its eagerness to accept antisemitism as the cause of Rathenau's murder – was its refusal to see that Rathenau's assassination was part of a much larger plot to overthrow Germany's new republican order by provoking an insurrection by the German working class which, in turn, would require its forceful suppression by Ehrhardt and the reserve army he had assembled under the auspices of the Organization Consul. And this would end not with the restoration of republican government or even the reestablishment of the monarchy but with the creation of a right-wing dictatorship to which all aspects of German public life would be subordinated.

This strategy failed not so much because the forces under Ehrhardt were poorly organized or lacked an effective chain of command but because it was based upon a fundamental miscalculation as to how German workers would react to Rathenau's assassination. For while there were massive demonstrations in Berlin and other metropolitan centers that gave vent to the anger those who supported Germany's republican system of government felt over the assault upon its leadership, this did not lead to the widespread violence that Ehrhardt and his supporters had hoped to use to justify their own embrace of violence. In fact, the opposite was true, as the German Center Party and the German Democratic Party closed ranks with the Social Democrats to create the Coalition of the Constitutional Middle (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der verfassungstreuen Mitte*) and demonstrate their unconditional support for the existing system of government. Weimar democracy had not been fatally wounded by Ehrhardt's treachery but emerged from the crisis – at least in the short run – stronger than it had been before. In the meantime, the Organization Consul retreated from the limelight as its followers regrouped into new organizations such as the New German League (*Neudeutscher Bund*) and the Viking League (*Bund Viking*). Ehrhardt, in turn, became an increasingly marginalized figure on the German Right, remaining profoundly estranged from the man who would soon emerge as the unchallenged leader of the radical Right, Adolf Hitler.

Martin Sabrow's book is a fascinating study, rich in detail and endowed with a sense of nuance that enables the author to explore the circumstances and consequences of Rathenau's assassination with great subtlety. It is particularly valuable for its analysis of antisemitism and its role in the radical Right at a time when National Socialism had not yet established itself as the German Right's most powerful expression. At the same time,

Sabrow's critique of the German judicial establishment and the way it allowed antisemitism to obscure the larger conspiracy behind Rathenau's murder represents a stinging indictment of the conservative biases that informed the administration of justice in Weimar Germany. Sabrow's work on the Rathenau assassination remains an important contribution to our understanding of the frailty of Weimar democracy and the strength of the forces pitted against its survival.

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Coffee with Hitler: The Untold Story of the Amateur Spies Who Tried to Civilize the Nazis

By Charles Spicer. New York: Pegasus Books, 2022. Pp. 392. Hardcover \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1639362264.

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With library bookshelves crumbling under the weight of the scholarly tomes written on the collapse of Anglo-German relations in the 1930s, with many focusing on the policy of appeasing Hitler adopted by the government of Neville Chamberlain, it is refreshing that, in his debut monograph, Charles Spicer so thoroughly and convincingly adds a revisionist and, as he demonstrates, significant perspective on the history of European diplomacy during the interwar era. Attentive to the call by Christopher Andrew and David Dilks in *The Missing Dimension* (1984) to consider the role of intelligence and spies in writing diplomatic history, Spicer casts new light on what he terms "ambulant amateurs" – a fitting description of those individuals outside of official diplomatic circles, who mobilised networks of professional and personal affiliation to provide critical information to the British government when the Foreign Office was otherwise restrained. Despite blunders and missteps, as one might expect of amateurs, the intelligence they passed along to their British masters direct from the lips of the Nazi elite was obtained expediently, proved reliable, and, as Spicer shows, was considered by those at the core of British decision-making regarding policy towards the Third Reich.

To examine this, Spicer's analysis centres on three protagonists: Philip Conwell-Evans, Ernest Tennant, and Grahame Christie. Conwell-Evans was a Welsh historian with deep ties to Germany, who informally advised several prime ministers on all matters German, while Tennant was an avid butterfly collector and businessman, whose friendship with Joachim von Ribbentrop gained greater significance as Ribbentrop climbed the Nazi ranks from German ambassador in London to Hitler's foreign minister. Of the three, Christie has attracted more scholarly attention for keeping his eyes and ears open in Central Europe on the personal payroll of Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office, but Spicer places Christie at the crux of his narrative and illustrates how Christie collaborated with Conwell-Evans and Tennant, and others, to furnish London with the most sensitive and accurate intelligence concerning mounting German aggression. The common thread that ties these men together is their affiliation with the Anglo-German Fellowship, an organization founded in 1935 by politicians and businessmen to foster friendship between Britain and Germany primarily through commercial pursuits. Here, Spicer departs from the normative scholarly interpretation that the Fellowship was a hotbed of British fascism