

Rheinwissen. Die Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt als Wissensregime, 1817–1880

By Nils Bennemann. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021.
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This is an institutional history of the Central Commission for Rhine Navigation during its formative years. It begins in 1817, shortly after the Vienna Congress (1814–1815) created an international framework for cooperation among the Rhine riparian states; and it ends in 1880, when the Rhine Commission completed a series of maps detailing the navigable stretch of the river from Basel to the Dutch delta. Nils Bennemann's main focus is on the emergence of a "knowledge regime" (similar to what Peter Haas has called an "epistemic community") that guided the Rhine Commission in its efforts to improve navigation and shipping on the river.

The initial purpose of the Rhine Commission was to establish a tariff-free waterway that would be open to navigation by all ships. This constituted a major break from the eighteenth century, when (as a popular poem put it) "the Rhine could count more tolls than miles, and knight and priestling block its path." Over time, the Rhine Commission's purpose and purview expanded, and the riparian states gradually came to rely on it to coordinate all projects connected to trade and commerce, including hydrological projects, rectification schemes, shipping regulations, and port development. The modern Rhine—with its canal-like appearance, swift current, traffic regulations, bridges, fortified banks, reengineered tributaries, and endless barges—is the permanent legacy of the Commission's work.

This book is first and foremost a study of international institution-building, and the author views the Rhine Commission as an early attempt at (and a microcosm of) nineteenth-century efforts to create lasting international cooperative regimes that would help mitigate the worst effects of nationalism. His nominal focus is on the decades-long effort to establish the exact length of the Rhine, but his real focus is on the myriad problems that political leaders, water engineers, businesspeople, and other experts encountered as they tried to turn a mercurial and meandering stream into a predictable canal with a uniform structure and an adequate water supply for year-round shipping. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction and lays out Bennemann's theoretical framework, methodology, and goals. Chapter 2 focuses on the internationalization of the Rhine in the decades after the Vienna Congress, with special attention given to the principle of "free trade." Chapter 3 focuses on the first attempts to create hydrographic maps of the river, maps that were necessary not only to establish the exact length of the river but also (and more importantly) to ascertain precipitation and flow patterns of the entire watershed as a prelude to the rectification and flood-control work that lay ahead. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the emergence of a community of Rhine experts and technicians from the 1840s onward, who coalesced around the Rhine Commission and collectively began to advise and assist the riparian states—thereby creating the "knowledge regime" that forms the backbone of this book. Chapter 6 serves as a conclusion and an assessment of the long-term accomplishments of the Rhine Commission that grew out of its formative years.

Institutional histories typically have similar trajectories. On the positive side, they offer an inside look at the emergence and development of an important and long-lasting institution. On the negative side, they too often get trapped inside the mindset of the persons being studied and therefore rarely look at the institution from an outsider's perspective.

Unfortunately, this book fits that pattern. The author does a superb job analyzing and summarizing the accomplishments of the Rhine Commission during the period from 1817 to 1880. As he points out, the commission proved to be a remarkable and durable institution that has served the interests of commerce and trade all along the river's route from Switzerland to the Netherlands for some two-hundred years now. However, the Rhine Commission (and this book's author) also completely ignored the negative consequences of the "knowledge regime" that came into being under its tutelage. The commission was never a depository of scientific data and knowledge about rivers in general or even the Rhine in particular. It was an institution with one overarching mission—to turn the Rhine into a shipping canal—and it pursued that goal with unwavering devotion. In doing so, it also pursued an agenda that ended up stripping the Rhine of most of its natural floodplain and biodiversity. It created a faster and straighter stream, to the detriment of fish populations and commercial fishing (most famously the salmon industry); and it stood idly by as the river became excessively polluted, to the detriment of every living thing on its banks.

Despite its title, this book is not really about "Rhine knowledge," but about "Rhine Commission knowledge," a very different thing. A more nuanced study would have examined the factors that created this lopsided "knowledge regime" in the nineteenth century, with an eye to elucidating why the Rhine Commission chose certain pathways instead of others, even when it was clear what negative consequences would ensue. Had the author taken a look at the institution from the perspective of an outsider, he might have produced a better primer for understanding the benefits and pitfalls of knowledge regimes within the context of international institution-building.

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Metternich, the German Question and the Pursuit of Peace, 1840-1848

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Studies dealing with Prince Clemens von Metternich and with German and European diplomacy in the crisis-ridden 1840s are not rare, even in an era that has deemphasized diplomatic and political history. Through engagement with that scholarship and wide archival research, this new monograph, a revised translation of a Czech-language work from 2019, enters the lists in just that field.

Following an initial chapter that sketches Metternich's involvement with the diplomacy surrounding the German Question in the preceding period (from 1813 to 1840), the core of the book concentrates on the years from 1840 to the Revolutions of 1848. A series of six chapters focuses on specific crises or aspects of diplomatic relations involving Austria and other German states, from the combined Rhine and Orient Crises with France between 1839 and 1841 to the civil war in Switzerland in 1847, and including a chapter on economic relations in the era of the Prussian-led German *Zollverein* as well as one on the national and constitutional questions as such in the German lands. By including chapters on the Swiss civil war and the annexation of Cracow in 1846, the book goes beyond a narrow focus on