
With this volume, Tom Scott, formerly Reader of History at the University of Liverpool and now Honorary Professor at the St Andrews Reformation Studies Institute, presents a selection of his finest historical essays published since the late 1970s. Scott, a specialist in the history of the rural German southwest (Upper Rhine Valley), especially the Breisgau and Alsace, thus offers us a glance into the tremendous variety of the themes included in his research and simultaneously a reminder of how much the academic and political worlds have changed in the interval. When Scott began publishing, Marxist ideas of “frühbürgerliche Revolution” were still under current discussion, and what Scott calls the “cantus firmus” of his work—the idea that local history research needed to be connected to broader historical and theoretical frameworks—is in the meantime a standard element of the many local studies produced since the 1970s. (That this idea has not done more to connect the synthesizing perspectives of professional academic historians with the detailed knowledge of local history researchers who used to stand alone in performing the backbreaking archival sifting that characterized their work proves only that much more still separates the professional scholar and the local historian than merely epistemological views). No one talks about the Marxist Reformation anymore, and the centrality of the local, whether in the parish, the landscape, or the polity, has become a central theme of current scholarship. Most of Scott’s scholarly concerns have thus become essential components of our analytical framework. Still, while he is clearly not a local historian, it is somewhat hard to integrate Scott’s work into a historical school or picture: he embraces structural factors, but not on the level of the Annales; he takes local politics very seriously but simultaneously rejects both the limited perspective of the local historian and the overarching theses proposed by scholars like Peter Blickle.

The appearance of this collection thus offers historians an opportunity to reassess the place of Scott’s work. Nine of its fifteen essays have been translated by the author from their original German into English in corrected versions; thus, although the substance of these articles has not changed, they can be seen as the definitive versions as intended by their
After a brief preface by Scott, the volume is introduced with a short essay by Thomas A. Brady, Jr., which addresses the question of Scott’s significance. While this is no doubt an attempt to lend significance to the collection, some of its claims are stronger than others. Brady correctly emphasizes the unparalleled detail and meticulousness of Scott’s work, for instance, and the underappreciated historiographical and interpretive significance of Scott’s thoroughgoing opposition to Blickle’s concept of the “communal Reformation.” On the other hand, the justification of the most controversial term in the title, “Reformation Germany,” is somewhat surprising. Indeed, given Scott’s repeated pains to assert that the Reformation was neither sufficient nor even necessary for many of the developments he narrates, the term “Reformation” hardly seems an essential component in describing the volume’s contents—he minimizes its role as a factor in the Peasants’ War and it is entirely irrelevant to the other matters treated in the volume. Most readers will assume this choice of title was a marketing decision rather than a scholarly one, and reading the volume will do nothing to change that impression. Similarly, the assertion that Scott has developed “a new way to map” German landscapes will surprise readers who see this work (as Scott does himself, in the preface) as connecting to and drawing upon the older, albeit at times politically problematic schools of Landeskunde or Landesgeschichte. Scott’s contribution in this regard has more to do with his deft interweaving of regional economic spheres with political themes, but this aspect of his research has much in common with that of many of his Germanophone colleagues. More important are the implicit connections that his economic depictions suggest to anthropological thinking about this term.

Admittedly, the first part of the volume displays Scott’s moments of disagreement with German historians more than his subtle affinities with them. In it, chapter 1 uses the case of Waldshut and its surroundings to answer a question of central interest when this essay was composed: the problem of the extent of connection between evangelical theology and the Peasants’ War (1524-6). Here, Scott vetoes the influence of Balthasar Hubmaier’s preaching as a motivating ground for peasant-town alliances, attributing it instead to structural political and economic factors that caused these relationships to develop in particular ways. Though the alleged role of Reformation preaching as a cause of the Peasants’ War has been subject to more comprehensive treatment since this essay was first published, it is valuable in two senses: for its emphasis of the contemporary perspective—that contemporary observers did not