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## Clio in Exile: The Historiography of Alfred Vagts

More than fifty years after the publication of *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*, the work of Alfred Vagts has remained one of the main sources for the history of German-American relations.<sup>1</sup> Like his colleagues Eckart Kehr and George W. F. Hallgarten, Vagts belonged to the outsiders of the German historical profession in the Weimar years because of his unorthodox approach to scholarship. According to historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler, these outsiders shared a group identity despite their different positions.<sup>2</sup> After Hitler's *Machtergreifung* in 1933, Vagts emigrated to the United States where he lived until his death in 1986.

Like other refugee historians in the United States who did not return, Vagts fell into oblivion in Germany. Since the 1960s, however, their work has been rediscovered by New Left historians who refer to them as their genuine, ideational ancestors in order to create a framework of tradition for their own writing.<sup>3</sup> Recently, a renewed interest in the experience of German refugee historians in the United States has been documented by the activities of the German Historical Institute in Washington.<sup>4</sup>

While Vagts's work has rarely been mentioned in terms of American scholarship, Wehler accords him an important place in the German historical tradition. There are two significant reasons for discussing Vagts's work as a prime example of German-American historiography. Firstly, Alfred Vagts spent the greater part of his life in the United States where he published the majority of his studies. Secondly, through his marriage to the daughter of Charles A. Beard, Vagts came into close contact with the leading American historian of his time. Together with Beard, Alfred Vagts published a historiographical essay that is an important document of late progressive thought in America; Vagts also published a revised edition of one of Beard's major works some twenty years after his father-in-law's death.<sup>5</sup>

Although the list of Vagts's publications is extensive, a comprehensive discussion of his work as a whole is still lacking. Apart from Wehler's introduction to an edition of Vagts's essays, scholars east and west of the

Atlantic have generally bypassed his achievements—a tacit admission of the difficulty in placing Vagts comfortably in either the American or the German historical tradition.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will discuss Alfred Vagts's scholarship as an important historiographical bridge between the continents. After a short biographical sketch, a discussion of his work will focus on the two major and interrelated fields of his interest. The first and most important phase of Vagts's achievement centers on the question of the relationship between economics and politics, particularly in the era of imperialism. Vagts's ideas are close to the progressive tradition in American historiography and will be discussed within this framework. In the late 1930s, foreseeing the probability of a new great war, Vagts changed his focus to military history. Although an outgrowth of his earlier work, his research on military matters will be discussed separately.

## I

Alfred Vagts was born on 1 December 1892 as a son of a mill owner and farmer in the village Basbeck close to Hamburg.<sup>7</sup> From 1912 to 1914, Vagts studied German literature and history at the University of Munich. His friendships with a number of expressionist authors and with the famous dramaturge Piscator stimulated Vagts's own literary production and his first publications as an expressionist poet.

In 1914, Vagts entered the First World War as volunteer and became an infantry officer and company commander. Nevertheless, he continued to write. His war poems were published in the social revolutionary journal *Aktion* in 1921. After his discharge from the army, Vagts resumed his studies in Munich and changed his major to history. In these years, he made friends with fellow historians like Kehr and Hallgarten.

More important was Vagts's acquaintance with Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, who was one of the editors of the German diplomatic prewar documents, *Die große Politik der europäischen Kabinette*.<sup>8</sup> Through the influence of his mentor, Vagts received a teaching position at the new University of Hamburg. From 1923 to 1932 he also published a number of essays and reviews about international relations in Mendelssohn's journal *Europäische Gespräche*.<sup>9</sup>

In 1924-25, Vagts was one of the first German exchange students to the United States. At Yale he prepared his dissertation on Mexican oil policy in connection with American and European influences.<sup>10</sup> In 1927, at the age of thirty-five, he received his doctorate at the University of Hamburg. Thereafter, Vagts began a work on the relationship between Germany and the United States in the period from 1890 to 1906. On request by Mendelssohn to foreign minister Gustav Stresemann, Vagts was granted permission to use the foreign office archives at Berlin.<sup>11</sup> A grant by the Rockefeller Foundation from 1927

to 1930 facilitated research in the National Archives. During this stay in the United States, Vagts married Charles A. Beard's daughter, Miriam.

Having almost finished his work in Germany in 1932, Vagts left for London, following the recommendation of Beard who had warned against the rise of National Socialism. After Hitler's *Machtergreifung* in January 1933, Vagts decided to emigrate to the United States. Due to the influence of Beard, his extensive work *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik* was published in New York in 1935.<sup>12</sup> After a talk on current affairs in Germany given to students at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Medford, Vagts was deprived of his German citizenship by the Nazi government in 1937.<sup>13</sup>

In the United States, Vagts started to work in the field of military history because he expected the outbreak of a war against Hitler's Germany. The first outgrowth of his new interest was *A History of Militarism* (1937), the scope of which reached from the Middle Ages to the present.<sup>14</sup> In 1938 and 1939 Vagts was a visiting professor of history at Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges. From 1939 to 1942, he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton University. He published a series of book reviews on German history and international relations in the *American Historical Review*.

After the American entry in the Second World War, Vagts was appointed to the Board of Economic Warfare in 1942. His activities confronted him with the exile's dilemma when he was suspected of still harboring affections for his homeland. In spring 1945, the Office of Strategic Services offered him a position participating in the elaboration of the charges against the German general staff at Nuremberg but Vagts declined. In return, his application for participation in the writing of the official military history of the Second World War was rejected.

Because of the legacy of his father-in-law, Vagts was able to lead a life of financial independence in a country house in the vicinity of New Haven. He did not teach again but published a number of essays and books in military history and in the history of international relations. His last essay appeared in 1982 when Alfred Vagts celebrated his ninetieth birthday. In 1986, he died at the age of ninety-three.<sup>15</sup>

## II

Vagts's first book was written under the premise of the primacy of economics. In this published version of his dissertation, Vagts discussed the interplay of diplomacy, economics, and public opinion by studying the American-European rivalries in Mexico.<sup>16</sup> Compared to the predominant diplomatic historiography in Germany of its time, Vagts's study was unorthodox to say the least.<sup>17</sup> For Vagts, the economy was "purpose and means, cause and effect of international politics."<sup>18</sup>

Apart from his thesis of the primacy of economics, Vagts's first book is significant in the development of his work in so far as it demonstrates a major conflict between his thought and methodology. Although his study is designed to be an "economic-diplomatic" piece of scholarship, the economic level is neglected while Vagts relies almost exclusively on traditional diplomatic sources. As a theoretical break with historiographical traditions, Vagts's first work was an important achievement; in particular his research continued up to the immediate present and thus he succeeded in providing a link between history and political science.

In his monumental, two-volume study of German-American relations in the era of imperialism Vagts was in part able to overcome the flaws in his theoretical concept.<sup>19</sup> This work is still one of the most important contributions in its field and only recently have scholars tried to supersede it.<sup>20</sup> In terms of his theoretical approach, Vagts again regarded diplomatic relations as determined chiefly by economic factors.

The activities of diplomats were seen by Vagts as a "profession in the service of the high-capitalistic upper strata of society."<sup>21</sup> The diplomatic service for Vagts was more of a "representative of the class—than the national—state."<sup>22</sup> Vagts's general judgment of the German empire is similar:

Der preußisch-deutsche Staat, angeblich das wichtigste Mittel zur Beeinflussung der Volkswirtschaft (Schmoller), angeblich die spezifischen Interessen, hoch über ihnen stehend, subsummierende, regulierende, harmonisierende, veredelnde Institution, ist faktisch wesentlich eine die mächtigsten Interessen bedienende, Interessendifferenzen und das Vorhandensein von Klasseninteressen verhüllende Autorität.<sup>23</sup>

In the beginning chapters of his book, Vagts discussed the economic rivalries and their social implications in the German-American relationship. He found a strong sense of protectionism in the United States. The same was true for Germany where the pressures of the agrarian landed elite caused the leadership to react by setting up protective tariffs as well.

Objectively, however, the clash of economic interests was only a minor source of conflict. According to Vagts, strong interest groups nourished the notion of an "American danger" to the German economy that loomed in legislative discussions, diplomatic correspondence, and newspaper editorials. German immigrants and German-Americans did not fulfill the imperialist hopes of some of the leaders in their old fatherland. In most cases, they were rapidly assimilated and were not willing to serve imperial interests, prompting the German government to study methods of directing emigrants to South America.

On the diplomatic level, a combination of economic interests and matters of prestige was responsible for the creation of various tensions, especially after

the Spanish-Cuban-American war and the Manila incident. Hence, the Samoan tangle and the competition with regard to the Caribbean were on both sides chiefly caused by the naval lobbies that propagated the necessity of a strong navy.

Vagts maintained that both in the Far East and in Venezuela economic interests were involved. But the Far East remained an area of German-American cooperation for the sake of the Open Door policy in China despite the fact that Germany had acquired a sphere of interest and the United States had not. In Venezuela, on the other hand, the most severe crisis in the relationship between the United States and Germany prior to the First World War emerged.

The German failure to secure genuine support from Roosevelt was best illustrated by the impact of the United States on the First Moroccan crisis and the Algeiras conference. President Roosevelt's diplomacy helped to defeat the German claims to a sphere of influence in Morocco. Vagts read this as a preventive action on the part of Washington in order to nip the growing German power in the bud. Somewhat bitterly he directed attention to the parallel of the events in 1906 and 1918. Thus, German attempts to harmonize the German-American relationship were doomed to fail in the long run. Only as long as the German and American aims did not cross each other was there an atmosphere of mutual goodwill. But as soon as these interests collided each power tried to take advantage of the other.

In addition to the economic causes, American imperialism was influenced by personalities like Theodore Roosevelt. German imperialism could also be traced to economic factors and was influenced by the "feudal" character of German diplomacy personified in leaders like Kaiser Wilhelm II, Friedrich von Holstein, and Bernhard von Bülow. In both countries imperialism was impelled by forceful capitalistic and pressure groups.

At the time of its publication, the study was considered "the most lengthy and thorough work thus far written on any phase of the diplomatic history of the United States."<sup>24</sup> The very fact that many of the German sources available in the early 1930s have not survived the Second World War makes a close reading of this book obligatory for anyone interested in the topic. Furthermore, Vagts's approach was modern by integrating the economic, social, and diplomatic levels in a balanced way.

The book was completely ignored in Nazi Germany when it was published in 1935. In the United States, on the other hand, Vagts's work was without exception reviewed positively.<sup>25</sup> Apart from Samuel F. Bemis, the reviewers stressed the importance of Vagts's progressive approach to history.

In comparison to his former work, Vagts's masterpiece is of higher quality. Nevertheless, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten* again revealed the basic problems in his writings. Vagts's approach to diplomatic history is the attempt to delineate the sum total of foreign affairs, including all social and economic influences. In Vagts's theory this may well be the case;

methodologically, however, he offers nothing new. He chiefly uses the classic diplomatic sources and even his newspaper citations are taken from diplomatic correspondence.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, historian Reiner Pommerin has pointed out:

Ihm [Vagts] wurde nicht alles in Frage kommende Material vorgelegt, und außerdem mußte er die von ihm angefertigten Aktenauszüge der Aufsicht vorlegen, bekam aber nicht alle Notizen zurück. Falls sein Buch in Deutschland erschienen wäre, hätte er das Manuskript dem Auswärtigen Amt vor der Veröffentlichung vorlegen müssen.<sup>27</sup>

*Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten* suffers from its sheer size and complex style. Since Vagts was unable to consult unpublished British records, he repeatedly overemphasizes the German side. His findings on the diplomatic level did add new interpretations to the existing scholarship. But these are hidden under a wealth of details.

The most important difficulty with Vagts's theoretical concept lies not so much in his theory of imperialism but in his claim of objectivity. He noted that the national perspective of an author usually does have an influence on a study of bilateral relations and requested of the nationalists of both countries not to use his results in a one-sided way against each other. Vagts himself, however, was convinced that he had been able to avoid the danger of a biased perspective:

Wir selbst glauben, derartigem einseitig politischen Standort ferngeblieben zu sein und auch aus zweien denken und empfinden zu können. . . . Als freier, nicht bürokratisch und nicht nationalistisch gebundener Historiker, der nur in ganz wenigen Exemplaren vorkommt, glauben wir uns für einen Beobachterplatz gegenüber der imperialistischen Konkurrenz immerhin qualifiziert.<sup>28</sup>

A close reading of this book reveals that Vagts's qualifications were not as strong as he would like to believe. Although Vagts was free from a biased nationalist point of view his participation in the First World War determined his interpretations. In his opinion, the German side was responsible for the imperialistic war whose senselessness he now comprehended.<sup>29</sup> His severe judgment of the political leadership in Germany was to a large degree caused by this basic assumption. When the book was published in 1935, Vagts had experienced the shock of exile and was keen on stressing the new danger of National Socialism.

Pommerin has recently argued that Vagts's concept of rivalry as the major explanation of international relations in the era of imperialism is too restricted to be sufficient.<sup>30</sup> From another perspective his colleague Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase has shown that the notion of the "American peril" had more substance

to it than Vagts believed.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Fiebig-von Hase has pointed out that Vagts's work was part of a development in the scholarship on German-American relations that corresponded to the state of political relations between the two countries in the 1920s:

Erst während der 1920er Jahre bemühten sich deutsche und amerikanische Historiker im Interesse einer deutsch-amerikanischen Annäherung um ein objektiveres Bild, das jedoch nun häufig so positiv gezeichnet wurde, daß die bestehenden Interessengegensätze vollständig verwischt wurden.<sup>32</sup>

Although Vagts began to shift the focus of his interest to military history in the late 1930s, he continued to publish a number of essays on diplomatic relations in the era of imperialism. As he had explored all levels of international relations in his monumental masterpiece, he was later concerned with a wide variety of aspects ranging from the impact of multinational banks to the efforts of Andrew Carnegie on behalf of the peace movement.<sup>33</sup> These articles essentially reiterated the underlying interpretation of his magisterial study on German-American relations.

In general, Vagts's commitment to the topic of imperialism was one of the main connecting themes in his work. While he had never formulated an elaborated theory of imperialism of his own, Vagts's concept can best be described as Schumpeterian. Vagts's notion of imperialism had a basis in Marxist theory in so far as he was aware of the strong impact of economic pressure and continuous class conflict on imperialistic rivalries. He deviated considerably from the doctrine, however, when he rejected the notion of the control of capitalism over the state.

Thus, Vagts followed Schumpeter in taking the irrational level as an explanatory factor. Both were agreed that imperialism was not the highest stage of capitalism. Rather, imperialism had to be interpreted as the product of the consequences of an older social structure within a developing capitalistic system. According to Schumpeter, imperialism is a phenomenon of transition on the path of a triumphant capitalism.<sup>34</sup> Vagts adopted Schumpeter's idea that imperialism was caused by a basic atavism in a society where a fusion of nationalism and militarism were a heritage of feudalism and were neither able nor willing to adjust to the modern industrial environment. Indeed Vagts categorized the members of the German diplomatic corps as well as of the military as representatives of this feudal past. It is unclear as to how far Vagts followed Schumpeter's concept that a complete capitalism would eventually leave no room for imperialistic ventures. Both shared, however, the concept of *objektlos* quasi-irrational expansion as the sign of imperialism.

When Vagts emigrated in 1933, his historical thought had much in common with the dominant progressive concept in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Like the Progressive historians, Vagts was mainly concerned with the relationship

of politics and economics. Thus, international relations were to a large extent determined by economic motives. When Vagts touched upon society, he pictured it divided into classes, and stressed the pattern of conflict which precluded unity in Germany as well as in the United States. In addition, Vagts's concern was a useable past, an admonition for a better future. Particularly with regards to the decline of democracy in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, Vagts emphasized the catastrophic outcome of excessive nationalism. On the other hand, these similarities to the progressive concept should not be overstressed because Vagts was not primarily concerned with American history.

Apart from the fact that Vagts, through his publications on the German-American relationship, contributed to American historiography, he also exerted an influence through his father-in-law, Charles A. Beard. Although the extensive secondary literature on Beard is usually silent about Vagts, his role in the shifting historical concept of his father-in-law was important.<sup>36</sup>

Under the guidance of Vagts, Charles Beard became acquainted with German historical thought on a trip to Europe in 1927. Shortly after his emigration, Vagts introduced Beard to Karl Heussi's *Die Krisis des Historismus* (Tübingen, 1932). Heussi discussed the changes in post-First World War German historiography and found out that at the core of the "crisis of historicism" lay a "loss of faith in the possibility of an objective study of history."<sup>37</sup> As historian Peter Novick has recently pointed out, it is difficult to evaluate the precise degree to which German thought influenced Beard.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Heussi's work became instrumental in Beard's shift from scientific history and determinism to relativism, individuals, and ideas in his search for the preservation of traditional values in the chaos of depression America.<sup>39</sup>

One outgrowth of this shift in Beard's attitude is revealed in an essay on historiography that Beard published in 1936 with Vagts as coauthor.<sup>40</sup> Although the main body of "Currents of Thought in Historiography" was essentially a review of Friedrich Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (München, 1936), the two authors made a number of significant statements in the introduction and conclusion that constitute important modifications in their conception of history. Vagts and Beard start out with the demand for "an interpretation of history as actuality" and a warning that the historian "cannot remain in an ivory tower" while facing a crisis in government and economy.<sup>41</sup> Also striking was the concept of ideas as an independent force in the shaping of history. According to the authors, "ideas march, divide, and come into conflict with themselves, with or without the relation to the world of external events."<sup>42</sup> In their criticism of historicism and "the limitation of history to the world of the recorded and observable," Beard and Vagts accepted the idea of relativity:

Ideas change in the minds of thinkers through inner examination and under the impacts of interests, psychological and material. Interests, both psychological and material, change under the impact of ideas.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, as "each historian does have his 'scheme of reference' or his operating conception of values, truth, and importance," objectivity is impossible and historical relativity becomes the norm.<sup>44</sup> This relativity does not, however, imply chaos because it "is checked by the recognition of the fact that there are not available as many distinct schemes of reference as there are historians."<sup>45</sup> Historical scholarship will continue to regard the critical method of historicism, but the limitations to objectivity must be taken into account.

Vagts and Beard continued their cooperation on historiographical questions in the Committee on Historiography of the Social Science Research Council, of which both were members. Vagts, however, did not contribute to the committee's main publication of 1946.<sup>46</sup> Under the patronage of Beard, Alfred Vagts made a name for himself in the American historical profession. His major focus of interest, however, did not rest upon historiographical matters or international relations but shifted again to military history.

### III

This shift in interests is indicated in Vagts's publication of *A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military* in 1937.<sup>47</sup> For a period of roughly fifteen years, Vagts's focus of interest remained exclusively on military matters, and only since the early 1950s did he again begin to diversify the topics of his research.<sup>48</sup>

Vagts's new interest in militarism, however, was not as radical a break in the continuity of his work as it may seem on first sight. Already in *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten* he had pointed to the importance of the military lobbies in Germany and the United States in fanning the flames of imperialism and had made it clear that he basically regarded militarism and imperialism to be coeval terms.

After the experience of exile and expatriation, Vagts decided to concentrate exclusively on the most virulent problem of his time, militarism and the relationship of the civilian and military branches of society. In his early works, Vagts had demonstrated his awareness of the problems of his immediate present and had tried to trace their historical origins. Focusing on military history, Vagts was additionally able to profit from his own experience of service in the First World War.

Ultimately, however, Vagts began his research on the history of militarism because he was aware of an imminent war. Vagts wrote in the preface of the second edition of *A History of Militarism*:

This book was originally written and published on the eve of the Second World War, in the early expectation of a large conflict to come, into which the war-unwilling democracies would be drawn at a time when they might not be prepared for the worst, when there was a danger that they might prove unprepared thanks to a militarism on part of the soldiers which would limit their best efficiency and impede the highest usefulness of their arms.<sup>49</sup>

*A History of Militarism* is Vagts's most important book on the topic. As in all his later monographs, Vagts approached his topic from a general perspective and discussed militarism from feudal times up to the Cold War. As the historian Robert G. Albion has concluded:

This book is not an analysis of strategy, tactics, supply, and other essentially military features. It is rather a study of the military caste in its social and political aspects.<sup>50</sup>

The distinction between the military and militarism was crucial to Vagts's book. While the military focuses on winning a specific objective and thus is limited to this one function, militarism has a decisively different character:

Militarism . . . presents a vast array of customs, interests, prestige, actions, and thought associated with armies and wars and yet transcending true military purposes. Indeed, militarism is so constituted that it may hamper and defeat the purposes of the military way. Its influence is unlimited in scope. It may permeate all society and become dominant over all industry and arts. Rejecting the scientific character of the military way, militarism displays the qualities of caste and cult, authority and belief.<sup>51</sup>

Like imperialism, militarism tends "to extend dominion."<sup>52</sup> Both the imperialist and the militarist utilize the concept of tradition as proof of the rightness of their beliefs. While, as Vagts pointed out, the military is necessary and useful, it may become a threat if militarism prevails.

According to Vagts, the lack of critical treatments of the military helped to foster the romantic illusions of comradeship in historiography and thus militarization itself. The army was too often represented as existing in a vacuum outside the interdependence of economic and social factors. Vagts concluded that the stage of development of the military directly reflected "the stage of social progress" and that furthermore "army conditions reflect the state of society generally."<sup>53</sup>

Not only in terms of temporal but also of geographical scope was Vagts's study overwhelming. While a discussion of militarism necessarily had to concentrate on its most ardent representative, Germany, Vagts did not neglect

other European nations, Japan, and the United States. Concerning the United States, he emphasized the fact that the American Revolution was in part an answer to the perceived threat of a standing army in the Colonies. The American constitution, then, confirmed civilian control over the military, which in itself was a major break with historical tradition. According to Vagts, "militarism with its glamour and hard service scarcely got a hold on the American imagination until the opening of the twentieth century."<sup>54</sup> Although the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt saw a rise of militarization in the United States, the share of officers in politics and power remained comparatively weak.

Finally, Vagts concluded that militarism can basically be divided into three major stages in which a permanent "osmosis of thought between the nations" guaranteed a wide distribution of militaristic thought.<sup>55</sup> The scheme of the standing army that originated in England in the seventeenth century was followed by the concept of the mass army, first practiced by France in the Napoleonic wars. The climax was reached in Germany with the concept of the armed society in which militarism was considered to be a good in itself.

Vagts compared Fascism and Communism and found a number of similarities in the specific importance of the army and the penetration of the whole society by military ideas. On the other hand, he also found a decisive difference in their aims:

The Bolshevik state indeed offered the theoretical promise that the military bondage of the present was only a transition period to a millenium in which all force will be ended; it does not exalt military exertion and expenditure as good in themselves. By contrast, the militarism of the Third Reich expected even theoretically to endure one or two thousand years, for it is the essence of that Empire.<sup>56</sup>

The historian Volker R. Berghahn has called Vagts's approach "one of the fullest and most important attempts to come to terms with the problem of militarism."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Vagts tried to integrate the non-Marxist arguments in the lively debate that had followed the end of the First World War. Hence, he stood in the tradition of the republican critics of militarism in Weimar Germany. Vagts approached the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the history of ideas and had little to tell about the technological or bureaucratic aspects of militarism.

In general, Vagts maintained the distinction between the military and militarism and the notion of the threat of the martial spirit throughout the latter part of his work. Essentially, he considered the military to be useful and necessary. Vagts was not, however, so much of a military historian as to lose himself in the analysis of strategy or tactics. In *A History of Militarism* and the monographs which followed it, Vagts sought to emphasize the social and

political implications of the military caste, a goal which he succeeded in attaining.<sup>58</sup>

A bibliography of Alfred Vagts's publications reflects the diversity of his interests: economic and social history, military matters, international relations, and political ideas were the subjects that this historian studied with a high degree of mastery. Although in the later part of his work Vagts was unable to follow the new approaches of quantification in social history, his concept of the past was modern and progressive at the peak of his creativity in the 1930s. In the context of German historiography it was even iconoclastic.

Due to the limited scope of this essay, many interesting aspects of Vagts's work have only been touched upon. The complexity and diversity of his scholarship is greater than this overview could represent. In retrospect, however, a number of significant continuities emerge. Alfred Vagts never left the comparative level and all his publications are marked by enlightening cross-references through time and space. In his extensive studies, Vagts achieved the beneficial and rare combination of general history and scholarly seriousness.

Without depreciating the importance and validity of Vagts's comparative approach to history, the history of Germany in the era of imperialism can definitely be regarded as his center of interest. This focus can be traced to his own experience of the defeat of Germany in the First World War, a defeat for which he held the German side to blame. His theory of imperialism not only reflects his awareness of the importance of economic factors, but also shows how Vagts, as a supporter of a republican form of government, tried to deal with the irrationality of militarism.

In retrospect Vagts asked himself whether his approach in the 1920s and 1930s was more that of an historian or a political scientist and found the answer that both categories were hardly distinguishable.<sup>59</sup> Indeed the most important feature of Vagts's work is his continuous interest in and concern with the problems of his own present without succumbing to the danger of presentism. Vagts successfully avoided the "ivory tower," and the results of his historiography as well as the formulation of his questions served the purpose of understanding the confusion of his days through an insightful examination of the past.

Alfred Vagts deserves more substantial treatment in the form of a full-scale biography not only because of the adventurous character of his life but also because of the quality of his writing. He is an important part of that bridge across the ocean that constituted the exchange of ideas and influenced the American historical profession as well as many years later its German counterpart.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Einleitung," in Alfred Vagts, *Bilanzen und Balancen: Aufsätze zur internationalen Finanz und internationalen Politik*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1979), 7.

<sup>3</sup> In Germany especially Wehler has taken up the task of "rediscovering" these scholars. Apart from *Bilanzen und Balancen*, he has edited a collection of essays by Eckart Kehr: *Der Primat der Innenpolitik: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preußisch-deutschen Sozialgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Syndikat, 1965). For the German historiographical context of both Wehler and Vagts see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition from Herder to the Present*, 2d ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1983), 229-93. For overviews of the emigration of German historians to the U.S. see idem, "Die deutschen Historiker in der Emigration," *Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland: Traditionelle Positionen und gegenwärtige Aufgaben*, ed. Bernd Faulenbach (München: Beck, 1974), 97-111; and especially Joachim Radkau, *Die deutsche Emigration in den USA: Ihr Einfluß auf die amerikanische Europapolitik, 1933-1945* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.*, no. 4 (Spring 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Charles A. Beard and Alfred Vagts, "Currents of Thought in Historiography," *American Historical Review* 41 (1935-36): 460-83; Charles A. Beard, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy*, ed. with new material by Alfred Vagts and William Beard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> Wehler, "Einleitung," *Bilanzen und Balancen*, 7-11.

<sup>7</sup> Vagts's papers are in the German Federal Archives at Koblenz. I am preparing a full-scale biography of Alfred Vagts. To date, Wehler's introduction to *Bilanzen und Balancen* provides the best biographical sketch. Based on Wehler is Michael Huhn's essay: "Europäische Gespräche - Eine außenpolitische Zeitschrift der Weimarer Zeit," *Wissenschaftliche Verantwortung und politische Macht*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Gantzel (Hamburg: Reimer, 1986), 116-22. Additional information has been supplied by Catherine Epstein of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C..

<sup>8</sup> Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, J. Lepsius, and F. Thimme, eds., *Die große Politik der europäischen Kabinette*, 40 vols. (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922-27).

<sup>9</sup> See *Bilanzen und Balancen*, 303-4; for Vagts's simultaneous activity at the Institut für Auswärtige Politik see *Kolonialrechtswissenschaft, Kriegsursachenforschung, Internationale Angelegenheiten*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Gantzel (Baden: Nomos, 1983), 1-111, especially Alfred Vagts, "Erinnerungen an Hamburg, 1923-1932," 97-111.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Vagts, *Mexiko, Europa und Amerika unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Petroleumpolitik: Eine wirtschafts-diplomatische Untersuchung*, (Berlin: W. Rothschild, 1928). The doctoral advisors were Adolf Rein and Otto Westphal.

<sup>11</sup> While Wehler emphasizes Vagts's special status as a user of the archives ("Einleitung," 9), the historian Reiner Pommerin points out that Vagts held a normal permit (*Der Kaiser und Amerika: Die USA in der Politik der Reichsleitung, 1890-1914* [Köln-Wien: Böhlau, 1986], 21).

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Macmillan, 1935).

<sup>13</sup> Information by Detlev F. Vagts.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1937).

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Vagts, "Andrew Carnegie and Wilhelmic Germany," *Amerikastudien* 27 (1982): 413-31.

<sup>16</sup> Vagts, *Mexiko, Europa und Amerika*, passim.

<sup>17</sup> For example the classical book by Erich Brandenburg (*From Bismarck to the World War* [London: Oxford UP, 1927]) where the economic and social levels are not discussed at all.

<sup>18</sup> Vagts, *Mexiko, Europa und Amerika*, 6. For stylistic reasons I have translated some of the quotations.

<sup>19</sup> Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten*, 2 vols. Originally, the book was written as the author's *Habilitationsschrift*. Because of Vagts's exile it was never submitted to a German university.

<sup>20</sup> The two most important new books in the field are Pommerin, *Der Kaiser und Amerika* (see n. 11) and Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, *Lateinamerika als Konfliktherd der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen, 1890-1903: Vom Beginn der Panamerikapolitik bis zur Venezuelakrise von 1902/03*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten*, 1:526.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 625.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>24</sup> See Samuel F. Bemis, "Review of Vagts: *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten*," *American Historical Review* 42 (1936-37): 158.

<sup>25</sup> Apart from Bemis's review see those of Louis L. Snyder in *Political Science Quarterly* 51 (1936): 624-26; R. B. Mowat in *English Historical Review* 51 (1936): 715-17; Harold H. Sprout in *American Political Science Review* 30 (1936): 779-81; and the review article by Lester B. Shippee, "German-American Relations, 1890-1914," *Journal of Modern History* 8 (1936): 479-88.

<sup>26</sup> See Bemis, "Review," 158.

<sup>27</sup> Pommerin, *Der Kaiser und Amerika*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten*, 1:xx.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Pommerin, *Der Kaiser und Amerika*, 5-10.

<sup>31</sup> Fiebig-von Hase, *Lateinamerika als Konfliktherd*, 1:330-31.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. As an American example of this tendency Fiebig-von Hase cites Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1937).

<sup>33</sup> The essays are: "M. M. Warburg & Co.: Ein Bankhaus in der deutschen Weltpolitik, 1905-1933," *Bilanzen und Balancen*, 36-94 (originally published in *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 45 (1958): 289-388; "Die Juden im amerikanisch-deutschen imperialistischen Konflikt vor 1917," *Amerikastudien* 24 (1979): 56-71; "Andrew Carnegie and Wilhelminic Germany," *Amerikastudien* 27 (1982): 413-31.

<sup>34</sup> See Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The Sociology of Imperialism," in idem, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, ed. with an introduction by Paul M. Sweezy (New York: Kelley, 1951), 3-130. For a discussion of Schumpeter's theory see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperialismstheorien*, 3d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 21-26.

<sup>35</sup> For this and the following discussion see Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 82-110.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Lloyd R. Sorensen, "Charles A. Beard and German Historiographical Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 (1955-56): 274-87; Forrest McDonald, "Charles A. Beard," *Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians*, ed. Marcus Cunliffe and Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 110-41; Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, and Parrington* (New York: A. Knopf, 1968); Robert Skotheim, *American Intellectual Histories and Historians* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966). The only scholar who mentions the connection is John Higham et al., *History: The Development of Historical Studies in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965), 126.

<sup>37</sup> Iggers, *The German Conception*, 241. For the historiographical context of Heussi's work see pp. 241-42.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1988), 158.

<sup>39</sup> See in particular Higham, *History*, 125-31.

<sup>40</sup> Beard and Vagts, "Currents of Thought." As it is not clear which of the two authors wrote which parts, the essay will be considered to be a genuine coproduction. For the problem of coauthorship in Beard's writings compare the insightful essay of Nancy F. Cott, "Two Beards: Coauthorship and the Concept of Civilization," *American Quarterly* 42 (1990): 274-300.

<sup>41</sup> Beard and Vagts, "Currents of Thought," 460.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Theory and Practice in Historical Study*. For the significance and context of this study the major contributor to which was Charles Beard compare Higham, *History*, 130-31.

<sup>47</sup> All quotations from 2d ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1959).

<sup>48</sup> Compare the bibliography of Vagts's work in *Bilanzen und Balancen*, 303-6.

<sup>49</sup> *A History of Militarism*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Robert G. Albion, "Review of Vagts: *A History of Militarism*," *American Historical Review* 44 (1938-39): 318.

<sup>51</sup> *A History of Militarism*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>57</sup> Volker R. Berghahn, *Militarism: The History of an International Debate, 1861-1979* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 38; for what follows see *ibid.*, 38-43.

<sup>58</sup> The books are: Alfred Vagts, *Defense and Diplomacy: The Soldier and the Conduct of Foreign Relations* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1956); *idem*, *The Military Attaché* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967); an exception in this regard is Vagts's *Landing Operations: Psychology, Tactics, Politics from Antiquity to 1945* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1946) which is only of minor importance. An additional book is *Deutsch-Amerikanische Rückwanderung: Probleme, Phänomene, Statistik, Politik, Soziologie, Biographie* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1960), in which only the biographical data of repatriation is noteworthy.

<sup>59</sup> Vagts, "Erinnerungen an Hamburg," 98 (see n. 9).

