
REVIEWS

NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS, HISTORY, AND POLITICAL CULTURE
IN EARLY-MODERN EUROPE. Edited by *Orest Ranum*. Baltimore and
London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975. x, 177 pp. \$10.00.

This fifth occasional volume of the Johns Hopkins Symposia in Comparative History, slim and attractively presented, contains an introductory article by Professor Orest Ranum and brief studies of six leading European countries, each written by a specialist. Contributors include Professors Felix Gilbert, William F. Church, Leonard Krieger, John Pocock, Michael Cherniavsky, and Helmut Koenigsberger, who cover Italy, France, Germany, England, Russia, and Spain respectively. A joint index concludes the volume.

In his opening essay Professor Ranum is primarily concerned with methodology and a definition of the problem in general; the other contributors deal with their many-faceted subjects in a much more specific way. Thus, in a packed survey, Professor Gilbert emphasizes that two mutually reinforcing factors—Spanish domination and sharp social cleavages in Italy—prevented Italy from achieving political unity. At the same time, however, he states that “there was, below or above the external forms of a political and social bond, a bond comprised of culture, language, and literature. The contribution this period made to the development of Italian national consciousness lies in the firm establishment of the view that an outstanding and singular Italian culture existed” (p. 39). In his essay on France, a country united around a centralizing monarchy, Professor Church lucidly traces French national consciousness through three consecutive stages—at the outset the monarchy is the center of national aspiration and attention, but it becomes, toward the end of the early-modern period, an obstacle to further national growth. The other specialists, in turn, analyze their assigned countries, either with Professor Krieger’s difficult and sophisticated technique, demonstrating how German national consciousness worked around and even through such unpromising institutions as the Holy Roman Empire and the local states, or with Professor Koenigsberger’s large dose of skepticism in regard to early Spanish nationalism. The late Professor Cherniavsky, in his study of Russia, gives another (unfortunately, the last) of his sparkling and stimulating but not quite convincing performances, frequently drawing conclusions based on insufficient evidence (for example, viewing the church of St. Basil as a representation of “the triad: Autocrat, Orthodoxy, Empire” [pp. 127–30]).

Although dealing with broad topics, covered much more thoroughly elsewhere—frequently by the authors of these essays themselves—the essays do present expert summaries and interpretations of crucial historical issues, as well as many interesting particular comments. Moreover, they encourage students of Russian history to think in general European terms, a habit well worth developing.

NICHOLAS V. RIASANOVSKY
University of California, Berkeley