“Honecker’s Vassal” or a Prehistorian in the Service of Science? The Evaluation of Former East German Scholarship and the Concept of the Scholar in the Debate on Joachim Herrmann in Reunified Germany

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Summary: The evaluation and transformation process of the GDR research system in the wake of German reunification 1989/90 was immediately accompanied not only by debates within the scientific community, but also by an extensive discussion about the value and future perspectives of East German scholarship and its protagonists in the nationally circulated press. In 1990, the focus turned temporarily to the prominent East German prehistorian Joachim Herrmann after his election to the board of an international historical association. The article uses the example of Herrmann and the public discussion about him as a case study to examine the status of, and changes in, the authority of scholarship and the scholar in the context of the evaluation and restructuring of the East German research landscape in the early 1990s. A selection of press articles from nationwide German newspapers and newsmagazines, as well as archival letters exchanged between different participants in the debate serve as prisms carving out the central arguments and subjacent structures of the discussion. Therefore, Herrmann’s case exposes generic characteristics of (different concepts of) scientific authority and the close connection between its negotiation and the search for identity in the newly reunited German academic sphere.

Keywords: scientific authority, prehistory, GDR, reunification, transformation, Joachim Herrmann, scholarship, the scholar

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Despite a long and successful career, the prehistorian Joachim Herrmann found himself applying for jobs again at the age of 58. His former workplace, the Institute for Archaeology and Ancient Studies at the Academy of Sciences of the GDR, which he had led as director, was about to be disbanded as part of the restructuring of East Germany’s scientific landscape during German reunification. In his 1991 letter of application to a potential successor institution within the Max Planck Society, Herrmann explained how he retrospectively saw his role as a leading archaeologist and head of the Academy’s prehistoric institute: “In the GDR, I lived as a scholar and represented the interests of my scholarship there.” Herrmann therefore presented himself first and foremost as a scholar whose main motivation was to gain new archaeological and historical knowledge. He construed this role, the scholar, as opposed to political engagement and ideological entanglement.

Overall, Herrmann’s letter of application took a discernibly justifying tone. This kind of self-defense can be explained as a result of the intense debate on the evaluation of former GDR elites, a topic that occupied the public discourse in the newly reunited Germany at that time. In Herrmann’s case this conclusion makes sense, especially because a year earlier, in 1990, he had unexpectedly gained prominence in an episode of this discussion due to his re-election as a member of the bureau of the international historical association Comité International des Sciences Historiques (CISH) at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Madrid in late August and early September 1990. The election aroused heated discussion about whether Herrmann could legitimately represent the international historical community or be considered a professional scholar, given his career before 1989. The media debate, remarkably involving not only journalists but also scholars (especially historians – although Herrmann worked primarily in the field of prehistoric archaeology), unfolded mainly in nationally circulated German newspapers and news magazines. In addition, personal letters exchanged between individual participants played an important role behind the scenes.

Like Herrmann, the majority of the former GDR’s scholars – especially those who had worked at state-financed institutions – found themselves more or less explicitly under the microscope. Thus, wider questions beyond the case of Herrmann’s CISH election were raised in the public discussion. What is considered serious scholarship? What are the criteria for evaluating professional research? What does an appropriate relationship between politics, science, and society look like, and who decides what appropriate means in this context? What is defined as objectivity? More precisely, which understandings of objectivity are invoked in a certain context?

Based on such observation, the aim of this article is to take up the example of Joachim Herrmann and the media discussion about him as a case study to further examine how the authority of scholarship and the status of the scholar

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1 Joachim Herrmann to Peter M. Roeder, 1 November 1991, Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities [henceforth ABBAW], NL Herrmann, no. 271/54–4. The systematization of Herrmann’s documents is still in progress, so in most cases both old and new source references are provided here.
were negotiated in public in the context of the dissolution of East Germany and reunification. To that end, the central arguments presented in articles in the press and letters (stored in Herrmann’s private archival materials and so far mostly untapped) written by Herrmann’s critics and defenders as well as himself, will be identified and analyzed. Although originally related to the specific event of Herrmann’s re-election, the core of the debate was constituted by very general questions: the demarcation/overlapping of different kinds of authority and the question of their compatibility. A comprehensive understanding of these connections cannot be attained without considering the contexts of the respective concepts of authority invoked in the discussion. In consequence, the specific German-German dynamics of the early 1990s, such as the restructuring of the former East German institutions and their partial integration into the West German system, or the discourse about East Germans’ role in German society, which still remains consequential, must be included in the analysis as part of historiographical source criticism. It is furthermore essential to consider situatedness, dependence on context, and historicity as fundamental characteristics of different concepts of scientific authority, particularly with regard to the different epistemologies and understandings of science and the scholar in relation to politics and society in the two German states before 1989/90.

On the basis of this thesis, the analysis can be fruitfully linked to the methodological-theoretical considerations that Bernhard Kleeberg and Robert Suter developed in connection with the praxeology of truth and that were further elaborated within the research initiative “(East) European Epistemologies.” These approaches, which also form the basis for this issue, focus on truth and knowledge as deeply embedded in and resulting from social practices, so they also tie in to the current premises of the history of science. Accordingly, individual situations in which truth and knowledge are addressed, discussed, or denied are the main research objects of praxeologically and epistemologically oriented studies, while social (inter-)actions connected to production, enactment, and negotiation of truth and knowledge are interpreted empirically rather than normatively. The analytical categories of “truth scenes” (i.e., the “framework in which corresponding negotiations of truth occur”) and “truth figures” (i.e., “actors who concurrently assume the function of transmission [of truth]”) are used to accurately describe these processes and practices, as historicization and contextualization are integral parts of the praxeology of truth. These concepts, applied to the investigation of Herrmann’s case, are intended to serve as analytical tools to systematically describe the underlying structures and parameters of the discussion. Thus, this case

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2 See Cain et al. 2019a; Cain et al. 2019b; Kleeberg and Suter 2014; Kleeberg 2019, where these approaches are further elaborated.

3 See, e.g., Läsig 2008; Szöllösi-Janze 2000; Veit 2011. An overview is presented in Sommer et al. 2017.

4 Kleeberg 2019, on 116, describes how the selection of research objects is thus “guided by problematisations of truth.”

5 Both in Kleeberg 2019, on 116, also addressed in Cain et al. 2019b; Kleeberg and Suter 2014, esp. 212, 217–226.
study offers more universal insights concerning scientific authority (as well as other, sometimes interwoven forms of authority), different understandings of science and different perceptions of scholars, and the continuity/replacement of elites in periods of transformation.

First, I will briefly introduce the protagonist Joachim Herrmann. With this overview of Herrmann’s professional life path, I will also illustrate the general structures of GDR science and prehistory in particular. It is not the aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of Herrmann’s biography, but to contextualize the following analysis of the media reports and the discussion about him. Therefore, the focus will be on the key stages of his career before and after 1989/90, situating Herrmann in the context of the transformation of the East German scientific system and the German-German discourses of the early 1990s, including a short description of the circumstances of the newly reunited German media landscape as well as the CISH election regulations. I will then present in greater detail the controversial voices that discussed Herrmann in the wake of his election to the CISH bureau and the dissolution of the academic institute he led, which also concerned his standing as a prehistorian from the former GDR and the questioning and defense of his authority as a scholar. The main intention of this article is therefore not to evaluate Herrmann’s scientific writings or his administrative decisions, but to analyse the arguments that were put forward in the public debate when his scientific authority was concerned. The fact that this question was discussed in public and in this respect not least followed the rules of media attention, but at the same time involved academics as discussants, makes the case of Herrmann all the more remarkable. In a way, this observation already forms a first conclusion…

1. An East German Dream Career – and a West German Nightmare? A Short Biographical Introduction of Joachim Herrmann

Joachim Herrmann was born in 1932 to a farmer and miller couple and grew up in a village in Brandenburg. He began studying history in 1951 at the Humboldt University of Berlin but switched to prehistory in 1953, when first a chair and then an institute dedicated to this discipline was installed. Herrmann therefore received his academic education entirely under the new political system in postwar East Germany. He witnessed the successive institutional establishment of prehistory in the GDR and actively took part in it first as a student and later as a researcher at the Institute of Early History and Prehistory at the German Academy of Sciences at Berlin (as the academy was called until 1972). In this context, under the influence of his mentors and superiors who were leading figures in East German prehistory and archaeology,
such as Wilhelm Unverzagt and Karl-Heinz Otto, Herrmann turned his attention to the early Slavs of prehistoric times and the early Middle Ages. This shift is evident in his dissertation, habilitation, and subsequent publications, as well as his practical excavational work. In addition to the early Slavs, he took up historical-philosophical questions (concerning the origin and development of mankind or the general course of history) as further focal points of his research activities. In 1969, as part of the so-called third higher education reform to standardize and centralize academic structures in East Germany, the Central Institute for Ancient History and Archaeology (Zentralinstitut für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie, ZIAGA) was founded at the Academy. This new institute united ancient history, archaeology, and oriental studies, which had previously been organized in individual institutions. Herrmann became the director of this institute and therefore held an influential administrative position that lasted until autumn 1990. Thus, at the peak of his career, Herrmann was more than ever representative of the ideal of an East German social climber.

According to the prehistorian Achim Leube, who had worked under the aegis of Herrmann at ZIAGA, the latter had been “in charge of all research in the field of ancient history and archaeology in the GDR.” Given the central importance of the East German academy institutes, Herrmann certainly belonged in the top echelon of the GDR’s science organizers and administrators. He lectured at different universities and coordinated larger research projects and conferences, making communication and negotiation with higher-level officials of the academy and the responsible state authorities part of his everyday work. Herrmann was also involved in the field of science communication and was known to the Eastern German public as a publicist and commentator on current political and social issues, due to his articles in

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7 Unverzagt’s career, including his activities during the Nazi period and after 1945, is described in detail in Brather 2001; Grunwald 2019; Heber 2012, etc. Regarding Karl-Heinz Otto, a respective analysis is still pending. The most important steps of his career are summarized in Leube, 2010, on 127–136.

8 See, e.g., Herrmann 1960; Herrmann 1968; Herrmann 1970 (and following editions); Herrmann 1971.

9 The most significant example is Herrmann’s overview of the history of mankind, first published in 1975.

10 For further explanation of the purpose and means of the reform, see Nötzoldt 2002, esp. 74–78.

11 The history of ZIAGA, from its foundation to its dissolution, is recapitulated in Gringmuth-Dallmer 2001; Gringmuth-Dallmer 2006; Willing 1996.

12 Leube 2010, on 145.

13 For more information on the importance of the Academy of Sciences in East Germany and the other states of the Soviet bloc, see Feichtinger and Uhl 2018; Nötzoldt 2002 (on East Germany in particular).

14 Herrmann’s correspondence, applications, and minutes of meetings, which include agreements on research agendas and conference programs, requests for travel permits and invitations for foreign researchers, coordination of international research cooperation, and negotiation of financial resources, are preserved as part of Herrmann’s papers and the ZIAGA administration in ABBAW, e.g., in NL Herrmann, no. 21–551; no. 24–552; no. 37–557; no. 19–558, and several others.
popular science magazines and the daily press. Based on these texts and additional material from Herrmann’s private documents, it is possible to deduce his political views. Early in his scientific career, in 1954, he had joined the ruling East German party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED). Herrmann’s belief in the idea of socialism as the only alternative after fascism could not be undermined by the political, economic, and social problems that occurred over time.\footnote{A more detailed analysis of the interpenetrations of Herrmann’s scientific and administrative work regarding politics and ideology is still needed and will be presented by the author in a different context.}

However, toward the end of the GDR, he was dissatisfied – albeit cautiously – with some political decisions and practical implementation of socialist principles, but according to the available sources, he never expressed open criticism and continued to emphasize positive elements of the GDR.\footnote{Herrmann explained his motivations and beliefs in a letter to his daughter in 1992, see ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 80–2.}

As part of reunification, East German research, especially the Academy and thus also Herrmann’s institute, were evaluated, partly restructured, and finally dissolved.\footnote{The evaluation process and the handling of East German archaeological and historical scholarship in the transformation period in general has already been described in several studies, sometimes with the participation of contemporary witnesses, see Fair-Schulz and Kessler 2017; Gringmuth-Dallmer 2017; Leube 2010, Röhr 2011; for a broader contextualization of communication and debates in German historiography, see Berg et al. 2018.}

Herrmann constantly endeavored to negate accusations of political and ideological influence and presented himself as primarily dedicated to research, which, in the case of ZIAGA, he felt was now being sabotaged by internal and external forces. This explanation failed to sway his critics, who remained unimpressed and continued reproaching him. After his resignation and the dissolution of his institute, Herrmann had to look for other ways to continue his career as a scholar. Neither his efforts to figure out new institutional affiliations nor his application to the state-funded support program for East German scholars (the so-called “Wissenschaftlerintegrationsprogramm”) was successful. The initially quoted application, for example, was rejected in December 1991.\footnote{These developments are illustrated in a letter from ZIAGA staff representatives to Joachim Herrmann, 12 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5, in Herrmann’s request for resignation to the academy president Horst Klinkmann, 21 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 80–2, and in a draft of a letter to ZIAGA employees, 25 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 80–2. Kowalczuk 2010 also comments on the reasons for Herrmann’s resignation.}

He therefore took early retirement in 1992.

Thanks to the support of the German Archaeological Institute and the State Office for the Preservation of Monuments Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (today

\textsuperscript{15}A more detailed analysis of the interpenetrations of Herrmann’s scientific and administrative work regarding politics and ideology is still needed and will be presented by the author in a different context.\textsuperscript{16}Herrmann explained his motivations and beliefs in a letter to his daughter in 1992, see ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 80–2.\textsuperscript{17}The evaluation process and the handling of East German archaeological and historical scholarship in the transformation period in general has already been described in several studies, sometimes with the participation of contemporary witnesses, see Fair-Schulz and Kessler 2017; Gringmuth-Dallmer 2017; Leube 2010, Röhr 2011; for a broader contextualization of communication and debates in German historiography, see Berg et al. 2018.\textsuperscript{18}These developments are illustrated in a letter from ZIAGA staff representatives to Joachim Herrmann, 12 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5, in Herrmann’s request for resignation to the academy president Horst Klinkmann, 21 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 80–2, and in a draft of a letter to ZIAGA employees, 25 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 80–2. Kowalczuk 2010 also comments on the reasons for Herrmann’s resignation.\textsuperscript{19}Peter M. Roeder to Joachim Herrmann, 16 December 1991, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 271/54–4.
with a slightly changed name), until 2008 Herrmann was able to publish several volumes of the results of his long-term excavation project in Ralswiek on the island of Rügen. Apart from that, after the late 1990s Herrmann attracted less and less attention in the world of national and international research. He became a member of the Leibniz Society of Sciences at Berlin, which a group of former Academy members had founded in response to the restructuring of the Academy and the dissolution of the integrated scholarly society. Herrmann was a respected participant of the society. In 2009, for example, he was awarded a medal – one of the last achievements of his scientific career before he died in 2010 at the age of 77.

As is already evident from this short biographical overview, discussion about the appropriate handling of East German research institutes and scholars began immediately, as a side effect of the reunification process itself – and extensively affected Herrmann. In addition to intra-institutional controversies and his efforts to continue his scientific career after his resignation, he became all the more center of a public debate when his membership in the CISH bureau was confirmed in September 1990. In this situation, the evaluation of the East German scientific landscape and the Academy of Sciences as its key institution was fully in progress. To understand the dynamics of the discussion, it is important to take account of the specifics of the public media in Germany as crucial contextual factors.

2. Previously on…: The German-German Press Landscape in the Process of Transformation and Reunification

The situation in 1989/1990 was initially formed by two different media systems. In contrast to the almost invariably state-controlled media in the GDR, West Germany’s print media had predominantly been organized along the principles of the market economy, with large private publishing houses running the most important newspapers and news magazines. In consequence of reunification and the Treuhand operations, the East German press landscape was restructured and privatized. This led to an “erosionary upheaval” in the East that left numerous East German newspapers facing a dramatic slump in circulation. In many cases, mere cooperation with West German publishers and joint ventures between East and West German newspapers proved able to...
partly save the East German press sector. Still, of the major East German newspapers, only the former party organ *neues deutschland* managed to hold up somewhat well. Overall, the German-German media landscape of the early 1990s was dominated by players from the old FRG. This imbalance between East and West German voices also had an impact on the way East German scholarship was covered in the media.

Nationwide newspapers and magazines with large readerships, like *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), *Der Spiegel*, and so on, reported extensively on the transformation of the research landscape, and the discourse was heavily influenced by West German authors and experts. In consequence, many articles (mostly regardless of political nuances among individual West German newspapers) all too well reflected the widespread West German assumptions of a dichotomy between free and pluralistic scholarship in the West and politically manipulated, one-dimensional research in the East. The historiography of the GDR was specifically addressed and labeled as particularly “subordinated to political guidelines and restrictions to a large extent,” patronized by the state and loyal to the party. Different historiographical subdisciplines and research areas were sweepingly assigned attributes like “political paternalism,” and academia was called a “handmaid of politics.” These assessments were produced not only by journalists, but also by representatives especially of the West German historical scientific community who contributed to the reporting as interviewees, commentators, and authors. Since West German journalists and editors could continue their work uninterrupted without suffering any major changes relating to the implementation of the West German media system in East Germany, prominent historians were able to build on their reputations as valuable contributors to the public discourse before 1989/90 and—to use Bourdieu’s words—take their capital (their experiences, their access to the media due to established networks, their role as “truth figures” in praxeological terms, etc.) into the reunited German media landscape. This development was enhanced by the fact that many journalists repeatedly adopted these scholars’ opinions. Statements by leading West German historians were sometimes reproduced almost verbatim, and West German organizations’ proclamations, such as the declaration of a reunified East and West German historiography issued by the German Historical Association (then the Verband der Historiker Deutschlands, VHD), the largest professional association of German historians, were discussed in detail. Therefore, assumptions such as absence of any pluralism in East German scholarship; attributions like narrow-minded, colorless, and monolithic; and highly biased comparisons with West German research found their way into the press.

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26 See Pürer 2015, esp. 61–67, with a table of the circulation numbers in chronological perspective (p. 62–63), and for further information also Pürer and Raabe 2007, esp. 211–248, 258–269.
27 Stumpf 1990.
28 Both in Sträter 1990.
29 See, for example, Rumberg 1990; Stumpf 1990.
Another important group of participants in the public discussion about East German scholarship consisted mostly of younger East German scholars, again primarily historians, who had seen the GDR system hinder their career and their autonomy. Over the course of reunification, some of them founded the Independent Association of Historians (Unabhängiger Historikerverband, UHV) in 1990 in opposition to the networks of East German historiography and its neighboring disciplines. The members of the UHV criticized the East German system and expressed concern that their former superiors would retain their influence despite the system change. They repeatedly published statements on the evaluation process that were again quoted or published verbatim in the nationwide media. Their worries seemed to coincide with the suppositions of many journalists, as references to opaque networks, cadre structures, and nepotism were recurring elements in articles on East German scholarship.

More differentiated statements in the former West German media tended to be exceptions and were likelier to be found, the longer their temporal distance from 1989/1990. However, by the beginning of September 1990, the Frankfurter Rundschau (FR) had published a report criticizing hasty political decisions and the lack of sensitivity toward East German scholars. Although still retaining some elements of the narrative of top GDR scholars as a "club of professors with close relations to the SED," a Der Spiegel article from early 1991 serves as another example of a slight tendency to more impartial points of view, in that the unknown author referred to political guidelines on both sides, Eastern and Western, and requested a fair assessment of East German research.

In contrast to the immediate publications in the Western press, articles in originally East German newspapers, which at the time were probably busy ensuring their survival, covered the evaluation and transformation process only later (starting mostly in late 1991 and 1992). In addition to rather neutral reports on political decisions and court verdicts, skeptical assessments were tendered by journalists and former employees of East German academic institutions. The most frequent critiques concerned West German researchers’ failure to treat their East German colleagues as equals and without prejudice. In view of the imbalances between the East and West German press, these articles were little more than a drop in the bucket. Scholars from East Germany occasionally raised their voices to reject the accusations against them and in turn criticized the restructuring of the GDR institutions as well as the media reporting about it, but they had only very limited possibilities of addressing the public, at least with regard to the most widely read newspapers in reunified Germany.

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30 While the first call had been made in January, the official founding took place in April 1990.
31 See, e.g., Brandes 1990 (on behalf of the UHV). The documents of the UHV have been collectively published in Eckert et al. 1994.
32 See, e.g., Sträter 1990; Stumpf 1990; Seibt 1990; Pommerin 1990.
33 Loewe 1990.
34 [Anon.] 1991.
35 See, e.g., Schmidt 1992; Karau 1992; Hildebrandt 1992; [Anon.] 1992; Dümde 1992.
Germany. Interviews, letters to the editor, and critical statements in the commentary sections often provided the only opportunities for self-defense.

In view of these developments and discourses, given the unequal starting points of West and East German discussants (or rather, discussants in favor of West or East German protagonists), Herrmann’s election to the CISH bureau thus obviously did not enter a vacuum in terms of public discussion about East German research and its protagonists. It is easy to imagine that by the time of his election, the mood was already heating up, while the fronts were increasingly hardening.

3. Just Playing by the Rules? The CISH and Its Election Regulations

The Comité International des Sciences Historiques (CISH) was established in 1926 as a nongovernmental international association representing the interests of historians and members of affiliated disciplines. The so-called CISH bureau, which oversees the practical work of CISH, was (and still is) not composed of national deputies but of individual members who are nominated by an independent commission and elected as representatives of the whole discipline because of their scholarly expertise (albeit a certain geographical balance can be observed among all member states). The bureau’s most important activity is the organization of the International Congresses of Historical Sciences, which are held every five years at different places, as was the case from 26 August to 2 September 1990 in Madrid – the site of the event that aroused the discussions about Joachim Herrmann.

Leading West German historians had already tried to intervene against Herrmann’s position in the CISH. They requested that he be excluded from the election process and specifically asked him not to run for the bureau. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Eberhard Jäckel, the representatives of the VHD, warned that their association would otherwise leave CISH in protest. Whether personal threats against Herrmann were also voiced is unclear to this day. Overall, the efforts to prevent Herrmann’s candidacy remained ineffective: the VHD request was declined and Herrmann did not renounce his candidacy. Instead, his membership in the bureau (since the last election in 1985) was renewed as a result of the confirmation by 82 percent of the General Assembly in Madrid. No other German historian was elected as an associated member, which had not been the case in 1985 either. Neither this nor Herrmann’s initial election in general had caused any extraordinary reactions in 1985, and

36 The history and the functioning of CISH are analyzed in Erdmann 1987, updated in Erdmann 2005.
37 Only Karl Dietrich Erdmann from the FRG functioned as a consultative member, see “Members of the Board 1926–2010,” Comité International des Sciences Historiques, online: http://www.cish.org/index.php/en/presentation/the-ichs-board/members-of-the-board-1926-2010/ (accessed 25 September 2021).
one-time re-elections were very common in practice,\textsuperscript{38} which illustrates the changes that had taken place since then.

4. The Tip of the Iceberg: The Media Debate on Joachim Herrmann during the Transformation

The outcome of the elections in Madrid in 1990 was immediately reported in the German press, motivating journalists and scholars alike to take a closer look at Herrmann. Reflecting the structures of the German-German media landscape at that time, the discourse was mostly influenced by originally West German voices. Articles concerning Herrmann’s election were mainly published in \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}, \textit{Süddeutsche Zeitung}, \textit{Der Spiegel}, etc., while \textit{neues deutschland} stayed out of the debate. A rare example of a report in an originally East German medium can be found in \textit{Der Morgen}, the central organ of the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (\textit{Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands, LDPD}) in the GDR.\textsuperscript{39} The election results did not remain a matter of simple news updates on either side; rather, the reports were combined with more detailed assessments of Herrmann and East German scholarship.

Articles by Western authors focused mainly on Herrmann’s influential position as ZIAGA director, a post considered to be unquestionably accompanied by political and ideological concessions and interpenetrations.

In many cases, such analyses of Herrmann’s professional career turned into character studies. The fact that Herrmann “had himself elected to the CISH bureau” (such was the expression used by his critics)\textsuperscript{40} in the face of West German protest was seen as proof of his impudence, obsessive careerism, and egoism. Gustav Seibt, who as head of the \textit{FAZ} feuilleton was one of the most prominent German cultural journalists, described Herrmann as “one of its [the GDR’s] most powerful scientific leaders” and the still reigning “fearsome master of several dozen employees.”\textsuperscript{41} An article in \textit{Der Spiegel} went even further, accusing Herrmann of absolute loyalty to the regime. He was called an “ueber comrad,” “an old vassal of Honecker,” and “a despotic governor of the

\textsuperscript{38} This is also shown by an overview of the board members available on the \textit{CISH} website, see “Members of the Board 1926–2010,” \textit{Comité International des Sciences Historiques}, online: http://www.cish.org/index.php/en/presentation/the-ichs-board/members-of-the-board-1926-2010/ (accessed 25 September 2021).

\textsuperscript{39} This article by Tegen 1990 will be addressed later.

\textsuperscript{40} See, e.g., Seibt in his introduction to the publication of an \textit{UHV} declaration regarding Herrmann’s resignation in Brandes 1990 (on behalf of the \textit{UHV}); Rumberg 1990.

\textsuperscript{41} Seibt 1990.
regime” who had constantly harassed his subordinates. According to Welt am Sonntag, Herrmann was “an especially reliable and faithful henchman of the SED.” His alleged servitude to the party was presented as a special characteristic, not just of Herrmann but of East German historical scholarship in general. This kind of loyalty was assumed to be incompatible with scientific objectivity and thus disqualified Herrmann and his colleagues from consideration as professional scholars. In this context, objectivity was understood as impartiality and immunity from any extra-scientific influences or, especially, political and ideological goals, as well as from personal preferences and attitudes, meaning that it was implicitly interpreted in opposition to subjectivity. However, the reproaches aimed at Herrmann and his colleagues show all the more that attribution or denial of objectivity to science and scholars is never detached from persons (“subjects”). Claims of universal, trans-personal objectivity (in opposition to subjectivity) therefore serve rather as argumentative devices and must be analyzed as such. This contextuality of the label “objectivity,” applied to science, becomes especially apparent with regard to the differing understandings of science and scholarship in the two German states before 1989/90.

After 1945, as part of a demonstrative break with the Nazi period (even if sometimes only inconsistently implemented), West German scholarship strove to stay as far away from politics as possible to avoid any impression of interference. Subsequently, even inherent connections between science and politics, based on what Mitchell G. Ash describes as mutual use and exchange of resources, were often ignored. Instead, West German conceptions of the scholar often focused on independence from politics and unbiased, pluralistic research. Despite increasing criticism of this approach over time, around 1989/90 these aspects received special emphasis as essential West German features, in contrast to East German scholarship. Although such impressions of

42 [Anon.] 1990.

43 Most accusations cannot be clarified because no evidence has been found in the available files. Nevertheless, there are some examples of disputes between Herrmann and individual employees over publication opportunities, association memberships, or participation in committees with Western involvement, etc. Identifying the motives of both sides is a very complicated matter requiring extensive case studies.

44 Pommerin 1990.

45 This traditional partition of objectivity and subjectivity has been questioned by the praxeology of truth, demanding a focus on the mutual interdependence and entanglement of these concepts instead, see Cain et al. 2019b, esp. 10, 12; Kleeberg 2019, esp. 109, 112–114, 117, with reference to Daston and Galison 2007.

46 Ash 2002; Ash 2016. On the mutual interferences of politics and science, see also Ash 2008, on 456–457; Thiel and Wagner 2008, on 342.

47 This has e.g. been described and relativized by Pasternack 2008; Thiel and Wagner 2008, esp. 311. Nevertheless, a higher degree of pluralism was certainly be observable in the West German science system.

48 This was due in part to shifts within the history of science, which focused increasingly on the production of scientific knowledge as a social process and therefore on the “political and social parameters of scholarly and intellectual developments”, Lässig 2008, on 15. See also Szöllösi-Janze 2000.
two consistently and homogeneously opposing blocs prove to be much more permeable and “holey” than expected, there were of course clear differences between the West and the East German science system. According to the Marxist-Leninist ideal, science in the GDR was supposed to contribute to the formation of a new socialist society.\textsuperscript{49} The historical-materialistic understanding of history, with its focus on the crucial importance of social and economic circumstances and on class struggle as the driving force of history, was officially considered the only true and valid maxim.\textsuperscript{50} The extent to which political and ideological affirmations in official statements by individual scholars were actually internalized and believed or else artificially parroted to secure the continuance of their research has to be analyzed from case to case.\textsuperscript{51}

Amidst this background, it is all the more evident that the issues and questions raised in the public debate reflected larger conflicts and differences between the two, now unifying German science systems and cultures, not least because the self-image of each was largely determined by its distinction from the other and mutual stereotypical attributions and prejudices. This must also be considered when analyzing the discussion about Herrmann’s membership in the CISH bureau. From his critics’ point of view, his success in the election derived from his conspiratorial skills, which not only fit with the image of his character that had been drawn in the media\textsuperscript{52} but also seemed to reinforce narratives of the old cadre structures and networks established in descriptions of the East German scientific community. The impression that positions and reputations in East German academia had invariably been the result of wheeling and dealing was also based on this idea. When criticizing Herrmann, journalists and the historians involved in the public debate alike claimed that selection procedures based on scholarly expertise had existed only in West Germany and were nonexistent in the former GDR.

Meanwhile, the media debate also featured references to transparent procedures and established formalities used by Herrmann’s defenders. Adherence to controlling mechanisms, rules, and regulations – a prevalent strategy and performative act to claim credibility, especially in situations of conflict and competing viewpoints – was presented as a safe method of avoiding ideological or political entanglements. This was probably both a reaction to the reproaches as well as a reference to their own understanding of scientific authority. A major argument of Herrmann and his supporters relied on the fact that the CISH bureau members were not elected as national representatives but as

\textsuperscript{49} The Marxist-Leninist understanding of science and its implementation in the GDR is described in Burrichter and Diesener 2002; Burrichter and Diesener 2005, König 2018, esp. 33–41; Pasternack 2008; Sabrow 1998, esp. 425–432.

\textsuperscript{50} Thiel and Wagner 2008, esp. 310–312.

\textsuperscript{51} Of course, differences between such superordinate paradigms and their implementation at lower, subordinated levels could lead to inner heterogeneities and synchronic and diachronic variations.

\textsuperscript{52} See [Anon.] 1990, where Herrmann’s election success was explained by “diligence and conspiratorial skills.” Similar argumentation can be found in the UHV declaration on Herrmann’s election and his resignation as ZIAGA director, see Brandes 1990.
representatives of the whole discipline,\textsuperscript{53} qualified by their expertise and legitimated by a precisely defined election process. This was stressed at the peak of the debate in a letter from Herrmann to the British historian Theodore C. Barker, president of the CISH bureau, on 13 September 1990, maybe also in anticipation of possible West German efforts to join forces with the association. In his opinion, Herrmann clarified, he had been elected “because of my scientific work, responsible for the efficacy of the C.I.S.H. as a whole,”\textsuperscript{54} which he saw as confirmed by the discussion in the General Assembly and the election results. Similar argumentation was presented by the CISH treasurer and historian Alain Dubois in the FAZ. Dubois described the election procedures in detail and accused the opposing side of ignoring or being uninformed about the committee’s regulations and conventions. He pointed out that candidates for the CISH bureau were appointed “on the basis of their scientific qualities and their ability to successfully work on the future of their science worldwide.”\textsuperscript{55} According to Dubois, CISH understood itself as a worldwide representation of historians and scholars from related disciplines; therefore, Herrmann had been elected by none other than the international historical community, which from Dubois’ point of view ultimately justified his membership in the bureau. This exposes one of the main structural characteristics or “misunderstandings” of the discussion about Herrmann: although the CISH operating principles were theoretically independent of national contexts, in practice contextual factors like the conflict between East and West German scholars had an impact at the CISH level and therefore cannot be ignored. In fact, several academic spheres are discernible in the discussion about Herrmann: East Germany and West Germany as separated spheres, the academic sphere of the reunited Germany, and the international community of historians, each sphere with its own individual features, hierarchies, and histories. Despite their differences, these levels of academia impacted on each other and were highly interrelated, for they sometimes followed each other in time, were subject to mutual developments, and partly overlapped (or clashed) in terms of their duration and their human composition.

This is another of the reasons for the failure of Herrmann and his supporters’ efforts to use his acceptance in one academic sphere – the international historical community, united within CISH – as an argument to require it in another, specifically the historical community (and the public) in the newly reunited Germany. In his notes on Seibt’s first extensive article about him, which he first took privately and later attached to his letters to Wolfgang

\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly, as the CISH was (and still is) primarily an association of historians, Herrmann did not act as an archeologist in this context, which is probably one reason why the media debate was dominated by historians and why Herrmann’s actual archaeological work was very seldom addressed.

\textsuperscript{54} Joachim Herrmann to Theodore C. Barker, 13 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5.

\textsuperscript{55} Here and in the following: Dubois 1990.
J. Mommsen and the FAZ editorial office, J. Mommsen and the FAZ editorial office, \(^56\) Herrmann included references to researchers of international renown that had acknowledged his achievements as a scholar with invitations to congresses, exchanges of letters, and elections like those in Stuttgart and Madrid, as compelling proof of his authority. \(^57\) The fact that these players were located beyond the German-German conflict made the argument all the more convincing to Herrmann: In his eyes, this disproved any accusations of ideological penetration, personal political devotion, and/or instrumentalization. Still, he and his supporters found themselves confronted with a characteristic of scientific authority and a major line of conflict: given the historical background, the discussion about Herrmann also needs to be understood as part of the search for identity in the newly reunited German academic sphere. With reference to the observations of researchers concerned with the praxeology of truth, relations between science and pseudo-science or political epistemologies, existential categories like truth, science, knowledge, etc., were of special interest “in boundary discourses or situations of (critical) complexity and uncertainty.” \(^58\) Therefore, assuring or denying Herrmann’s authority as a professional scholar and legitimate representative of the scientific community was an identifiable “technique of identity politics” \(^59\) applied in the highly contested and uncertain context of the German reunification. Herrmann’s election unleashed broader conflicts and challenges underlying the fusion of the two German scientific systems. Obviously, criteria of valuable research, discourse paradigms, and perspectives for the future were connected to more pragmatic issues like internal hierarchies and the negotiation of employment opportunities. An essential part of this was the questioning of previously valid East and West German paradigms and the redefining of scientific authority, which functioned not least as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, self-defining, and dissociation.

As these observations demonstrate once more, the granting or denying of scientific authority and the status of the professional scholar are highly context-dependent and hence situationally determined and historically dynamic. Neither affirming truth and knowledge (as analyzed by the praxeology of truth and the approach of political epistemologies) nor labeling someone a scholar is based on universally applicable parameters. Therefore, as Herrmann’s case convincingly shows, these definitions need instead to be analyzed as reflections of the interests and expectations of both situational actors and the specific circumstances under which they appear. Sociologically spoken, these concepts are “moving targets.” \(^60\) The fact that this can be linked to recent assumptions in the history of science, which firmly insists on understanding science as a

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\(^{56}\) Joachim Herrmann’s comments on a FAZ article (5 September 1990), September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Kleeberg 2019, on 113.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., on 108. Ash 2008, esp. 458, also points to attributions of science/pseudo-science to create collective identities.

\(^{60}\) Ash 2008, on 453, with reference to Daston and Galison 2007.
social process, attests to the potential these interdisciplinary approaches and transfers of categories hold for science-historical studies.

The observation “that epistemic and political criteria of scientificity are not easily separable” is also confirmed with regard to another strategy of argumentation adopted by Herrmann’s defenders as well as his critics: accusing the respective other side of acting mainly out of political motives (rather than for the sake of scientific knowledge). Interestingly, this argument directly included references to contextual factors. The analysis has already shown that Herrmann’s opponents frequently pointed to his activities in the GDR, his party membership, and his leading position to discredit him and deny him the status of a professional scholar. By contrast, when Herrmann’s supporters and he himself assumed that the opposite side was primarily driven by political motives, they were referring instead to the period of transformation and the current debate. These were often combined with more general criticism of the transformation, reaching beyond the particular example of the CISH election. In the FAZ, Dubois lamented “the way in which Joachim Herrmann was driven into a corner and all GDR historians were badmouthed” for political reasons. Herrmann himself laid an equal measure of blame on his critics for questioning his membership in the CISH bureau “irrespective of my scientific excellence” and for sheerly political reasons, which he interpreted as a statement against East German scholarship’s right to exist. In a letter to the FAZ in late September 1990, Alfred Kerndl of the Archaeological State Office Berlin extended this argument with the critique that along with the condemnation of Herrmann based on his political views, democratic decisions, such as the election process in Madrid, seemed to lose their value for Herrmann’s opponents – an accusation that was aimed at the core of the self-image of West German scholarship (as strictly based on democratic convictions).

The fact that these references to political motivations were based on the idea that science and politics ideally exist in separate spheres reveals another central point of conflict concerning scientific authority. Amidst the backdrop

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61 Szöllösi-Janze 2000, esp. 20.
62 Ash 2008, on 458.
63 Dubois 1990.
64 Joachim Herrmann’s comments on a FAZ article (5 September 1990), September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5.
65 See also Joachim Herrmann to Wolfgang J. Mommsen, 12 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5. In the letter, Herrmann characterized the questioning of his membership in the CISH bureau as an “ad hoc request for political reasons.” In his letter to the FAZ, Herrmann also accused the media of being primarily interested in promoting science policy, not in discussing questions of actual science; Joachim Herrmann to the editorial office of the FAZ, 17 September 1990, ibid.
66 Similar arguments can be found in other media debates concerned with the treatment of former GDR scholars after the reunification; see, e.g., Heuer 1991; Karau 1992; Hildebrandt 1992.
67 Tegen 1990.
of the German-German situation in the early 1990s, and the implications of the unification of both science systems, East German scholars mostly knew that previously valued references to historical materialism and/or SED politics would no longer be popular after the end of the GDR, and that in view of the new conditions, confessions of unpolitical and unideological research would be requested, and from them especially. Thus Herrmann, by using the image of the scholar as someone withdrawn from social and political day-to-day business, partly adopted the criteria of scientific authority of his Western opponents. He referred to this in his letter to Mommsen, in which he commented on the allegations against him and disputed having “identified himself neither with SED historiography nor with any of its preformed narrow-mindedness.”

In his notes on the FAZ reporting after his election (which he also attached to his letter to Mommsen), Herrmann combined this demonstrative commitment to the ideal of the apolitical scholar with pointing to the differences among the historical subdisciplines in the GDR in terms of their proximity to politics and their penetration of ideology, which had not primarily concerned archaeologists, ancient historians, prehistorians, or medievalists.

This argument was also raised by Tegen in Der Morgen. Her text, published on 13/14 September 1990, is a rare example of an article about Herrmann’s election in an originally East German newspaper. Remarkably, in view of the biased nature of the majority of articles, Tegen’s description turned out to be quite differentiated, as she demanded a less hysterical discussion and instead aimed for a more balanced portrayal of ZIAGA as a “stepchild of the rulers” that “did not belong among the particularly praised, and certainly not among the especially promoted research institutions.”

In her remarks on Herrmann, she assumed that he might have made “more ‘party’ than ‘science-motivated’ decisions” but had still left freedom for autonomous research, according to some of his employees. At this point, it is important to note that the academics who took part in the media debate were almost exclusively historians who were not involved with the topics on which Joachim Herrmann was researching. The fact that the discussion about Herrmann’s CISH post and, spreading from this, about his scientific authority did not deal with his concrete prehistoric-archaeological research at any point (except for sweeping descriptions as “ideological”), can, on the one hand, be understood as a result

68 Joachim Herrmann to Wolfgang J. Mommsen, 12 September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5.
69 Joachim Herrmann’s comments on a FAZ article (5 September 1990), September 1990, ABBAW, NL Herrmann, no. 81–5.
70 Here and in the following Tegen 1990.
71 This reasoning – that a certain distance from politics was (in contrast to modern history) characteristic of premodern history and archaeology – can similarly be found in retrospective (self-)legitimations of archaeologists and historians from other states of the Eastern bloc as well as in the explanations of scholars from other authoritarian regimes. Here, e.g., reference can be made to the prehistorian Witold Hensel from Poland, see Urbańczyk 2008. Sebastian Brather revealed a similar argumentation by Wilhelm Unverzagt after 1945, see Brather 2001. The political involvement and ideological penetration of archaeology and prehistory under the Nazi regime has been analyzed in Geringer 2013; Schallmayer and von Kurzynski 2011; Steuer 2001.
of this composition of the discussants. On the other hand, another interpretation seems just as convincing: it becomes clear that the debate was not about Herrmann as a prehistoric archaeologist and about possible ideological and political contamination of concrete research results. Instead, Herrmann was seen as a representative of GDR scholarship and in this role his legitimacy as a CISH bureau member was doubted.

Therefore, despite different positions and objectives, the lines of argumentation of both sides of the discussion referred to the complex question of whether timeless and universally applicable criteria to define scientific authority and professional scholarship can be assumed, and whether something like scientific objectivity can be determined and evaluated independently of the respective circumstances. With regard to the issues raised in this essay, it can be considered proven that the praxeological premise that time- and space-specific contextual factors are decisive for processes and claims of truth and knowledge production can be transferred to such cases as the one analysed here. Contextual factors ("authority scenes," "figures," and "theories," so to say) have a decisive impact on negotiations of scientific authority and must therefore always be included in the analysis. In the discussion that arose subsequent to the CISH elections, the dynamics of reunification and transformation of the scientific landscape(s) of Germany surely played an important role in discourse as well as in the arguments raised for or against Herrmann. In a way, this confirms the statement in the UHV’s declaration of Herrmann’s imminent resignation as ZIAGA director in September 1990: his case was “only the tip of the iceberg.”

5. Conclusion: Discovering What Lies Below the Surface

In conclusion, we see that almost no references to actual research activities, concrete archaeological and/or historiographical interpretations, or research interests can be found in the discussion about Herrmann’s membership in the CISH bureau and his status as a professional scholar in general. This observation itself points to the central results of this study. Analysis of articles from nationwide German newspapers and news magazines, which serve as prisms carving out the dominant lines of argumentation and their subjacent structures, proved the initial presumption and could therefore exploit the potential of microhistorical approaches and case studies especially. Demonstrably, the debate soon extended to broader issues beyond Herrmann’s case and involved deeper questions and problems that were extensively embedded in the particular context, i.e., the German-German developments and discourses following the evaluation of East German research and its restructuring as part of the general transformation and reunification. Considering this disputed background, it seems all the more plausible that the discussion about Herrmann developed into a more general process of negotiation regarding the identity of the reunified German scientific community, the understanding of

72 Brandes 1990. This was also referred to in Rumberg 1990.
science and the scholar, and the position of individual protagonists under these new circumstances.

In accordance with this, the analysis confirmed that in most cases, the background of the participants – their East or West German origin, their socialization and their experiences, their public status and authority, and in the case of the historians involved, their affiliation with the East or West German research system – had a fundamental impact on their position in the discussion, and that these “subjective” factors even outweighed possible differences in the political attitudes of individual newspapers. Once more it becomes clear that including the respective circumstances (the structures and hierarchies of the science system and the scientific community; the political, economic, and social developments; the personal background of each discussion participant, etc.) is absolutely necessary for examining negotiations of scientific authority.

The analysis of the discussion about Herrmann’s authority as a scholar and a representative of his discipline also exposed the often-assumed transferability and universal validity of scientific authority as illusions. Certain parameters are frequently applied and therefore sometimes seem to be universal, but this does not disprove the influence of context-specific factors. The crucial importance of a historicizing perspective on scientific authority was illustrated with regard to German-German particularities, like the clash of previously coexisting, competitive scientific communities with individual dynamics, hierarchies, and criteria for scientific authority, and their significant influence on Herrmann’s case. Furthermore, the involvement of both journalists and scholars (as authors of articles and commentators) in the debate and in letters exchanged between several participants in the discussion behind the scenes, but then partially referred to in the media, resulted in a merging of different levels of discourse within the scientific community and in the public media as well as in semi-private and in public. Regarding scientific authority, the criteria by which it is defined, and by whom, Herrmann’s example also shows how the focus partially shifted from the scientific community alone to the public, giving it more authority in granting authority, so to speak.

Therefore, the case of Herrmann not only revealed particular German-German developments and discourses but also pointed to more general issues in connection with scientific authority. It proved that detailed analyses with comprehensive consideration of contextual factors and pragmatic methodological-theoretical recourse to approaches like the praxeology of truth, political epistemologies, and general assumptions of the history of science serve as a promising tools by which to discover more hidden aspects of scientific authorities – the fundaments of the iceberg, so to say.

Acknowledgements

Open access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.
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