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Portraits of the Nation

Stamps, Coins and Banknotes
in Belgium and Switzerland
1880–1945



Peter Lang

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Alexis Schwarzenbach : Portraits of the Nation (Europäische Hochschulschriften / European University Studies / Publications Universitaires Européennes) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Portraits of the Nation (Europäische Hochschulschriften / European University Studies /

Portraits of the Nation offers a fascinating insight into the construction and development of national identity in two multilingual countries - Belgium and Switzerland. This book not only shows that multilingualism was no obstacle for the development of national identity - in both countries it was used as a positive means of collective identification - it also demonstrates that other means of identification were much more important. These were found on a national and supralinguistic level - in Belgium the Royal Family and in Switzerland the Alps - and on a local and sub-linguistic level - in Belgium mainly the provinces and in Switzerland the cantons. This study also shows that, contrary to what might be expected, Belgium was often more successful than Switzerland in constructing and adapting its national identity, especially in the inter-war years. Combining written and iconographic sources found in the archives of the national banks, mints and Post Offices in Berne and Brussels this book furthermore fills in an important historiographical gap using stamps, coins and banknotes as historical sources for the first time. Often neglected by historians, Alexis Schwarzenbach successfully argues that these sources have to be seen as important lieux de mémoire and that they are ideally suited for the study of the interrelated topics of memory and identity.

About the AuthorThe Author: Alexis Schwarzenbach was born in Zurich in 1971. He studied Modern History at Balliol College, Oxford from 1991-1994 (BA 1994) and was researcher at the Department of History and Civilisation at the European University Institute in Florence from 1994-1997 (Ph.D. 1997). His research focuses on collective identities, early female photography and film and the 20th-century representation and significance of European monarchies.