# German Historical Institute London Bulletin

Conference Report: *Fifteenth Workshop on Early Modern German History*

by Natalie Grace

# CONFERENCE REPORTS

*Fifteenth Workshop on Early Modern German History*. Organized by the German Historical Institute London in co-operation with the German Historical Institute Washington DC and the German History Society, held online on 7 May 2021. Conveners: Bridget Heal (University of St Andrews), Katherine Hill (Birkbeck, University of London), David Lederer (NUI Maynooth), Alison Rowlands (University of Essex), and Hannes Ziegler (GHIL).

Spring 2021 saw the welcome return of the GHIL workshop on early modern German history. Originally planned for May 2020, it was one of many events postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thankfully, the organizers were able to bring together presenters and attendees for a one-day online event this year. While it was a shame not to meet in person, the online format retained the core principles of the workshop, providing a welcoming and engaging platform for open discussion of new research and of developing projects. It also enabled participants to join from across the UK, Germany, and the USA. The nine papers presented covered wide-ranging themes, including public communication, identity and image, good governance and crisis management, and Renaissance learning and art. Scholars at all stages in their academic careers attended and presented at the workshop. It was especially encouraging to see a strong postgraduate and early-career presence—a testament to the supportive environment created by the workshop and a demonstration of the ongoing appeal of early modern German history as a subject of research.

The first session of the day, chaired by Bridget Heal, featured three papers which addressed different forms of communication and persuasion. Stefan Beckert (TU Dresden) presented a part of his current doctoral research, which seeks to develop a greater understanding of the mid sixteenth-century public sphere. Beckert defined any communication without a specific addressee or recipient as part of the

public sphere, and his paper explored the use of language of dissent, slander, and provocation (invectives) in public communication during the pamphlet controversy relating to Duke Henry II of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel between 1538 and 1542. Beckert stressed the importance of social capital for effective governance during this period and argued that when employed effectively, invectives in Protestant pamphlets served a dual purpose. On the one hand, they were offensive, attacking the duke's social capital and damaging his honour; on the other, they were protective, justifying and legitimizing the actions of the Protestant princes. Public communication required a delicate balance in the use of invectives; ultimately, whether something amounted to slander or honourable defence was decided in the public sphere.

Protestant propaganda, albeit in a different form, was also the subject of the paper by Thomas Wood (University of Birmingham). His doctoral research examines representations of serpents and dragons in early modern German culture, and in his paper he considered the use of the papal dragon in Protestant imagery to denigrate the papacy. Wood highlighted long-standing folkloric and popular perceptions of the dragon as a greedy and evil creature. These connotations made it an appealing image for Protestant propagandists because it could be readily understood by a wide audience without the need to develop new visual literacy. The dichotomy of the dragon and dragon slayer also contributed to a national myth-making process for Protestants. Wood traced the association of the dragon with the Antichrist and with the papacy in a variety of images in the early decades of the Reformation, and noted a growing confidence in the Protestant message by the 1540s. These ideas culminated in Peter Gottland's woodcut of St George defeating the dragon (1552), a bold illustration of Protestant faith triumphing over Catholicism. Wood also observed that such imagery was gradually exported to communities outside German lands, such as the Netherlands, emphasizing the significance of this motif to a developing Protestant identity.

The final paper in this session likewise focused on the communication of Protestant ideas. Benedikt Brunner (Leibniz Institute of European History, Mainz) presented work from his second book project, a comparative work exploring attitudes to death in several different Protestant cities in Europe and New England between 1580

and 1750. Death and ways of coping with bereavement form a key part of Christian and confessional identity, and some suggest that the Reformation changed the meaning of death. Brunner's project considers the accuracy of this characterization by analysing funeral sermons from Nuremberg, Basel, London, and Boston. He noted that funeral sermons are often only considered in a Lutheran context; yet although they originated among Lutherans, other strands of Protestantism also adopted them. Funeral sermons were primarily intended to support the grieving community and to provide instruction on living a good life in order to ensure a peaceful death. Brunner shed particular light on the funeral sermons' discussions of the body and soul. The body was presented in a negative light in the sermons, with the preachers in the different cities instead emphasizing the destiny of the soul and the need to train it for death. Overall, Brunner demonstrated that funeral sermons conveyed central theological beliefs and norms of living and dying to the community, and therefore offer an insight into the development of Protestant identities within the cities he is examining.

In the second session, chaired by Alison Rowlands, Rita Voltmer (Trier University) introduced her current research project, which examines resilience and criminal justice in witchcraft and fornication trials in the western territories of the Old Reich (fifteenth to seventeenth centuries). The project is part of a wider research group based at Trier University combining approaches from history and social science to explore how the concept of resilience can be used to analyse social, religious, and political upheaval and the steps to regain stability. The group considers resilience to be a neutral concept that denotes the ability of social groups and structures to continue and survive in the face of disruptive events and change. Voltmer provided an overview of the key principles and questions guiding the research. Rather than focusing on the resilience of those tried for witchcraft, Voltmer's research examines criminal justice as a resilience strategy (a method for individuals and groups to cope with disruptive events) and explores witchcraft and fornication trials as resilience resources within this framework. It questions how, when, and in what contexts criminal justice was used as a resilience strategy. It also considers how this strategy was used at different operational levels—among

authorities, experts, and the general populace—and how these groups interacted. Voltmer noted that the western territories of the Old Reich provide a perfect testing ground for this research as they were politically, judicially, and linguistically fragmented, and there were several severe witch hunts there. They are therefore a good setting for examining the continuities and discontinuities in the use of witchcraft and fornication trials as resilience resources. The project is still in its early stages, with two further workshops planned in the next year. Voltmer argued that the application of the resilience concept developed by this research group has the potential to provide a new paradigm for considering the functionality and non-functionality of belief in witchcraft and of the trials.

The third panel, chaired by Katherine Hill, featured three speakers whose papers all addressed notions of identity and image. Fabrice Flückiger (LMU Munich) presented a paper from his current book project exploring practices and representations of good government in cities. Flückiger's paper considered the role of dance in reflecting ideas of good governance and harmony in Nuremberg. He discussed the *Tanzstatut* (originally drawn up in July 1521), which specified who could attend dances at the city hall. The forty-two patrician families listed in the *Tanzstatut* were the families from which members of the council were drawn. Flückiger suggested that the dances codified in the *Tanzstatut* were part of the symbolic identification of these patrician families as the leading citizens of the community. Participation in the dance was a way for the patrician to assume his council duties publicly. Flückiger also drew attention to the *Rathaussaal*, the room in the city hall where dances took place. The frescos in this room used motifs borrowed from ancient Rome to reflect Nuremberg's prominence in the Holy Roman Empire and to emphasize republican values. Ultimately, Flückiger claimed that the dances were a representation of order in a well-governed city. With patrician rule under threat from monarchical government and the rise of absolutism, the dances reflected the will and ability of the richest citizens of Nuremberg to do their duty and protect the city. According to Flückiger, they were essential to ensuring the longevity of city structures.

Frederick Crofts (University of Cambridge) presented an abridged version of an article he has recently published in the *Historical Journal*.

It is part of his current doctoral research, which explores epistemic images, confessionalization, and intellectual and visual culture in Germany through the works of Calvinist church councillor and lawyer Marcus zum Lamm (1544–1606). During his lifetime zum Lamm compiled a vast collection of manuscript and printed images in his *Thesaurus Picturarum*. In his paper, Crofts focused on two volumes of this collection: volume fifteen (*Turcica*), which contains images of eastern and African people, and volume twenty-three, which contains images of contemporary German costume from sixteen different cities located in the Rhine–Danube heartland. Crofts argued that the juxtaposition of these two volumes created an image of Germanness, with the images of eastern and African alterity standing in contrast to those of German costume. According to Crofts, zum Lamm was inspired by early German humanist ideas of Germans as indigenous people from between the Rhine and the Danube. Zum Lamm's costume images were also part of a wider attempt by the Palatinate Electors in Heidelberg to place themselves at the centre of German history and to create a Protestant union under Calvinist leadership. Crofts used the examples of images of Jews from Worms and of East Frisians to demonstrate that zum Lamm's iconographic and historical references designated some groups as inside and others as outside his conception of Germany and Germanness.

Holly Fletcher (University of Cambridge), who recently completed her Ph.D. examining body weight, shape, and size in early modern Germany, presented the final paper of this session with a discussion of the relationship between clothing and the materiality of the body. Her paper challenged the notion that concern about body weight and shape is a modern phenomenon, and showed that assumptions that fatness was simply viewed as a positive sign of prosperity and wealth in early modern Germany are misconceived. Fletcher used images, personal reflections, and letters from individuals in Germany to consider how body shape altered one's experience of the world. She explored several different examples that demonstrated how people's fashion choices were influenced by their physical form and by cultural ideals of body shape. She also discussed the *Gansbauch*—padding which created the impression of a rounded stomach in male clothing. Although this item of clothing may seem to indicate that men wanted

to appear fat, the garment could in fact accentuate a slim waist, and by wearing it, men could demonstrate that they were slender enough to fit into the garment. Overall, Fletcher underlined the critical role of clothing and dress in approaching the materiality of bodily size and shape.

In the fourth panel, chaired by David Lederer, Alexander Schunka (FU Berlin) presented his research on water scarcity and resource management in early modern Germany, focusing on cities in the Duchy of Saxe-Gotha and the Electorate of Brandenburg in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Schunka's paper was wide-ranging and covered several themes, including the management of water in urban communities, the regulation of rivers and canals, practices of co-operation, potential for conflict, and the position of water in early modern mindsets. Using a variety of sources from religious, legal, and political contexts, Schunka emphasized the cultural value of water and explained the need for careful co-operation between multiple social groups to maintain water supplies. Public fountains, for example, were places where different social groups intersected, and were maintained and managed by the community as a whole. Water usage also held the potential for significant conflict. Schunka particularly highlighted the role of millers (as principal users of water) and local elites, and noted the management of water supplies such as the Finow Canal in Berlin during the eighteenth century, which was carefully monitored every day to ensure shipping did not interfere with milling. Schunka emphasized that studying water regimes in landlocked territories offers an insight into co-operative forms of resource management, demonstrating that such techniques did not originate in the modern period. While the study of water in landlocked communities may not be as dramatic as in coastal regions, Schunka proposed that this 'normal' case can shed light on how societies coped with and managed disaster.

The final session, chaired by Hannes Ziegler, featured a paper by William Theiss (Princeton University), a Ph.D. candidate whose research focuses on Renaissance learning and art in Cologne during the second half of the sixteenth century. Theiss proposed a new geography of neo-Stoicism. While neo-Stoicism has often been considered unimportant in German history, Theiss claimed that Cologne was a

laboratory of ideas for the movement, and particularly for its founder Justus Lipsius, who studied at the Jesuit school in Cologne from age 11 to 16. The other key figure in Theiss's paper, Gerhard von Kempen, taught Greek at the Jesuit school while Lipsius was a student there. Following a mission to the northern Netherlands during the 1560s, Kempen became increasingly unwell and was confined to an independent Jesuit-run asylum in Cologne; his madness culminated in a murderous attack on three Jesuits in 1574. Theiss used this case to consider how responses to madness were connected to the development of neo-Stoic ideas. Examining the records of Kempen's interrogation, Theiss found links between his visions of history and those expressed in Lipsius's later writings, with both drawing parallels between the events in the work of Tacitus and the present day. While Theiss acknowledged that there is insufficient biographical evidence to state that Lipsius's writings were directly influenced by this case, he argued that the two men provide insights into the development of neo-Stoic ideas as people navigated living in an ambiguous, violent world.

As in previous years, the workshop offered the opportunity for a relatively informal exchange of ideas about ongoing research. This exchange was not hindered by the online format, and each panel was followed by a lively question and answer session in which attendees gave feedback and explored connections that emerged between different papers. The broad thematic scope of the workshop remains one of its greatest strengths, exposing attendees to areas outside their specific research specialisms. As a postgraduate researcher, attending this workshop was a valuable opportunity to learn more about the range of ongoing work in early modern German history and to make new connections with scholars at all stages of their academic careers. The workshop was a clear demonstration of the vitality of the field, and a welcome sign that many fruitful avenues remain for future research.

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