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Conference Report: *Workshop on Medieval Germany*

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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

*Workshop on Medieval Germany.* Organized by the German Historical Institute London in co-operation with the German Historical Institute Washington DC and the German History Society, and held at the GHIL on 6 May 2022. Conveners: Len Scales (Durham University) and Marcus Meer (GHIL).

After many months of online-only conferences, one of the first in-person events to take place at the GHIL saw thirteen scholars gather at the beginning of May 2022 for a densely packed day of discussion dedicated to medieval history. What united participants at this workshop—and its previous iterations—was their special interest in the German-speaking lands of the Middle Ages. Encouragingly, the list of participants' home institutions shows that this interest is far from restricted to scholars based in Germany, but also alive and well in the United Kingdom. In addition, the workshop was fortunate to welcome scholars from North America, not least thanks to the support of a travel grant in one case awarded by the GHI Washington DC. Ph.D. students and early career researchers had the chance to present their current projects and discuss their approaches among themselves and with two distinguished scholars invited by the GHIL. In 2022 these were Eva Schlotheuber (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf) and Wolfram Drews (University of Münster). Like their respective areas of specialization, all the speakers traversed broad chronological boundaries from the early medieval period to the later Middle Ages and reached beyond narrowly (and artificially) conceived notions of the borders of medieval 'Germany'. Yet thematic strands emerged, which illustrate the diversity of ongoing trends in medieval history.

One such strand dealt with experiences and constructions of 'otherness'. It was led by the paper presented by Wolfram Drews, who traced the changing perceptions in modern scholarship of early medieval Mozarabic Christians on the Iberian Peninsula, moving from an

emphasis on their role as martyrs to an appreciation of their achievements as cultural brokers. For the high medieval period, John Eldevik (Hamilton College) presented tentative thoughts on the possible relationship between accusations of torture suffered by Christians at the hands of Muslims in European chronicles and the emergence of the myth of ritual murder directed at Jews in the aftermath of the Second Crusade. Based on English and German sources, Eldevik's work suggested that these may have given rise to the popular image of Christendom's damaged body, threatened by internal and external forces—that is, Muslims and Jews. Lane Baker (Stanford University) found that stereotypes and prejudices developed in a comparable way during the late medieval period in his exploration of the historiographical reception of the arrival of Romani immigrants in the Holy Roman Empire. Baker's close reading of the sources and their transmission illuminated not just medieval perceptions of 'outsiders', but also showed how antiziganist sentiment was at times retrospectively introduced to earlier sources—edits which were not always critically appreciated by modern editors.

A second thematic strand addressed the social dimensions of confraternity and consorority. Eva Schlotheuber demonstrated how investigating the letter collections of nuns at the Benedictine Lüne Abbey gives a voice to the sisters who lived there. Schlotheuber stressed that new digital editions of such collections allow easier access and provide a comprehensive perspective on the social history of monasteries and nunneries, also revealing extensive intertextuality and specifically fashioned vocabularies. Miriam Peuker (University of Greifswald) turned the audience's attention from Benedictine to Dominican nuns and the lesser-explored area of Saxony. She highlighted that the founding family exerted influence on the nuns of Lahde, and that they had to draw on wide-ranging networks—secular as well as ecclesiastical—outside the convent to ensure the survival of their house. Matthias Wesseling (RWTH Aachen University) subsequently showed how marginalized social groups also flocked together to create institutions that were somewhat less easy to define. Wesseling drew attention to the fact that such associations are sometimes restrictively referred to as 'beggars' brotherhoods', although they were not necessarily restricted to beggars but also included the

working poor, thus offering a fertile field for research on premodern poverty.

The court as a space for multimedia forms of communication and as a stage for social aspiration was at the heart of two further presentations. Simon R. Bürcky (Justus Liebig University Giessen) spoke about the imperial court as lying at the far end of the spectrum of social relations carefully maintained by the rather minor noble family of the counts of Solms. Their pursuit of enhanced position and power further rested on cultivating their dynastic links and extending their lordship through territorial gains. Meike Wiedemann (LMU Munich) subsequently explored the architectural and ceremonial framing of feasts at late medieval and early modern courts as a stage for public displays of power alliances and demonstrations of bonds of trust. She argued that during the later Middle Ages, courts saw the rise of the *Tafelstube*, where the ruler and distinguished guests and courtiers could increasingly withdraw from the (more) public feast to a (more) private room.

A final strand of presentations dealt with tradition in religious contexts. Huw Jones (University of Oxford) posited that narratives of the conversion of pagans in the twelfth-century hagiography of Bishop Otto of Bamberg showed that such conversions were seen as claims to unquestionable sanctity. They also spoke to the expectations and preconceptions of their writers when it came to questions of secular and episcopal authority, as well as to conceptions of barbarians. Philipp Winterhager (Humboldt University of Berlin) continued the topic of bishops, adding charters and letters to an analysis of narrative sources, with a special focus on accounts of material exchanges as part of a discourse on episcopal authority. Curiously, such accounts often emphasized the past of the objects of material transactions. Tradition also mattered in the presentation by Vedran Sulovsky (University of Cambridge). It appeared as the high medieval legacy of the Carolingian apse mosaics at Aachen cathedral, which were replaced in the fourteenth or early fifteenth century and are now lost. Sulovsky suggested that similarities in later pieces of art may allude to their original, early medieval appearance and indicate that Carolingian Aachen was much more Roman—that is, following in the tradition of Papal Rome—than is generally appreciated.

## WORKSHOP ON MEDIEVAL GERMANY

Tradition was also on the minds of the conveners Len Scales (Durham) and Marcus Meer (GHIL) as they reflected on the chronologically, thematically, and partly also geographically inclusive nature of the topics and approaches presented, and expressed their hope of continuing the workshop in two years' time.

MARCUS MEER (GHIL)