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Conference Report:
Medieval Germany Workshop

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Medieval Germany Workshop. Organized by the German Historical Institute London, the German Historical Institute Washington DC, and the German History Society. Held at the GHIL on 12 April 2024. Conveners: Len Scales (Durham University) and Marcus Meer (GHIL).

In April 2024, the Medieval Germany Workshop once again saw doctoral students and early career scholars from the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland gather in London to celebrate their shared interest in medieval German history. In keeping with previous years, the organizers were also fortunate to welcome two professors, invited from Germany, who offered their expertise both by commenting on the presentations and contributing talks of their own to the wide range of topics explored by the workshop.

The first to do so was Andrea Stieldorf, who currently holds the Chair of Ancillary Sciences and Archival Studies at the University of Bonn. Her insights on the iconography of portraits on coins in the twelfth century focused in particular on double portraits of rulers and their wives. Stieldorf emphasized that although the role of women was conceptualized as subordinate to that of their husbands, portraiture on coins points to an understanding of medieval power that very much expected a partnership between ruling couples. Thus wives, often perceived in the Middle Ages as another ‘asset’ of elite status and claims to power, featured as part of rulers’ insignia. Continuing the theme of communication, Marcel Singer (University of Marburg) turned to the media and networks that promoted participation in the third crusade. Focusing on Latin and Middle High German songs, Singer showed how papal crusading calls were (or indeed were not) transmitted to wider audiences, and how, in the process, ideas were adapted to make them more appealing to circles beyond the Curia. Heresy was at the heart of the talk by Tina Druckenmüller (University of Cologne), who situated the monk and presumed heretic Gottschalk of Orbais’s thought on the origins of souls within wider social networks by investigating his letters and short theological treatises. Druckenmüller argued that the fact that Gottschalk engaged with the dominant creationist viewpoint only after his confinement in Hautvillers Abbey clearly showed that even convicted heretics could still

participate in intellectual debates on theological issues. Turning to auditory matters, Hannah Potthoff (Chemnitz University of Technology) searched historiographical texts and courtly literature in order to carve out a vivid account of the soundscapes associated with war and warlike encounters, such as tournaments, in the medieval period. In the process, Potthoff identified the diverse meanings and narrative functions which the phenomenon of 'noise' acquired in accounts of both war and courtly life.

Franz-Josef Arlinghaus, Professor of Medieval History at Bielefeld University, inaugurated a session concerned with urban history. Posing the question of what drove the formation of guilds, fraternities, and similar associations popular in towns, his analysis of sources from Cologne suggests that a desire to derive social status from membership of such groups was a decisive motivational factor in their foundation. Rather than being inflexible, premodern society established innovative ways to distribute and demarcate social status. Laura Bitterli (Universität Zürich) explored the activities of one group often at the helm of such associations – the elite of Zurich – and its role in establishing and extending urban influence over neighbouring and even more distant domains. Her work adds substance to the emerging awareness of the intricate connections between city and countryside which, rather than being socially opposed and neatly distinguished, more often than not overlapped in complex social and political ways. Rural and local elites often had to carefully negotiate their status between the conflicting priorities of service to the Habsburgs and obligations to the Zurich commune.

Social and political interactions between groups also marked two other contributions. Jan Lemmer (University of Cologne) analysed the extent to which imperial vicars took an active role in controlling lords and influencing laws, trying to identify changes in applied and imagined conceptualizations of their role. Using Rainald of Dassel as an example, he showed how the study of imperial vicars can fundamentally change our understanding of how political interaction in the Empire was shaped and played out in the High Middle Ages, beyond the dominant narratives of 'rule by consensus' (*konsensuale Herrschaft*) and the 'rules of the political game' (Gerd Althoff's *Spielregeln der Politik*). Anna Someya Messer (University of Tübingen) then

presented her research on the Counts Palatine of Tübingen, in which she similarly investigated the means, both material and immaterial, by which those in power sought to expand their grasp over their territories. She also highlighted the significance of the ruling Hohenstaufen dynasty in enabling the counts to expand their (local) sphere of influence. As important as good relations with the top level were, the Counts Palatine also fostered an extensive network encompassing members from both the *ministeriales* and the lower nobility in order to further secure their position.

Aspects of intellectual history and the interconnections of written culture emerged as another thematic strand of the workshop. Vedran Sulovsky (University of Cambridge) painstakingly traced the written style of imperial notary and bishop of Worms Heinrich of Maastricht, and suggested that a continuation of the *Annales Aquenses* for the years 1169 to 1191 and one of the earliest known manuscripts of the famous twelfth-century *Vita Sancti Karoli Magni* both stem from Heinrich's pen. Connections such as these, tentative as they may seem, are also important for our understanding of the political sphere, as Sulovsky showed with regard to the prominent position Aachen-trained clerics apparently held in the imperial chancery. Diarmuid Ó Riain (University College Cork) provided insight into his work on the dissemination of Irish hagiographies in Southern Germany in the twelfth century, where the significance of the *Schottenklöster* as a bridge between Irish- and German-speaking monastic textual traditions have yet to be explored in full. By meticulously reconstructing the transmission history of a now lost hagiographical collection, the Regensburg *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, Ó Riain made a case for the integration of Irish monasteries into broader regional monastic networks.

For the first time, the Medieval Germany Workshop also featured a session dedicated to the public communication of history and its sources beyond academic circles. Alison Ray and Matthew Holford from the Bodleian Library at Oxford introduced the attendees to the projects 'Manuscripts from German-Speaking Lands', which is a British-German collaboration between the Bodleian and the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, funded by the Polonsky Foundation, and 'Manuscripts from the Mainz Charterhouse', funded by the

Fritz Thyssen Foundation.¹ Both projects provide profound and easily accessible resources for further research, and both Ray and Holford encouraged scholars working on this material to get in touch to help them contextualize the corpus. Dirk Hoffmann-Becking (independent, London) introduced attendees of the workshop to the challenges and rewards of podcasting as a medium for public history, using his show, 'The History of the Germans', as an example.² In addressing issues such as formats, intended audiences, and the ever-growing market of (competing) history podcasts, he especially drew attention to the vital issue of finding a niche not already (or at least not extensively) covered.

In their concluding remarks, the organizers of the event from the German Historical Institute London and the German History Society looked forward to its next iteration in 2026, when the Medieval Germany Workshop will once again set out to show the thematic breadth and innovative paths that research on medieval Germany continues to create. This year's speakers have certainly done so impressively.

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¹ For more information see [<https://hab.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/en>] and [<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/mainz-charterhouse-manuscripts>], both accessed 17 July 2024.

² See [<https://historyofthegermans.com>], accessed 17 July 2024.