17TH TRANSATLANTIC DOCTORAL SEMINAR: EARLY MODERN GERMANY HISTORY

Seminar at the GHI, May 18-21, 2011. Co-sponsored by the GHI Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University. Conveners: Roger Chickering (Georgetown) and Richard F. Wetzel (GHI). Faculty Mentors: David Luebke (University of Oregon), Harriet Rudolph (University of Innsbruck), Ulrike Strasser (University of California, Irvine), Anne-Charlott Trepp (University of Bochum). Participants: Emily Bruce (University of Minnesota), Fabrizio Dal Vera (Goethe University, Frankfurt/Main), Sven Düwel (Goethe University, Frankfurt/Main), Amanda Eisenmann (University of Illinois), Nikolas Funke (University of Sussex), John Jordan (University of Oxford), Kornelia Kaschke-Kisaarslan (Free University Berlin), Laura Kounine (University of Cambridge), Erin Lambert (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Stephen Lazer (University of Miami), Hans Leaman (Yale University), Margaret Lewis (University of Virginia), Hannah Murphy (University of California, Berkeley), Avraham Siluk (University of Marburg), Jason Strandquist (Penn State University), Marco Tomaszewski (University of Freiburg).

The 17th Transatlantic Seminar brought together sixteen doctoral students working on dissertations in early modern German history at universities in the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. The students submitted papers on their dissertation projects ahead of time so that the seminar could be fully devoted to comments and discussion. Each panel began with two comments from fellow students.

The first panel was dedicated to the history of childhood and the history of reading. Margaret Lewis’s paper “Beware the Kinderfresser: Infanticide in Swabia, 1580-1630” examined infanticide in Swabian cities at the turn of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. Her analysis focused on the relationship between the dramatic rise in prosecutions of infanticide in this period and the simultaneous flourishing of popular literature focusing on the theme of violence toward children. Even though this literature usually depicted other types of violence directed at children (rather than infanticide), Lewis argued that both phenomena reflected a period of intense political, social, and economic pressure in Swabian cities. Emily Bruce’s paper “The Geographic Education of German Children: Schoolbooks and Reading Practices in the Late Enlightenment” sought to reconstruct
the ways in which geography and world history textbooks were used by German children around 1800. Bruce argued that new pedagogical approaches to geography developed in synergy with children’s increasingly interactive reading practices. Children themselves contributed to the making of geographic education, which must be seen as a constitutive component of reimagining modern childhood. The comments and the discussion focused on the themes of children’s agency, the history of reading and literacy, the methodological problem of recovering the experience of readers as well as contemporary mentalities, and the place of infanticide in a larger reconfiguration of sexuality, paternity, and state regulation.

The second panel featured two papers on political communication in the Holy Roman Empire during the sixteenth century. Fabrizio Dal Vera’s paper “Public Order and Political Crimes: Sedition in the Legal and Political Discourses of the Sixteenth Century” examined sixteenth-century legal and political discourses on revolts in order to analyze the historical development of the concepts that were generated in reaction to political struggles. Dal Vera argued that sixteenth-century jurists interpreted and modified the concept of sedition (seditio) in order to respond to particular political problems. By reconstructing the history of this concept in the context of the legal tradition and political theory, he sought to shed light on the development of the legal remedies and political strategies that were deployed to repress and prevent revolts. Avraham Siluk’s paper “Wahrnehmung des Politischen, Politische Strategien und Politische Organisationsformen der Juden im Alten Reich zu Beginn der Frühen Neuzeit, 1509-1555” explored a very different aspect of political communication in the Holy Roman Empire, namely, the relationship of the Jews to the Empire. The Jews, Siluk contended, were in many respects well-integrated subjects of the Reich who knew its structure and political culture exceptionally well. Presenting a case study of the Frankfurt Jewish community’s response to Johannes Pfefferkorn’s call for the confiscation of Jewish books, Siluk argued that the community’s knowledge of the empire allowed it to mount quite an effective defense of its rights by appealing to Reich institutions. Recurring topics in the comments and the discussion included different approaches to understanding exactly how Herrschaft functioned, the close relationship between rebellion and litigation in the Holy Roman Empire, as well as the gradual juridification of the empire’s social and political conflicts.
The third panel dealt with two different aspects of war and violence in the Holy Roman Empire. In his paper “in puncto declarationis belli nomine Imperii de annis 1756 et 1757: Die Instrumentalisierung des Reichstags durch Preußen und Österreich – Das normierte Reichsrecht stößt an seine Grenzen,” Sven Düwel presented a chapter from his dissertation about the Holy Roman Empire’s Reichskriegserklärungen in the period 1675-1757, in which he analyzes the interaction of the Reichshofrat, the Reichstag, and its delegates in the shaping of these declarations of war. At the end of this period, he argued, Brandenburg-Prussia and Austria pursued power politics in ways that undermined the regular procedures of the Reichstag, thus effectively abolishing the longstanding norms of Reichsrecht. Nikolas Funke’s paper “Military Religious Violence, Confessional Identity, and the Individual in Early Modern Germany” examined incidents of military religious violence in the period 1500-1650 to assess soldiers’ confessional identity and the role of confessional differences. While this approach yielded valuable insights into soldiers’ spirituality, Funke found that the patterns of religious violence challenged the usefulness of confessional explanations. Funke’s conclusion therefore pointed towards the centrality of the individual, rather than confessional differences, for the occurrence of religious violence and the form such violence took. Comments and discussion set the papers in the wider contexts of military history as well as the confessionalization thesis and its critics.

The fourth panel featured two papers that used gender as their primary category of historical analysis. Amanda Eisemann’s paper “Equine Trade Identities and Curative Masculinities in Daily Life, 1580-1735” examined the masculinization of horse-related smithing and medicine which occurred both through the gradual exclusion of women from these guilds and through a variety of visual representations—in guild signs, for instance—that associated equine trades such as veterinary smiths with masculine virtues. Laura Kounine’s paper “The Gendering of Witchcraft in Early Modern Germany” presented a case study using the Listening Guide method of psychological enquiry to analyze an extract of a witch-trial concerning a man and woman in a case of “stolen manhood.” Setting the case study in a broader historiographical context, Kounine argued that early modern historians ought to move beyond the binary categories of “man” and “woman” and recognize the fluidity of masculinity and femininity in the gendering of witchcraft. Differences within the genders, she concluded, are as important a category of analysis as differences between
the genders. Comments and discussion placed the equine trades in the larger context of the gradual exclusion of women from most guilds in the transition from the late medieval to the early modern era, situated Kounine’s study within the historiographical debates on witchcraft, and touched on the use of psychological methods of analysis in history.

The fifth panel was devoted to two local studies of legal and medical institutions in sixteenth-century cities. John Jordan’s paper’s “Urfehde and the Evolution of Court Procedure in Sixteenth-Century Freiberg, Saxony” probed the development and culture of the Freiberg (Saxony) Stadtgericht. Adopting a legal-anthropological rather than sociological approach to study the culture of the local courts, Jordan argued that by using the civil device of the Urfehde to handle what would normally be considered criminal offenses (such as theft, assault, and Unzucht) the Freiberg Stadtgericht demonstrated a preference for using civil remedies to resolve conflicts. Hannah Murphy’s paper “Limits of Medical Orthodoxy: Galenicism and Paracelsianism among the Municipal Physicians in Nuremberg, 1553–1598” focused on two of Nuremberg’s municipal physicians to investigate the relationship between Paracelsian and Galenic medicine among practicing doctors. Although Paracelsian pharmacology played a major role in Georg Palma and Heinrich Wolff’s medical practices, both doctors contributed to the city’s medical ordinances, which prohibited the practice of Paracelsian medicine. By examining how these doctors balanced their private Paracelsian leanings and their public Galenic medical practice, Murphy sought to revise our understanding of the boundaries of orthodox medicine in the sixteenth century. In the comments and discussion, it was noted that both papers analyzed a professionalization process; Jordan’s project was discussed in the context of the historiography of early modern legal history and its critiques of the paradigms of Normdurchsetzung and Sozialdisziplinierung; and Murphy’s project was related to eighteenth-century medical reforms, raising the question of whether sixteenth-century Nuremberg anticipated later reforms in some ways.

The sixth panel was devoted to the theme of early modern knowledge production. In her paper “Wenn du gehört hast, ich hätte viele seltsame Dinge und einige ungewöhnliche Tiere mitgebracht, so ist das alles nicht der Rede wert: Die Verdienste Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecqcs um die Vermittlung von Wissen über das Osmanische Reich,” Kornelia Kaschke-Kisaarslan studied the knowledge transfer performed by
Ogier Ghiselin de Busbeqc following his stay in sixteenth-century Constantinople. Based on an analysis of Busbeqc’s descriptions of Ottoman plants and of Islam and its rituals, Kaschke-Kisaarslan argued that sixteenth-century travel literature on the Ottoman Empire did not just convey Türk enfurcht (fear of the Turks), but represented plural systems of knowledge that integrated the Ottomans into the world of European knowledge. Turning from knowledge transfer between cultures to the writing of local history in one early modern city, Marco Tomaszewski’s paper “Historiographische Kommunikation in Basel, 1525-1550” examined the close connection between the writing of family history and urban history. Based on an analysis of a sixteenth-century manuscript chronicling family history, Tomaszewski argued that such histories, though motivated by the family’s desire to secure social status, became alternative forms of social memory and city history after the reformation eliminated religious forms of memoria. The comments and discussion raised the questions of whether reports on the plurality of religions in the Ottoman Empire affected debates about religious toleration in Central Europe and how the patrilineal family history affected the practice of urban history.

The seventh panel dealt with religion in the sixteenth century. Erin Lambert’s paper “Resurrection, Devotion, and Illustrated Hymns in Reformation Nuremberg” used song pamphlets depicting bodily resurrection as an avenue into Lutheran devotional culture and its role in the construction of religious identities in sixteenth-century Nuremberg. In the context of pastoral writings on resurrection, Lambert argued, the pamphlets reveal devotional practice as fundamental to identity construction: worship materially altered the Christian’s body, both in earthly life and after death. Hans Leaman’s paper “Exile in the Development of Gnesio-Lutheran Identity and Ecclesiology” examined Gnesio-Lutherans’ efforts to call evangelicals out of Catholic territories where they faced pressure to participate in Catholic forms of worship. In public letters (Trotschriften) addressed to persecuted evangelicals, they related contemporary exile to biblical accounts of exodus and sojourning. Through those analogies, Leaman argued, Gnesio-Lutherans developed a distinct identity and ecclesiology that embraced transience and marginality as marks of Christian fortitude.

During the comments and discussion, it was noted that both papers challenged the confessionalization thesis; instead, both papers were related to the historiographical thesis that the Reformation was not only about religious beliefs and practices, but also about a new regime of emotions.
The eighth and final panel examined practices of Herrschaft (rule) in seventeenth-century Lübeck and eighteenth-century Alsace. Jason Strandquist’s paper “The Rod and Bloody Sword: Pastors and Magistrates in Wartime Lübeck, 1618–1650” examined how the relations between Lübeck’s religious and civic authorities changed during the Thirty Years’ War. Whereas Lübeck’s clerics and magistrates had frequently clashed over what it meant to be a “Lutheran” city before 1618, the physical threats and heterodox challenges of the Thirty Years’ War pushed them toward a confessional rapprochement in order to secure the city’s survival. This new cooperation between the secular and spiritual estates, Strandquist concluded, provided the model for Lübeck’s recovery from a severe internal crisis after the Peace of Westphalia. Stephen Lazer’s paper “All the King’s Men? French State Building and Seigneurial Administrations in Early Modern Alsace, 1680–1789” analyzed the process of state-building in Pfalz-Zweibrückenfeld’s Alsatian territories of Guttenberg and Lützelstein from 1680–1789. Lazer argued that France extended its sovereignty through a series of mechanisms that included not only stringent administrative regulations but also the preservation and cooptation of seigneurial systems and their officials. The comments and the discussion asked to what extent Strandquist’s project challenged Landesgeschichte historiography and whether Lazer’s findings support the main thesis of Peter Sahlins’s book Boundaries (1989) that national identities were shaped in the borderlands.

The final discussion provided an occasion to place the seminar’s papers in the context of current research trends. Here it was noted that the seminar featured relatively few papers on the history of cultural transfer, the history of violence (including Gewalterfahrung), and media history (Mediengeschichte), three prominent areas of research in contemporary German historiography. By contrast, participants remarked that the history of religion was more strongly represented at the seminar than in current German research. Much of this research engaged the confessionalization thesis, which was a frequent topic during the panel discussions. While everyone agreed that the confessionalization thesis has been the subject of trenchant criticisms for some time, most participants conceded that it was difficult to avoid engaging with it in some way because it has not been replaced by a new master narrative. Nevertheless, some called on the dissertation writers to emancipate themselves from the confessionalization thesis. Another theme in the papers as well as the exchanges was the issue of “identity,” which was the subject of extensive debate during the final
discussion. While some argued that the search for religious and other identities formed a legitimate and important part of historical inquiry, others argued that, since historians can never uncover a historical actor’s "core self," they ought to abandon the search for identities and restrict themselves to reconstructing and analyzing people’s behaviors, practices, actions, or communication. As the debate on identity demonstrates, the sustained and lively discussion of methodological issues was one of the strengths and pleasures of a seminar that was characterized by a remarkable combination of academic rigor, intellectual generosity, and a congenial atmosphere.

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