

### Early Modern Central European History

Eighth Workshop, co-organized by the German Historical Institute London,  
the German History Society, and the University of Hull  
London, 30. Oktober 2009

The 2009 workshop on Early Modern Central European History was held in its customary location at the premises of the German Historical Institute London and drew the usual crowd of regulars and newcomers from Britain, Ireland, and Germany. A few of the themes around which the gathering was organized also linked up nicely with sessions of earlier years, for example, the emphasis on new approaches to the political and the relationship between war and society. In one respect, however, the eighth workshop was different from earlier workshops. It did not focus exclusively on Central European or German history but had a wider geographical remit. Several papers branched out into French and Dutch history, a number of others compared German and British history and there was even a sprinkling of papal and Spanish history. As a result the 2009 meeting, organized by Peter H. Wilson (University of Hull) and Michael Schaich (GHIL), was more European in outlook than most workshops in the past.

This greater geographical scope was already clearly in evidence in the first session, chaired by *Michael Schaich*, which, after a welcome by *Andreas Gestrich*, director of the GHIL, dealt with the role of information in early modern history. *Arndt Brendecke* (Munich/GHIL) and *Matthias Pohlig* (Humboldt University Berlin/GHIL) gave insights into research for their „Habilitation” projects, which approached the common theme from two very different angles. Brendecke adopted a normative approach. In his paper, „Integra Informatio”, he analysed the formulae that routinely crop up in communications between rulers on the one hand and subjects and officials on the other to legitimize political decisions. Drawing on examples from the history of the papacy and the Spanish monarchy, he demonstrated how the claim „to be well informed” had been used by monarchs since the later Middle Ages to give their statements particular force and to adapt their techniques of rule to a changing environment. Phrases such as „ex certa scientia” and „ad aures nostras pervenit nuper” conveyed the impression that decisions were not taken arbitrarily, stressed the pastoral role of the sovereign, and were conducive to the exigencies of rule over long distances as was the case in the Spanish Empire. They gave officials in Latin America leeway to disregard orders because of the king’s limited knowledge without questioning his authority.

Leaving the realm of norms and prescriptions, Pohlig concentrated on the basic problems of gaining and controlling information at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In his talk, „Marlborough’s Secret: Gathering Information in the War of the Spanish Succession”, he drew on the experiences of the commander-in-chief of the allied forces in Flanders to sketch an infra-structural history of information which sees information flows and the channels of communication as more important than the message itself. From this point of view, such mundane activities as the packet boat services that criss-crossed the Channel, the role of information brokers in Marlborough’s entourage, and espionage assume a significance that has hitherto often been overlooked by historians. This is all the more surprising because the vast amount of source material in archives and libraries testifies to the information addiction of politicians around 1700.

In the second session, chaired by *David Lederer* (NUI Maynooth), the focus shifted to rural areas and their particular problems. *Abaigéal Warfield* (NUI Maynooth), who is preparing a Ph.D. thesis on witchcraft pamphlet literature in early modern Germany, spoke on „Weather-Magic in the Media”. Her starting-point was the late sixteenth-century theological discussion of whether witches could really change the weather. Although most contributors to this learned debate were rather sceptical, it had little or no effect on the popular imagination, as a close investigation of the reporting on weather magic in contemporary „Hexenzeitungen” demonstrates. In particular, during the 1580s, one of the most severe periods of the Little Ice Age, broadsheets and pamphlets frequently reported cases of weather magic. This is ample proof of deep-seated fears about the bad influence of witches among large sections of the population during the period and also raises a number of questions about the concept of a general crisis of the seventeenth century, a debate which has only recently been revived by American historians.

The second paper, given by *Markus Küpker* (Cambridge), concentrated on „Migration and Population Development in Pre-Industrial Westphalia”. Aiming to reconstruct patterns of demographic change, Küpker chose the region of Tecklenburg-Lingen in northwest Germany as a case study because its heterogeneous territorial, confessional, and economic structures lend themselves to a detailed analysis of the impact of migration on the development of the local population. A closer look at the movement of people in this area shows significantly diverging trends in demographic growth between different groups of the population. Whereas villages consisting of weavers engaged in the linen industry or seasonal day-labourers who went to the nearby Netherlands to earn their living experienced rapid growth, communities that relied on itinerant traders who travelled much of northern Europe stagnated. Different kinds of migration entailed positive or negative consequences for the reproduction of the population.

The third session, chaired by *Beat Kümin* (Warwick), brought together two papers on a topic which has received renewed interest by historians in recent years, namely, corruption. In her talk on „Political Culture(s) in Early Modern Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg”, *Mary Lindemann* (Miami) presented her ongoing comparative research project on three big commercial centres of early modern Europe. The project is structured around the notion of „Grundwerte” or fundamental values as used by Hans-Christoph Rublack and Paul Münch and examines the „glue” that holds communities together. One aspect of this larger research design is the question of what constituted corruption in the early modern period. Early modern concepts of corruption, as Lindemann explained, differed greatly from those that have developed since the nineteenth century, which are invariably based on a distinction between public and private. In contrast, contemporaries expected the public and the private to overlap. Early modern corruption therefore needs to be understood and investigated as linked to particular personalities and situations.

Problems of definition were also at the centre of *Niels Grüne's* (Bielefeld) talk on „Political Corruption in the Early Modern Period: Practices and Discourses in England and Germany Compared (1550–1750/1800)”, which introduced the audience to a research project located at the university of Bielefeld. This is part of a wider collaborative research project on the debates and struggles about political power (Sonderforschungsbereich 584: Das Politische als Kommunikationsraum in der Geschichte) and again studies corruption in a comparative perspective, juxtaposing developments in Britain and selected German territories and cities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. To exemplify his approach, Grüne presented an analysis of ordinances against corruption from the duchy of Württemberg. His findings showed that these became much more articulate and the vocabulary more straightforward in describing improper behaviour by officials and that, in general, a clarification of norms with regard to corruption took place over the course of the sixteenth century. In the early seventeenth century, then, as a high-profile case involving rivalry between two competing court factions in 1609-10 showed, the language of corruption could be used to discredit individual officials without calling the general system of patronage into question.

The new appreciation of the wider cultural dimension of political history which informed these two papers was also prominent in the fourth session, chaired by *Clarissa Campbell-Orr* (Anglia Ruskin University), which discussed new methodologies in the study of diplomacy. Both speakers presented doctoral theses originating in a research project on novel approaches to the history of international relations between the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the French Revolution conducted at the University of Berne. *Corina Bastian*, in her paper „Female Diplomacy?“, explored the role of women in diplomatic relations between early modern European courts, taking Catharina Gräfin Wackerbarth (1670-1719) as an example. As the wife of the elector of Saxony's envoy at the imperial court in Vienna, she formed a working team with her husband, conducting his correspondence while he was absent and even representing Saxony's political interests in conversations with members of Viennese court society. Her repeated claims to her own political insignificance can only be understood as disclaimers to make herself unassailable. In reality, her informal (and formal) leverage in the negotiations between Dresden and Vienna is just one example of the influence women could exercise in the decades around 1700, a thesis that Bastian also examines with regard to French aristocratic women during the War of the Spanish Succession.

In the second paper, *Tilman Haug* looked at another aspect of the history of international relations which has only recently attracted the attention of historians. Speaking on a slightly earlier period, he discussed the diplomatic networks of the French crown in the Holy Roman Empire between 1648 and 1678 under the title „Amis et serviteurs du roi en Allemagne“. In an attempt to replace a state-centred view of diplomatic relations with one that allocates agency to individual actors, he explored the patronage networks that linked German clients to the French crown, emphasizing in particular the notion of trust that was crucial for the success or failure of this informal means of exercising influence. In contrast, stereotypical views of the „other“ played no particular role, contrary to what has frequently been assumed.

The final session of the day, chaired by *Peter H. Wilson* (Hull), took a closer look at the relationship between war and society. To start with, *Mark Wishon* (London) gave an overview of his Ph.D. project on „British-German Interactions in the Eighteenth-Century British Army“. At the heart of his investigation are the German auxiliary troops and, increasingly from the middle of the century, the German soldiers serving in the British armed forces. Interestingly, the bad reputation of the German allied contingents in the British press, which was closely linked to negative views of the personal union with Hanover, stood in marked contrast to the positive assessment of the German soldiers by their comrades.

The lower ranks of the military and the „little man (and woman)“ in general also formed the main theme of *Leighton James's* (Swansea) post-doctoral research on the experience of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In „Tales of War: German Central Europe, 1792-1815“, he drew on autobiographical writings (letters, diaries, and memoirs) to illustrate the world view of the common soldier and populace during this crucial period in European warfare. In particular, he described the stereotypes and loyalties prevalent in his sources which often run contrary to expectations. Relations between the French and the Germans could be very cordial, whereas the German population saw the Poles and Russians as backward and barbaric. At the same time, local patriotism (Landespatriotismus) and tensions between different German-speaking groups remained strong despite a surge in national cultural identity. In this respect as in others, James's research suggests greater continuities during the period in question than have previously been allowed by a historiography that stresses the modernizing tendencies of the wars around 1800.

All the papers were followed by lively discussions which revolved around some of the main themes that had emerged during the day: the role of concepts and ideas, the transmission of information through networks and otherwise, and the significance of identities and shared values.

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