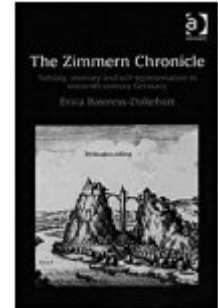


Erica Bastress-Dukehart. *The Zimmern Chronicle: Nobility, Memory, and Self-Representation in Sixteenth-Century Germany.* Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2002. viii + 223 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7546-0342-9.



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Just as the noble Zimmern family of Swabia was approaching its demise in the second half of the sixteenth century, two of its members produced an extraordinary family history that continues to fascinate readers today. Preserved in two closely related sixteenth-century manuscripts, this history of the Zimmern family has come down to us without a clear title or author. It was discovered in the Fürstenberg library in Donaueschingen in the late-eighteenth century and has been referred to as the *Zimmerische Chronik* ever since. The chronicle presents the deeds and legends of the family, interwoven with tales of other Swabian noble families, ribald stories familiar from the *Decameron* and medieval *Schwänke*, and a lengthy recounting of the Zimmerns' disastrous feud with the Werdenberg family, which reached its peak in 1503.

This book is the first in English on the *Zimmerische Chronik* and should convey the value of the chronicle to a broader audience. Working primarily from a published edition of the chronicle, Bastress-Dukehart takes us into an aristocratic world of feuds, noble alliances, and inheritance

disputes that was, as the author observes, disappearing along with the Zimmerns as the sixteenth century wore on. By the time the male Zimmern line ended with the death of Wilhelm von Zimmern in 1594, the fortunes of German noble families "had come to depend less on the sword and more on the pen" (p. 199). Bastress-Dukehart shows us how the members of this noble family adapted to the new realities, contrasting the educated Wilhelm Werner (1485-1575), who became a successful assessor of the Imperial Chamber Court under Charles V, with the malicious Johannes Werner the Younger (1480-1548), who refused to pay for his sons' studies, unable to grasp the growing importance of a legal education for noblemen in the Empire.

Despite its title, this book does not examine systematically the *Zimmerische Chronik* itself as history or literature. Instead it shifts back and forth between retelling key events in the history of the Zimmern family and assessing the question of the chronicle's author. For many years scholars have debated the relative contributions of the last two leading members of the family, Wilhelm Wer-

ner and his nephew Froben Christoph (1519-1566/67) to the final form of the chronicle. These debates were assessed by Beat Rudolph Jenny, who published the fundamental source-critical and biographical work on the chronicle in 1959. Jenny argued that the heterogeneous text was nonetheless the work of Froben Christoph alone.

In her discussion of the chronicle's authorship, Bastress-Dukehart makes her most original argument. She connects the contribution of Wilhelm Werner to the *Zimmerische Chronik* with an anamorphic portrait of Wilhelm Werner and his wife Amalia von Leuchtenberg painted in c. 1535, now in the German National Museum in Nuremberg. Best known from Hans Holbein's *Ambassadors* (1533), the anamorphosis is a visual trick of Renaissance painting. Such a painting presents a shape unrecognizable from a standard point of view that, when viewed from an oblique angle, becomes clear, like the skull stretched across the foreground of Holbein's painting. Shakespeare mentioned the effect in *Richard II* (act II, scene II), describing "perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon; Show nothing but confusion, eyed awry, Distinguish form." The anamorphosis that depicts Wilhelm Werner and his wife also presents scenes from a medieval legend cited in the *Zimmerische Chronik*, and Bastress-Dukehart argues that these scenes substantiate the role of Wilhelm Werner as co-author of the chronicle. This is inherently plausible, given the cut-and-paste style of the *Zimmerische Chronik*. It is not apparent to this reviewer, however, how the author uses her argument of co-authorship to enhance our understanding of the chronicle and its milieu.

Beyond the argument that Wilhelm Werner should be considered co-author of the chronicle, the scholarly goals of *The Zimmern Chronicle* are not clear. The author notes that the *Zimmerische Chronik* raises fascinating questions about history and memory, but she does not engage with the extensive literature on *memoria* in late-medieval German culture, such as the work of Otto Gerhard

Oexle. One might also consider the chronicle in the context of ego documents and self-representation, another fertile theme in early modern studies: again, there is no notice of the relevant literature, such as the collection edited by Kaspar von Greyerz, Hans Medick, and Patrice Veit on *Europäische Selbstzeugnisse als historische Quellen*. Bastress-Dukehart retells stories of explosive noble violence, marriages for love or money, brutal fathers, and embittered sons. All this could be used to enhance our understanding of gender in early modern Germany, or placed in the context of scholarship on the nobility or on masculinity, for example, but the author has chosen not to explore these themes.

The treatment of the *Zimmerische Chronik* itself occasionally becomes a problem for the author: while insisting on the literary character of the chronicle, she sometimes uses it quite uncritically as the basis of her story of the family. In her description of Veit Werner's capture of the town of Oberndorf on December 5, 1496 (pp. 134-143), she quotes a speech recorded in the text as the actual words addressed to the townspeople by Veit Werner. How would the authors of the chronicle, writing two generations later, know what was said on that night? The question is worth exploring much more carefully. In a similar instance, we are told that a particular anecdote in the chronicle concerning Werner the Younger (1423-1483) "indicates how much the non-noble community admired him as well (!)" (p. 78). The admiration of common people for a member of the Zimmern family in the fifteenth century cannot be documented by an anecdote from a mid-sixteenth century chronicle intended, as the author notes earlier, to show Werner "as a just, kindhearted and fair man."

The recent fate of the manuscripts of the *Zimmerische Chronik* offers an ironic commentary on nobility and memory in our own times. The two sixteenth-century manuscripts that make up the *Zimmerische Chronik* were held in the manu-

script collection of the Fürstlich Fürstenbergischen Hofbibliothek in Donaueschingen from sometime before 1776 until 1993. Their last noble owner, one Joachim Egon von Fürstenberg (1923-2002) had begun to sell off his family's priceless books and manuscripts piecemeal to the highest bidders in the early 1980s. The Federal State of Baden-Württemberg negotiated with Fürstenberg to purchase the library as a whole but could not approach the asking price. After Fürstenberg moved many of the most valuable manuscripts to Zurich and threatened their sale in 1992, the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg began intensive negotiations and ultimately purchased the majority of the Fürstenberg manuscripts, including the *Zimmerische Chronik*, for DM 48 million in 1993. These manuscripts were then divided (!) between the Landesbibliotheken Karlsruhe and Stuttgart. The *Zimmerische Chronik* is now held in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek in Stuttgart as Cod. Donaueschingen 580 and 581a.

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