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Thirtieth Annual Conference of the German Studies Association, Pittsburgh, PA (28 September to 1 October 2006)

Conference Report for H-HRE by Tryntje Helfferich, University of California, Santa Barbara

### Pre-modern Central Europe and the GSA

This year's German Studies Association conference had much more of interest to scholars of pre-modern Central Europe than in most past years. Dr. Mary Lindemann (University of Miami), who was the GSA Program Committee's medieval and early modern representative, deserves much of the credit for pushing this welcome change. Still, there is a great deal of room for improvement. Out of two hundred and twelve panels, only nineteen concerned the eighteenth century or earlier, and of these only two were pre-seventeenth century. To be fair, I should mention that a few of the other panels also included a paper on early modern Germany. The pre-modern topics that received the most attention were the radical enlightenment (six panels) and military history (six panels), and I am pleased to note that H-HRE members were well represented in both areas.

The first sessions began Friday morning at 8:30am. Scholars of the Holy Roman Empire had the choice of two panels. The first, panel #1, was one of the two medieval panels (both sponsored by Young Medievalist Germanists in North America, or YMAGINA), and was titled "...gar untiusch. Encounters with non-Germans in the German Middle Ages." The second, panel #19, was titled "Reason, Toleration, and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Germany." The second set of Friday morning sessions began at 10:30am. Here there was a choice of three pre-modern panels: "Radical Enlightenment I: Academic Discourses" (#24), "Culture of War I: Reacting to War" (#25), and "When Was the Eighteenth Century?" (#28).

The Friday luncheon speaker was Esther Dischereit, a writer interested in issues of modern German Judaism, who presented a paper titled "'Ich heie Samuel.' 'Provozieren Sie immer?'"

Friday afternoon sessions offered some interesting options. There was another medieval panel, "'Medieval': Finding the End of an Age" (#47), two further panels on the radical Enlightenment, "Radical Enlightenment II: Radikale Aufklrung und Esoterik" (#51) and "Radical Enlightenment III: Esoteric Currents and Academic Debate" (#65), and a second panel on military history, "Culture of War II: Austrian and Prussian Command in the Seven Years War."

Friday evening was dedicated to the GSA business meeting and the presidential address, given by Katherine Roper. Her talk was titled "Is There Life after Thirty?" (a play on the current age of the GSA, for those of you who haven't been paying attention).

Saturday morning was a bit thinner than Friday, since the first two session times offered only two possibilities for scholars interested in anything before the nineteenth century. At 8:30am there was “Radical Enlightenment IV: Pietist Currents” (#86), and at 10:30am the interesting “Culture of War III: Men, Comrades, Brothers” (#108), which focused on Prussia and Swedish-occupied northern Germany from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries.

Saturday’s luncheon speaker was Michael Geyer, whose topic was “Where Germans Dwell: Transnationalism in Theory and Practice.”

Saturday afternoon was also somewhat bereft of pre-modern panels. The 2:00pm sessions included the panel “Radical Enlightenment V: The Question of Kant” (#136), while the 4:00pm sessions included “Goethe and His Collaborators: Literary, Political, and Aesthetic Reflections on Collaboration and Collectivity in the Eighteenth Century” (#153) and a second Pietism panel, “Pietism in Conflict, 1690-1740” (#154).

Saturday evening was dedicated to cruising the book exhibits and munching on H-German’s free food at their nice reception. There was also a reception hosted by the American Friends of the Humboldt Foundation, and special evening reception for GSA members at the Frick Fine Arts building hosted by the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, and Duquesne University.

Sunday’s sessions occurred only at 8:30am and 10:30am, yet in that time there were five possible choices for pre-modernists. At 8:30am those interested in military history had to choose between “Round Table: The Seven Years War: Fatal Crossroad?” (#169) and “Culture of War IV: Fire and Ice” (#179), which concerned the Thirty Years War. For those more interested in intellectual controversy than warfare, there was also a final panel on the enlightenment, “Radical Enlightenment VI: Wer darf was lesen?—Kontroversen zur Zeit der Aufklärung” (#171). Those who had not yet left for the airport at 10:30am (and the panels were noticeably less well attended by this time) also had a choice, since they could attend either “Round Table: Geoffrey Parker and the Thirty Years’ War” (#191) or “Transgressions, Processions, and Boundaries: Belonging and Not-Belonging in Early Modern Germany” (#192).

This was my first visit to the GSA conference, and I was pleased by the generally fine quality of the papers, commentary, and round table discussions that I heard. I was also very happy to see that pre-modern history is finally beginning to crack the extraordinary modern bias of the GSA. On the other hand, while those interested in the Thirty Years War, the Seven Years War, the Radical Enlightenment, and perhaps Pietism will have found the conference quite interesting, others would probably have been justified in sitting this one out.