Mark Häberlein. *Die Fugger: Geschichte einer Augsburger Familie (1367-1650).* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006. 257 pp. EUR 28.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-17-018472-5.

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Published on H-German (July, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

In Augsburg today, visitors are greeted by signs welcoming them to the "Fugger City." They can visit the Fugger Palace, where Martin Luther met with papal legate Thomas Cardinal Cajetan in 1518, and which still houses the Fürst Fugger Privatbank. Across town, they can stroll through the narrow streets of the Fuggerei, a walled enclave first established by Jakob Fugger in 1516 that still houses needy Augsburgers under the terms of his will. Both in Augsburg and in the countryside beyond, tourists can marvel at the magnificent homes and chapels erected by the princely family. To be sure, the Fuggers were, and remain, a vital presence in Augsburg. But they were also a potent force in early modern Europe. Sometimes labeled the "German Medici," the Fuggers rose--in a mere two generations--from humble origins as Augsburg weavers to become the masters of a worldwide empire in banking, mining, and trade. They served as bankers to the Roman curia and as financiers of the royal houses of Europe. And with this wealth came influence: Jakob Fugger famously "bought himself an Emperor" by bankrolling the election of Charles V in 1519.[1] Soon, the family was elevated into the imperial nobility, and in their territories, the Fuggers distinguished themselves as discerning patrons of the arts and powerful supporters of the Roman Catholic Church.

For historians, the Fuggers have assumed a special significance. Historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw in Jakob Fugger the prototype of the modern capitalist, a man whose coldly calculated pursuit of profit prefigured the modern age's rationalistic approach to business. As the supposed embodiment of "the spirit of early German capitalism," Fugger had obvious significance for the history of a rapidly industrializing nation.[2] Later historians have broadened their focus to examine issues such as the family's cultural patronage or political engagement, but most historical treatments of the Fuggers continue to foreground their commercial activities, and, in particular, the achievements of Jakob Fugger "the Rich" (1459-1525).

Mark Häberlein's new book takes a different approach, seeking to place the Fuggers' astonishing rise in its broader social, cultural, and economic context. He charts the family's history from their first entry into the Augsburg weavers' guild in the late fourteenth century, through their establishment among the landed nobility by the end of the Thirty Years' War. Throughout, he aims to pull together the Fuggers' diverse enterprises to demonstrate how the family's commercial activities intersected with their social and political aspirations, as well as their cultural and religious priorities. He largely succeeds, providing a cogent synthesis of the Fuggers' complex history in a succinct and highly readable book.

Häberlein devotes the first five chapters of the book to charting the family's financial fortunes. He seeks to understand the Fuggers' commercial triumphs and reverses as reflective of larger trends within the early modern European economy. He shows that, for all their successes, the Fugger firms were neither dominant nor particularly exceptional in this era. According to Häberlein, the Fuggers benefited from a general upswing in the fifteenth-century European economy, when the rapid growth of state institutions created increasing demand for precious metals and ready credit. With their mining and banking interests, the Fuggers were brilliantly poised to take advantage of these opportunities, but, as Häberlein points out, so were a great many other mercantile families in the south German imperial cities. In Augsburg, Nuremberg, and the surrounding towns, many trading firms built fortunes to rival and, in some cases, exceed that of the Fuggers. Thus, the Fuggers' successes were by no means unique, nor were their reverses. Just as the Fuggers benefited from upturns in the European economy, they suffered with its declines. In the 1560s, Fugger businesses suffered significant losses, but Häberlein notes that the Fuggers' financial reverses in this period were by no means exceptional, but stemmed from a general crisis in the credit market over which they had little control. To meet the crisis, the firm jettisoned failing enterprises to concentrate on its core businesses--a move Häberlein sees as critical to their survival where others failed.

Where most accounts of the Fugger empire have focused on its gains under Jakob Fugger, Häberlein takes a longer view, devoting equal time to the contributions made by less famous names in both prior and succeeding generations. Häberlein underlines, in particular, the contributions of the Fugger women to the family's early successes, a fact which the Fuggers themselves sought to downplay in their family chronicles once their status was secure. Häberlein also stresses the Fuggers' reliance on the technological and administrative expertise of their far-flung network of managers and agents. Indeed, Häberlein attributes the Fuggers' successes in mining and banking in part to their ability to marshal the expertise of a burgeoning cadre of professionals in these fields.

In assessing the Fuggers' commercial empire, Häberlein cautions against reading it too narrowly as a forerunner of modern capitalism. Rather, he reminds us, the Fuggers were products of an early modern urban culture that placed primary value not on wealth, but on honor. In urban communities, wealth found legitimacy in its contribution to ***der Gemeine Nutzen*** (common interest). To many, the pursuit of private gain clashed with this ideal, and, as bankers and monopolists, the Fuggers were repeatedly denounced for diverting wealth from the general good. Luther and other reformers attacked the Fuggers in print, while the Diet of Nuremberg (1522-23) sought to restrict their monopolistic activities. To allay criticism and enhance the family's honor, the Fuggers were compelled to convert their "financial capital" into "cultural capital." Chapters 6-8 detail this process, focusing on the family's activities as cultural patrons, social benefactors, and political leaders in Augsburg and the surrounding region. In chapter 6, Häberlein analyzes how the Fuggers sought to shape their image in Augsburg. They took care to provide for the public good, endowing churches and chapels in the city, and, with the establishment of the Fuggerei, created the first social welfare home for the "deserving" poor. Stately urban palaces highlighted the family's status, while their support of artists, musicians, and writers distinguished them as learned patrons and collectors. Nonetheless, the family's commercial activities sat uneasily with its newly won aristocratic status, and in the latter sixteenth century, the Fuggers increasingly withdrew from trade to tend their country estates. While this pattern of "feudalization" was often observed among urban merchant families made good, Häberlein notes that it was also a wise investment strategy, as the family shifted its wealth from volatile markets into stable realty.

Chapters 7 and 8 address the Fuggers' influence in Augsburg and the surrounding region. Häberlein notes that, despite their wealth, the Fuggers played a relatively limited role in Augsburg's politics. The family was elevated into the patriciate, the city's highest social order, only in 1538, and few Fuggers held high political office before the revision of Augsburg's constitution at the end of the Schmalkaldic War in 1548. Despite the Fuggers' limited governmental role in the 1520s, Jakob Fugger and his family worked mightily to counteract the growing evangelical movement in the city. Fugger patronized clergy that preached a strong, anti-Reformation message and pressed his connections in city government to enforce stricter censorship of the Protestant texts flooding the city. Even with Augsburg's formal adoption of religious reform in 1534, however, the Fuggers retained important political connections in the city, if little direct involvement in government. After Augsburg became an officially bi-confessional city with the Peace of Augsburg (1555), the Fuggers emerged as powerful promoters of the Catholic cause, becoming instrumental in the establishment of Jesuit and Capuchin missions in the city. As lords in their own territories, and as advisors and officials in the governments of neighboring princes, the Fuggers played pivotal roles in the confessional politics of the latter sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In placing the Fuggers within a broader social, political, and cultural context, Häberlein offers a fuller understanding of the family's role in both the early modern economy and in its wider culture. The organization of the book, however, in some sense undercuts his stated purpose. While Häberlein stresses that he aims to integrate the Fuggers' economic history into their wider social and cultural context, these subjects are largely treated independently of each other, in separate chapters. Perhaps a less thematic, more chronological approach might have woven the family's social, political, and cultural history more effectively into the overall analysis. Some of these themes also merit more attention: given the Fuggers' extensive ties to the Habsburgs and the Roman curia, for example, further analysis of their influence in the imperial and confessional politics of the day might have been expected. Although Häberlein does address these issues, they receive comparatively less attention; even here, economic history has pride of place, with more than half of the book devoted to the history of the Fuggers' various businesses, leaving only the remaining three chapters to the Fuggers' social position, their cultural patronage, and their political influence. That said, the book is nonetheless a compelling synthesis of the history of a remarkable early modern family, and will be of value to scholars working in the many areas that bore their mark.

Notes

[1]. Günter Ogger, *Kauf dir einen Kaiser: Die Geschichte der Fugger* (Munich: Knaur, 1978).

[2]. See, for example, Jakob Strieder, *Jakob Fugger der Reiche* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1926); Götz Freiherr von Pölnitz, *Jakob Fugger: Kaiser, Kirche und Kapital in der oberdeutschen Renaissance* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949).

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Citation: Allyson Creasman. Review of Häberlein, Mark. ***Die Fugger: Geschichte einer Augsburger Familie (1367-1650).*** H-German, H-Net Reviews. July, 2009.

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