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(Review) Konfessionalisierung am Obermain: Reformation und Gegenreformation in den Pfarrsprengeln von Baunach bis Markgraitz

Marc R. Forster

Connecticut College, mrfor@conncoll.edu

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Comments

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Konfessionalisierung am Obermain: Reformation und Gegenreformation in den
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Review by: Marc R. Forster

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Konfessionalisierung am Obermain: Reformation und Gegenreformation in den Pfarrsprengeln von Baunach bis Markgraitz. Günter Dippold. Staffelstein: Obermain Buch- und Bildverlag, 1996. 509 pp. DM 49,50.

Günter Dippold has written a valuable local study of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Franconia. The heart of this book is an analysis of the efforts of authorities to reestablish Catholicism in eight parishes and the resulting resistance of the Protestant villagers to this "Counter-Reformation."

Dippold begins the book with a description of the success of the Reformation in the early sixteenth century in this group of villages on the border between Catholic Bamberg and Protestant Saxony. A shortage of source material apparently limited Dippold in this part of his study, and he can do little more than speculate on the appeal of Protestantism for the villagers. What is known is that by the 1540s there were Protestant ministers in almost all the parishes of the region, and their parishioners considered themselves Protestant. Dippold further argues that there is evidence of "a flourishing church life of a Lutheran stamp" from the middle of the sixteenth century on. It was this Lutheranism that the Catholic authorities sought to stamp out beginning in the 1580s.

There was nothing unusual about the policies of the bishops of Würzburg and Bamberg on the upper Main during the period 1580 to 1630. Like other Catholic princes, the bishops and their officials began by removing the Protestant ministers and appointing Catholic priests. This aspect of Catholic reform was relatively straightforward, since by the later sixteenth century it was quite clear what the differences were between the clergymen of the different confessions. Furthermore, state and church officials had considerable control over appointments and salaries of the clergy.

The second phase of the Counter-Reformation was the "Catholicization" of the population. Needless to say, the authorities had more trouble forcing people to be Catholic than they did installing Catholic priests. Villagers were given the choice of conversion to Catholicism or emigration. Furthermore, Bamberg officials (especially) resorted sporadically to forceful measures, arresting and imprisoning recalcitrant Protestants. As elsewhere in Germany, the authorities had trouble determining if people were in fact Catholic and had to focus on the external markers of religious identity, such as attendance at services and annual confession and communion, as evidence of loyalty to Catholicism. Interestingly, this program worked quite smoothly in some of the parishes Dippold studied, where in the course of the 1580s and 1590s the population quietly converted to Catholicism. In about half of the villages, however, the inhabitants actively resisted Catholicization and engaged in a protracted struggle with the authorities.

The most original part of this book is Dippold's study of "religious" peasant resistance (*Widerstand*) to the Counter-Reformation. Peasants, generally led by the village communes (*Gemeinden*), and not the Protestant pastors, actively fought the authorities, refused to participate in Catholic services, and did not emigrate. Peasants sought out legal help, appealed to neighboring Protestant princes for support, brought suit (at times successfully) at the Imperial Chamber Court in Speyer, and ultimately resorted to violence. This resistance had the effect of delaying the full conversion of some villages until the 1620s and 1630s.

Dippold reminds us that German peasants were far from passive subjects of their lords and that the process of "confessionalization" was far from easy or simple. He carefully explains the methods and leadership of the villages, emphasizing the resourcefulness and determination of the population, and even their ability to raise the money to support expensive legal cases. Dippold is also aware of the weaknesses of peasant resistance, particularly the inability

of peasants to cooperate with other villages and the tendency of more powerful villagers to dominate their neighbors. The “state” was also far from a “modern” institution, only sporadically acted to enforce its own religious edicts, and depended on an active prince to operate effectively.

Dippold’s villagers could not stop the process of Catholicization, and in the end they did become completely Catholic, at least as far as the authorities were concerned. As Dippold himself recognizes, however, external obedience did not necessarily mean an internal commitment to Catholicism, one of the central goals of the church, if not the state. The story of these villages would have to be carried into the late seventeenth century to determine the nature and depth of Catholic belief and practice.

Despite the title of the book, Dippold only engages the issue of “confessionalization” implicitly and even then only in a narrow way. The subject here is confessionalization in the sense of church-state cooperation to create and enforce religious/confessional uniformity. We learn much less about confessionalization as the creation of popular confessional identity. Dippold argues that the villagers were Protestants, even Lutherans, by the mid-sixteenth century but has little to say about the nature or content of their religious beliefs or practices. The same is true about their ostensible Catholicism after 1580. Beyond obedience to the prince-bishop, what did it mean to be Catholic? Perhaps such questions are beyond the scope of this study or cannot be answered from Dippold’s sources. I would argue, however, that they need to be engaged to understand why some villages in this small region easily submitted to Catholicization while others actively resisted it. A local study such as this one has the potential to reveal much about the local meaning of religion in early modern Germany.

Konfessionalisierung am Obermain nevertheless makes an important contribution to our understanding of the process of Catholicization and of peasant resistance in the Counter-Reformation. The massive appendix, which lists all the clergy who served in these parishes between 1500 and 1650, should be useful for both local historians and those interested in the social history of the clergy. Finally, the appendix also contains a fascinating seventy-three-stanza poem or song written in the early seventeenth century by one of the village leaders of the Protestant peasant resistance, which deserves further study.

Marc R. Forster **Connecticut College**

Money and Magic in Montaigne: The Historicity of the *Essais*. Edward Benson. *Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 295. Geneva: Droz, 1995. 197 pp. Fr. s. 65, 30.

Benson’s book opens with Montaigne’s criticism of oracles followed by a story about the treason of a nobleman in the service of François I. Just as peasants believed in “prognostications” during the period, a nobleman could commit treason based on the prediction of a military defeat. Popular culture and aristocratic culture shared a belief in predictions exemplifying a permeability between the two cultures. However, this permeability was being lost according to Montaigne: “much of ‘De la force de l’imagination’ and ‘Des boyteux’ was the record of nobles’ eagerness to suppress these memories.”

Montaigne bore witness to this cultural antagonism in his *Essais*. He was then a *scripteur*, a term Benson uses intentionally throughout his book where we would refer commonly to the “author.” However, writing with the feeling that a tradition was being disturbed, Montaigne was also a mediator of history. Benson clarifies this idea of *scripteur*-mediator in the following passage: “My own interest, though, has never been as much in how writers saw what