

CfP: Freedom - Justice - Violence. Late medieval protest movements and the "Peasants' War" of 1525 in comparison

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Call for Papers

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Germany

Subject Fields:

Early Modern History and Period Studies, Economic History / Studies, German History / Studies, Popular Culture Studies, Rural History / Studies

The late medieval history of Western and Central Europe is shaped by numerous urban and rural revolts. The German historian Peter Blickle pointed out that while in the 14th century an average of one uprising per generation (25 years) occurred in the German-speaking regions of Europe, between 1500 and 1525 all in all 18 uprisings took place, culminating in the so-called "Peasants' War" of 1525. Alongside many smaller revolts, the *Jacquerie* of 1358 in France and the *Peasants' Revolt* of 1381 in England are considered to be pivotal events of social unrest in Western Europe. This observable surge of social unrest in Central and Western Europe leads to questions about parallel or divergent developments, about the distinctiveness of individual uprisings, and about possible similar causes, structures, and developments. Only a comparative perspective enables us to identify characteristics and specifics of the "Peasants' War", which will be commemorated for its 500th jubilee in 2025.

The German research on the "Peasants' War" of 1525 was dominated for a long time by the work of the outspoken National Socialist Günther Franz (1902-1992) and focused primarily on questions of political, social and, to some extent, legal history. Moreover, the connections of the "Peasants' War" to the Reformation movements were explored and the relevance of individual actors emphasized. Overall, historical research assessed the outcome of the "Peasants' War" to be largely unsuccessful, especially with regards to the peasants' concerns. Due to the studies of the Franz-student Peter Blickle (1938-2017), who expanded the focus by including unrests apart from peasant movements, as well as further studies, e.g. on the rebellious "Armer Konrad"-movement (1514), on the legal dimension of the "Zwölf Artikel", on peasant conflict management, and on the historical reception as well as memorial culture, the subjects is overall considered to be well researched.

However, explorative studies of recent and latest historical research suggest four research fields that have the potential to provide new perspectives on the "Peasants' War" of 1525.

(1) First, the analysis of factors that constitute substantive reasons for the uprisings, such as

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resource conflicts, which can be traced in the sources as conflicts of use (for example, regarding the common lands) or disputes over legal rights. Long-term specific economic and environmental crises or socio-political transformations might also be reasons for these contemporary conflicts.

(2) Second, uprisings can be analysed as collective movements, for instance regarding the individual actors (social background, age, gender, etc.) and associated networks of supporters, the internal organisation, and forms of decision-making as well as the groups' internal communication (with networks and sympathisers) and external communication (self-representation, discourse with the authorities). Specific types of protest, which may oscillate between formal petitions and judicial conflict management, symbolic forms of resistance and open violence, are also relevant in this context. An analysis of these forms of conducting conflicts also entails questions about mechanisms of conflict resolution.

(3) The analysis of methods of conducting and resolving conflicts is closely linked to the exploration of the intentions, motives and goals of the protest groups, which can not only be traced back to the social and economic background of the participants, but can also be interpreted as demands for political participation in general. What ideas of an ideal or desired political order can be traced among the insurgents? What concepts of participation and protest are being discussed? Do these ideas correspond to the authorities' discourse of governance or do they oppose it with dissenting conceptions and practices?

(4) Another prospective field of research opens up by analysing the results and consequences of insurgencies in the short, medium and long term; linked to this is the attempt to avoid sweeping statements regarding the "success" or "failure" of these uprisings. Which specific partial successes and structural transformations can be observed? What concerns of the insurgents were addressed? What were the reasons for their partial success or failure?

The conference will address these and similar issues with regard to the "Peasant War" of 1525 as well as in a broader comparative perspective that extends on two levels: temporally, by including protest movements of the 14th and 15th centuries and spatially, by broadening the focus beyond the 'Empire' to Western and Central Europe (e.g. England, France, Poland, Hungary). The comparative approach can reveal differences and similarities with regard to the research fields outlined.

The international conference will take place from 26-28 October 2023 at the conference centre of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Lorsch Abbey. We are looking forward to receiving abstracts (approx. 300 words) for presentations of approx. 25-minutes on the outlined topics. Qualification theses (PhD, habilitation etc.) are welcome to be presented.

Please send the abstracts to christoph.mauntel@uni-tuebingen.de until 31.03.2023.

The conference languages are German and English. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered. We intend to publish the papers after a peer-review relatively soon after the conference - the submission of the manuscripts is planned for March 2024.

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