

**Falk Bretschneider, Christophe Duhamelle (dir.),  
Le Saint-Empire, histoire sociale (XVIe–XVIIIe  
siècle), Paris (Éditions de la Maison des sciences  
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This edited volume is based on the work of a research network financed by the Centre interdisciplinaire d'études et de recherches sur l'Allemagne (CIERA), which explored avenues for the renewal of the historiography of the Holy Roman Empire from a Franco-German perspective. The resulting volume focuses on social history approaches and the editors identify its three central aims as follows. Firstly, they seek to make available for a French audience the key developments within German research on the early modern Holy Roman Empire of the last five decades. They further wish to emphasise the role of French historians in the rejuvenation of this field, and, finally, they want to counteract the isolation of the Empire within the discipline, and open up their object of study for international comparisons.

The volume is divided into four parts and contains a total of sixteen chapters. It is thus not feasible to discuss all contributions individually here, and this review will instead focus on providing an overview of the key themes of the volume.

The editors forego a detailed introduction, and instead confine themselves to a handful of pages, in which they outline the broader aims of their work. Matthias Schnettger then provides a useful opening chapter focusing on the changing perceptions of the Holy Roman Empire in German historiography. These ran the gamut from weak and fragmented antithesis to the strong Prussian state, to more positive interpretations in post-war (Eastern) Germany, which focused on the perceived strength of the rule of law in the Empire and the political participation of different interest groups in Imperial institutions.

The first section of the volume focusing on social and cultural approaches to the political history of the Empire opens with two essays discussing the intersection of personal and political relationship practices. André Krischer shows how ruling councillors of Free Imperial Cities could gain temporary access to noble society through the godparenthood of a princely child, which offered them a familial connection to the society of princes. Sébastien Schick adds the »société des ministres« to that of princes and shows how princely rulers supported and even demanded that their ministers maintained good relations with their counterparts at rival courts, as such networks were important political assets. Remaining with the theme of (fictions of) kinship and networks, Katrin Keller shines a welcome spotlight on the princesses of the Empire and provides an insight into her new research on empresses. Her chapter demonstrates how the coronation



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ceremonies of these women provoked interesting conflicts over precedence, which will undoubtedly be crucial to the further analysis of symbolic communication in the Holy Roman Empire.

The second section is concerned with the economic history of the Holy Roman Empire and it begins with an overview of the previous literature on this topic by Guillaume Garner. The author argues that this field of research is neglected because traditionally the many borders of the Empire have been thought to inhibit the development of robust economic exchanges. Yet Garner makes a convincing case for rejecting such attitudes, as he shows that the presence of borders could also lead to increased cooperation, and even the creation of a type of free-trade zones, which were one response to the embargoes on grain trade in the early 1770's.

Similarly, Vincent Demont sees opportunities for enterprising manufacturers to exploit the complex relationship between the emperor and the Free Imperial Cities to their advantage by bypassing the city councils and applying directly to the Imperial Aulic court in order to be granted privileges for their trade. Rachel Renault further constructs a compelling argument about how the social practice of paying taxes to the emperor could provide an opportunity to renegotiate the power relationships between the counts of Schönburg and Reuss, their subjects, and the emperor. Tax »giving« could be performed and challenged in multiple ways depending on the broader contexts of the payment, and Renault argues that the levying of taxes was not merely an activity linked to state formation, but actually helped to produce Imperial society itself.

In the opening chapter of the third section focusing on spatiality Falk Bretschneider advances a set of conceptual propositions that were developed in collaboration with his co-editor Christophe Duhamelle. They put the notion of a »fractal« (the term is culled from mathematics) up for discussion as a potential replacement for the popular metaphor describing the structure of the Holy Roman Empire as a multipolar, multi-tiered network, since the latter does not facilitate the analysis of the intricate connections between the different layers of the figure. This is a complex and interesting idea, which cannot be discussed in detail here.

Yet, Bretschneider's practice-centred usage of the concept in order to analyse Imperial penal justice is convincing, since it allows for the simultaneous consideration of the effects of overlapping, multiple jurisdictions and the practices that created a minimum of cohesiveness across legal spaces. The concept gains further plasticity in the remaining chapters of this section of the volume. Anne Saada does not refer explicitly to fractality, but her analysis of Johann Pütter's double-pronged career at the University of Göttingen and within Imperial legal institutions equally makes the case for centring the connections between centres of legal knowledge at different levels of Imperial territoriality. In her case study this connection takes the shape of Pütter, who cross-fertilized practices in both his working spaces.

Luca Scholz further uses stimulating primary sources to show that the mere request for the production of a letter of safe passage addressed to a traveller in the Empire could provoke conflicts among actors loyal to different authorities on the ground. In such



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cases, the actors' agency helped to bring to life various levels of territoriality, as well as the tensions between them.

The notion of fractality continues to resonate in the final section of the volume that is concerned with confessional spaces stretching out over various cross-sections of Imperial and territorial authority. Christophe Duhamelle opens up the topic with a thought-provoking essay that is much more than a historiographical overview, and in fact proposes a methodology for how to tackle the study of confessional coexistence (as opposed to religious toleration, marginalisation, or confessionalisation). He directs attention to the interactions between confessions as a way of nuancing our understanding of how religious groups forged identities not merely through adherence to a specific doctrine, but through social practices.

Finally, Năima Ghermani concludes the volume with an investigation of the economic and social dimensions of religious exile within the Holy Roman Empire. She posits that this form of exile could offer an interesting point of comparison for similar studies in France and other more centralised territories of Europe, since the specific situation within the Empire blurred the distinctions between foreigners and host society, and thus required adapted strategies from all parties concerned.

Not all contributors to the volume have taken its overall aims to heart to the same degree as Ghermani, but that is likely inevitable. Overall though, the contributions showcase a cohesive approach to the Holy Roman Empire that focuses on actors and practices, and that follows its objects of study across multiple levels of investigation. The stimulating conceptual and methodological propositions of the editors are particular highlights, and the volume is at its strongest where their ideas serve to link different case studies together.

The chapters are all pleasingly written in lucid French, and credit must go to Christophe Duhamelle who has shouldered much of the translation work required for this feat. This publication will appeal to graduate students seeking to home in on master's degree or Ph.D. topics within the field, but also to seasoned researchers wishing to be brought up-to-date with developments in the Franco-German perspective on the Holy Roman Empire. In this context, it has to be noted, however, that the chapters show a bias towards the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the 16<sup>th</sup> century only being considered at some length in a single chapter. It would also have been desirable to include more research on female actors, as a new social history of the Holy Roman Empire can certainly not be written without paying appropriate attention to half its population. Nevertheless, this is a publication of quality that will stimulate thoughts and debates within its field and the editors and contributors are to be commended on their work.



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