



Stipendiatenkolloquium

Montag, 15. August 2011; 18:15 Uhr

Forschungszentrum Gotha (Seminarraum im Pagenhaus, Schloss Friedenstein)

Dr. Vera Keller (Oregon)

Central European "Baconians": Gotha and the early Royal Society

Historians have rightly questioned whether Francis Bacon had a single "modern" project unproblematically combining science, politics, economics, and empire. The result of this well-intentioned historiography has been, however, a too radical division between Bacon's political and philosophical thought. This historiographic trend continues in treatments of the later seventeenth century Baconian founders of the English Royal Society. Fellows of the Society maintained that they did not meddle in politics, in part to avoid royal censure and in part to assert that their investigations benefited all mankind rather than a particular polity.

The view from Central Europe sheds a different light on these claims (and on the current historiography which these claims support). The traditions of sixteenth-century courtly alchemy, *Kunstammer* collecting, and methodical travel (the *ars apodemica*), as well as early seventeenth century Ramism, established the empirical study of nature and useful knowledge as intimately tied up with political practice in Central Europe. Such continental practices both informed Bacon's thought and explain Bacon's rapid reception in Central Europe. There he was embraced by politically-oriented Tacitist historians in the orbit of Matthias Bernegger, such as Bernegger's student Johann Heinrich Boeckler, and Boeckler's student, Jena Professor Johann Andreas Bose. Practices which in Anglophone historiography are often associated with the Royal Society, such as the query lists of methodical travel, had long had many proponents in Central Europe (including Bernegger). The correspondence between Gotha and the Royal Society, including query lists, was initiated not from England, but from Gotha. Likewise, the study of manufactures by early cameralist and Fellow of the Royal Society, Wilhelm von Schroeder, drew upon courtly alchemy.

This paper will trace the contours of Central European "Baconianism" with a special emphasis on Gotha. The explicit relationship between empiricism, experiment, and state-

building in Central Europe will question English science's claim to political disinterestedness. Such questions were already raised by late seventeenth-century "Baconians" in German-speaking lands.

Dr. Vera Keller:

After completing her Ph.D. at Princeton in 2008, Vera Keller was a postdoctoral fellow at McGill University, the University of Southern California/Huntington Library, the Herzog August Bibliothek, and the Warburg Institute. After her fellowship in Gotha (since June 2011), she will be starting a new position as an assistant professor at the University of Oregon.



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