

**Susanne Lang (Hg.), Jesuiten am Oberrhein,
Ostfildern (Jan Thorbecke Verlag) 2020,
303 S., 78 Abb. (Oberrheinische Studien, 41),
ISBN 978-3-7995-7841-7, EUR 34,00.**

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Marc Forster, New London, CT

This collection of articles on the Jesuits in the early modern period examines the Rhine valley region between Mainz and Basel. The volume focuses on the cultural production of the Jesuits and their supporters, including literature, architecture (particularly churches), and educational writings. In the introduction, Susanne Lang highlights the volume's engagement with the ideas of a *Kunstlandschaft*, a »cultural region«, and the notion of a *Kommunikationsraum*, a »communication area«, which has been fashionable in German scholarship in the last decade or so. Lang emphasizes the challenges of trying to identify unifying characteristics of a politically and confessionally fragmented region, including the danger of going down a »nationalist-romantic« path, as earlier generations of scholars often did (p. 16–17). Instead, Lang advocates for an analysis that focuses on cultural networks and influences. A number of the articles engage this theoretical issue in useful ways, but, as in all such volumes, this engagement is uneven, as is the quality of the articles. And, as the volume comes out of a 2016 conference held in Mannheim, it feels at times a bit dated. The book is lavishly illustrated, as is appropriate for a volume that focuses on cultural production.

Several of the articles lay out the history of the Jesuits in this part of Germany. These also vary in quality. Some of them reflect a traditional confessional historiography that emphasizes the successes of the Jesuits in reviving and strengthening Catholicism, referring for example to the »irresistible spread of the Jesuits in Alsace« (p. 38). Articles in this tradition tend to reflect uncritically the Jesuits' own reports of their successes in conversions, missions, and in their schools. Other contributions, like Daniela Blum's article on the founding of the Jesuit college in Speyer, recognize not just Protestant opposition to the Jesuits, but also the tensions between the Order and other (often more traditional) Catholics. As Blum points out, the Jesuits in Speyer were both »protected and hated« and they dramatically changed the confessional dynamic in the city. Even for the Cathedral Chapter, which brought the Jesuits to Speyer, the Society was »attractive, but in the end also unpredictable« (p. 101).

The heart of the volume are the articles about the cultural impact of the Jesuits. These articles are erudite and sophisticated, often bringing together multiple disciplines and modes of analysis. An underlying theme is that the Jesuits themselves were well aware of the multidimensional cultural project they were undertaking and they understood, for example, the interplay of their new



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churches, the sermons around the opening of these buildings, and the printed materials that publicized them. Hermann Wiegand traces the construction history of the Jesuit college in Mannheim, that culminated with the completion of the *Jesuitenkirche* in 1760. He then presents a detailed textual analysis of the Latin *Festschrift* produced at the time. This is a sophisticated analysis that links this text to other texts produced at this time, pointing to the way they tied the Mannheim Jesuits to the ruling family of the Palatinate, the house of Pfalz-Neuburg, and to the Empire. The notion of Mannheim as a »new Jerusalem« may strike the modern observer of the sometimes gritty industrial city as surprising, but Wiegand's analysis points to the great ambitions of the Jesuits, even in the late 18th century as the »tragedy« (Wiegand's term) of the dissolution of the Order in 1773 loomed (p. 128).

Other articles examine the Jesuit church in Molsheim in Alsace and the construction of the Jesuit church in Mainz. Both these chapters reinforce some of the themes of the article on Mannheim, particularly the ongoing vitality of Jesuit building projects well into the 18th century and the strong support the Jesuits received from bishops and secular rulers in the period after the Thirty Years' War. Developments in Alsace were complicated by the French conquest of the region, a dynamic carefully studied by Patrick Schiele. Schiele provides a profile of the students in the episcopal university of Strasbourg, which was run by the Jesuits until they were expelled from France in 1764. Interestingly, the students at the university continued to come predominantly from the Upper Rhine region, even after the French conquests that began in 1648, and even as the faculty was increasingly of French origin, primarily from Champagne.

Sybylle Appuhn-Radtke highlights another aspect of the Jesuits cultural activity, the creation of a multifaceted pedagogical program that aimed not just at the students in Jesuit schools, but at the wider public. Jesuit theater and public theological disputations with Protestants are well-known aspects of this program. Appuhn-Radtke focuses her study on *Thesenblätter*, engraved sheets that laid out the arguments made during disputations. These sheets were lavishly illustrated and aimed to show the Jesuit contribution to the Church Triumphant. The *Thesenblätter* reflected the Jesuit program of reaching a (primarily educated) public through texts, images, sermons, and public displays of devotion.

This collection sometimes contains more than a whiff of nostalgia for the Jesuits and their churches and for a lost world of baroque Catholicism. More articles on the Jesuits as leaders of the Counter-Reformation and their active anti-Protestant policies, which peaked during the Thirty Years' War, would have been welcome. Perhaps in our ecumenical age this passing over these issues is understandable, but it limits our understanding of the impact of the Jesuits in the Upper Rhine region. That said, this collection does remind historians of the wide influence of the Society of Jesus, in a region where the memory and even the physical traces of this history have often been erased and lost. The vibrant culture the



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Jesuits helped create and promote is elegantly brought to life in this volume.



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