

Romedio Schmitz-Esser, Richard Engl, Jan Keupp, Markus Krumm (Hg.), StauferDinge. Materielle Kultur der Stauferzeit in neuer Perspektive, Regensburg (Schnell & Steiner) 2022, 272 S., ISBN 978-3-7954-3626-1, EUR 40,00.

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Joseph P. Huffman, Mechanicsburg, PA

This volume contains papers presented on 31 January 2020 at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich in a conference to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of the university's own Knut Görich, the doyen of Staufer research in recent decades. The volume's title is a play on Görich's own book »Barbarossabilder: Entstehungskontexte, Erwartungshorizonte, Verwendungszusammenhänge« (2014), as well as on the biennial symposia series »StauferGestalten« whose papers are published in the series »Schriften zur staufischen Geschichte und Kunst« by the Gesellschaft für Staufische Geschichte in Göppingen. Knut Görich is the president of the GSG. Thus, the present volume is a Festschrift of sorts, but focused less on the Görich himself than on advancing his seminal research into the material culture of the Staufer era. With this broad mandate, there appear here no less than sixteen studies of artifacts »which contain in some way or other the attribute *staufisch*«.

The volume itself is also theory-driven with a focus on three dynamics:

(1) The material object as physical witness of material and cultural practices in the Middle Ages, which is analyzed through traditional questions of provenance, dating, historical context of origins and of subsequent use.

(2) Mindfulness of the historical basis, motives, and conditions that enable, stabilize, but also modify the linkage of the material artifact with a mental abstraction like »Staufer«.

(3) Investigating the historical reception of the material artifact as evidence for a history of material-semantic interactions between the artifact and either future public or scholarly imaginations about the Staufer past. This third focus is historiographical in nature and thus reflects an interest in discourse analysis between the contexts for the original medieval and later reception history. What then qualifies as *StauferDinge*, as material objects in some way *staufisch*? Well, just about anything: here one finds studies in architecture, sculpture, insignia, coins, tents, windows, reliquaries, jewelry, a limestone casting of a dead person, and modern Barbarossa statues.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris | publiée par l'Institut historique allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Finally, within a German historiographical context, several authors in this volume raise significant methodological critiques of prominent 20th-century art and iconography scholars – principally Percy Ernst Schramm, but also Gerhart B. Ladner and Ernst Kantorowicz – whose own cultural histories took as their guide the study of Staufener-era *Herrschaftszeichen* in search of a distinct imperial ideology. Instead, authors recommend what some would call a post-structuralist »material turn« approach of discourse analysis along the lines described above. Just as Görich (and John B. Freed) dismantled the imperial Barbarossa as a »discovery of the 19th century«, this volume dismantles 20th-century German *Ideengeschichte* of *StauferDinge* in favor of an art historical *Rezeptionsgeschichte* and *Objektsgeschichte* for material culture. In all this, Anglophone readers will likely recognize a German analog to the branch of cultural history which studies modern medievalisms, including both scholarly constructions as well as public history nodes where citizens encounter the history of their own city, state, or nation.

The numerous and wide-ranging articles of this volume can be organized into four different categories. First there are for all intents and purposes traditional art history and material culture studies which focus on dating, provenance, and contexts of use rather than the revisionist theorizing supposed to characterize the volume. Claudia Märkl analyzes the ciborium of Sant’Ambrogio in Milan and offers a new dating for its construction. Jörg Schwarz uses the campaign tent given to Barbarossa as a gift by King Henry II of England to ground a study of such tents in general, only to point out the obvious, that the tent was not a *StauferDing* but rather an *AngevinDing*. This begs the question of how this subject matter comports with the volume’s focus, and given the tent’s origins there is little exploration of the rich Anglophone scholarship on this gift and its connection to the negotiations between the monarchs over Henry II’s possession (from his mother the empress Matilda) of the relic of St. James’ hand. It should also be noticed that the tent was an ironic symbol of Henry II’s gauzy reply to Barbarossa’s request for the relic’s return: like the tent itself, Henry II’s reply to the emperor’s appeal was impressive and expansive, yet completely empty. The relic was never returned to Germany.

A second category of articles reflects the theory-rich methodology of the volume. Jan Keupp provides an introductory essay in which the 19th-century origins of the modern imagined Hohenstaufen soon give way to an epistemological consideration of the complex interactive relationship between a physically present artifact and historical constructions in the minds of later scholars, public officials, and the wider citizenry. Keupp challenges the reader to consider the space between the artifact of medieval material culture and the psychological representation of it in the minds of later observers – the former may be fixed in form, but the latter is always capable of change according to changing contexts for interpretation. Thus *StauferDinge* are envisioned as »epistemic things« with unfixed, subjective meanings in retrospective imaginations – the »epistemic acts« of later humans, scholarly and



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l’Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

popular alike. The Cappenberg Reliquary so similarly studied by Görich appears next as an exemplary case study. In the end, Keupp calls »text-based historians« to reflect on the epistemic status of objects in forming our own imaginations for public reception of knowledge about the Middle Ages. The article concludes, however, without showing text-based historians the value of such meanings derived from decontextualized and mediated historical artifacts for the study of medieval Europe itself. Hence the thrust of this volume's approach is more historiographical than historical, yet quite stimulating on a theoretical level as in this theory essay.

Ludger Körntgen goes more deeply into the Cappenberg Reliquary and joins it with consideration of the Staufer Imperial Crown in the Vienna *Schatzkammer* as two examples with important hermeneutical implications. Körntgen marshals a strong hermeneutic challenge to 20th-century *Ideengeschichte*-driven art historical scholarship as far too much shaped by the interpretive expectations of iconographical »programs« of imperial ideology in lieu of a careful study of the material findings of the objects themselves. Richard Engl provides a detailed and nuanced study of two insignia of Frederick II: the umbrella (so prominently appearing in the 13th-century fresco of Pope Sylvester I and Constantine in the Roman basilica of Santi Quattro Coronati) and the hanging crown (*Hängekrone, corona imperii*) and shows their previous usage in Fatimid, Norman, and Papal contexts. And Markus Krumm also makes a solid case for local interests rather than a Kantorowicz-inflected imperial ideology of Frederick II as the basis for the design of Capua's bridge gate.

The third category of articles have nothing to do with medieval history per se, but rather are fascinating studies of modern medievalisms only tangentially related to the Staufer era. Romedio Schmitz-Esser considers the mysterious modern history of the so-called Barbarossa Ring now housed in the former royal palace of the Wittelsbach monarchs of Bavaria in Munich, while Christoph Dartmann offers a provocative and disheartening reflection on the civic evocation of the medieval past in the fictional Hamburg harbor privilege of Barbarossa while the actual medieval history of the city remains invisible for all intents and purposes. Michael A. Bajcov provides a similar modern fictional account of the Staufer origins of the Golden Door of Vladimir constructed by Vasilij Tatiščev (1686–1750), the author of the first complete history of Russia. Finally, Jürgen Dendorfer considers the public history commemoration of Barbarossa's ancestors and their patronage of the church of St. Fides in Schlettstadt, and Martin Wihoda does the same for the *Buckelquaderturm* (ashlar tower) on the Klingenberg Castle of Bohemia. These are all fine studies in modern medievalism, but they make no case for their relevance to medievalist historians trying to understand these supposed *StauferDinge* in their original contexts. The focus here is on the ever-evolving meanings these artifacts have been given over the early modern and modern centuries.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The fourth and final category of articles are rather brief in textual length and of uncertain relevance to the volume's theory-driven theme. Michael Matzke submitted a six-page description of the practice of overstriking coins in the Staufer era, which seems to suppose that coins by definition were *StauferDinge* though the latter connection is never developed. Christoph Friedrich provides a detailed discourse on wills and testaments as historical source material for communal life in Italy during the Staufer era, but never makes the case that said artifacts are either *StauferDinge* or give insights into the epistemic challenges offered in this volume. Roman Deutinger set out to prove that Konradin was without doubt born in Wolfenstein Castle on the Isar in ten short pages, while Jochen Johrendt provides a very extensive study of the *corona duplex* as a symbol of the papal office in the Staufer era. Whether coins, wills, births, or papal crowns, we are going rather far afield if we consider these *StauferDinge* simply because they came into existence in the Staufer era. Indeed, these subjects are more properly labelled *StauferzeitDinge*. Though there is some solid scholarship in this category of articles, one gets the impression they were included to fill out the volume.

This extensive set of articles on *StauferDinge* concludes with an article which has nothing whatsoever to do with this topic. Rather, it publishes the keynote address on the final evening of the conference, offered by none other than Gerd Althoff. It is a fascinating article, and very much in the Görich genre, about how imperial honor led Barbarossa to treat the Italian communes brutally while simultaneously engaging the German princes north of the Alps with collegial collaboration and consensus decisions. So why was Barbarossa a trusting, generous collaborator as monarch with German nobility north of the Alps, and yet uncompromising hard emperor to those outside this realm, especially the Italian communes? The Lombards, unlike the German nobility, held no status of regional nobility and were simply to submit to and obey their princeps as his subjects. Their refusal to do so denied Barbarossa his due honor, which angered him while also hindering his goal of establishing the so-called *Reichsherrschaft* in Italy. It took Barbarossa a long and painful time before he was ready to seek consensus with the Lombard cities as he was accustomed to do with the princes of his German kingdom, and to achieve a settlement neither through his legal courts nor through the force of his army but through negotiations in which the Lombards were engaged »at an equal eye level«. Unfortunately his successors Henry VI and Frederick II followed the same path as their progenitor. One could suppose that in this final article by Althoff, that Barbarossa himself serves as the ultimate *StauferDing*.

In sum, this volume's articles are unevenly engaged with the central theme, as collections of conference papers often are. Yet those which do fully engage have indeed extended Knut Görich's reassessment of our understanding of the Staufer era. We see that era through the atmosphere of generations of received knowledge at least as much accumulated from multiple post-Staufer contexts of scholarship and civic life as of the original time, provenance,



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

and use of the original material objects themselves. While this revisionist cultural history of the political through *StauferDinge* may trouble some scholars, it will appear as quite familiar to any cultural historian. Indeed, the generational »cultural turn« of the late 20th century has now been with us long enough to realize that our era too is fast becoming a historical context for our own scholarly imaginations about medieval material objects. For we too have become the scholars in the amber of time whose work will be revised and found to contain the medievalisms and epistemic limitations of our own generation. There is much food for thought in this beautifully produced volume.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)