Imperial Villages

Cultures of Political Freedom in the German Lands c. 1300-1800

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Hundreds of rural communities tasted political freedom in the Holy Roman Empire. For shorter or longer periods, villagers managed local affairs without subjection to territorial overlords. In this first book-length study, Beat Kümin focuses on the five case studies of Gochsheim and Sennfeld (in present-day Bavaria), Sulzbach and Soden (Hesse) and Gersau (Switzerland). Adopting a comparative perspective across the late medieval and early modern periods, the analysis of multiple sources reveals distinct extents of rural self-government, the forging of communalized confessions and an enduring attachment to the empire. Negotiating inner tensions as well as mounting centralization pressures, Reichsdörfer provide privileged insights into rural micro-political cultures while their stories resonate with resurgent desires for greater local autonomy in Europe today.

Readership

Students, researchers and a wider public interested in the history of the Holy Roman Empire, late medieval / early modern rural communities, centre-periphery relations, local autonomy and popular politics.

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