

CfP: British Travels to Germany

Coburg, Prinz Albert Gesellschaft e.V., 3—5 September 2020

For centuries, the close ties between Britain and Germany have found expression not least on the level of personal travel. Travellers came from Britain to Germany for a host of occasions and with the most diverse aims, expectations, and preconceptions. This conference explores the reports produced about their experiences in German lands by travellers from England, Scotland, and Ireland since the Middle Ages.

Travel accounts of this sort are not merely 'about' travel and its circumstances, but they construct images of Germany and 'the' Germans. Whether – and to what extent – Germany even existed as an entity and object of observation is a matter of specific historical circumstance, of course. However, travel writing is a particularly salient medium for communicating observed geographical, political or cultural units. The mere fact that a 'German' space should be perceived – whether as destination, transit space, or neighbouring borderland – offers productive insight into a period's British image of Germany. Travellers make first-hand experiences that will often precipitate the revision of stereotypical preconceptions or prejudices. Travel accounts will enter into a dialogue with such images of the other, (re-)producing or transforming them. Thus, travel writing must be seen as an agent within the network of cultural relations between Britain and Germany. It can be fruitfully studied for its representation of Germany and Germans encountered by British travellers – including social, political, cultural and ethnographic aspects as much as representations and constructions of 'natural' sites and spaces. Next to specific occasions and contexts for travel, the intended readership of travel accounts needs to be taken into account.

Similarly, the form of individual accounts rewards attention. Travel writing is inevitably suspended between fact and fiction. Surely, a diplomat's code message serves a different function than the unreliable narrator of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), or a BBC programme on a royal visit to Germany. Even when an account is clearly marked as fiction (such as that of Victor Frankenstein's Rhine valley sojourn), its representation of Germany may create discursively powerful 'facts'. Contributions might inquire into the formal – i.e., generic, textual, (tele-)visual, musical, or intermedial – nature of travel accounts and how they employ historically contingent 'form-knowledge' in order to bestow authority on the knowledge about Germany and Germans they communicate.

The conference aims to examine the history of this inter- and, potentially, transnational phenomenon from an interdisciplinary perspective. We invite proposals for twenty-minute papers from the fields of history, literary and cultural studies, art history, the history of science, and related fields on British, English, Scottish, and Irish travellers to Germany from the Middle Ages to the present day. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- reasons for, and aims of, travels to Germany
- conditions of travel (e.g., economic, cultural, logistical)
- forms and genres of travel writing
- political systems and their representation
- economic, technological, and scientific exchange
- the experience of conflict, war and reconciliation
- the negotiation of regional, national and transnational identities

Abstracts of around 300 words, along with a brief biographical note, should be submitted by March 15 to Prof. Dr. Florian Klaeger (University of Bayreuth) at <klaeger@uni-bayreuth.de>.

As host, the Prinz-Albert-Gesellschaft will cover travel expenses for contributors. The conference proceedings will be published in the Prinz-Albert-Studien / Prince Albert Studies (PAS) series (with Duncker & Humblot, under the general editorship of Frank-Lothar Kroll).