

Reading in the Alps

Private book ownership in the Catholically dominated Central Alps 1750–1800. A systematic study
based on inventories from the Tyrolean Pustertal

– Abstract –

The proposed project aims at investigating private book ownership in the Catholically dominated rural areas of the Central Alps, or, putting it more precisely, in historic Tyrol in the 18th century. Referring to comparable existing studies – for example by Hans Medick – mainly focusing on protestant-pietistic regions, this study investigates inventories. Books mentioned in about 4,400 inventories from the Pustertal/Val di Pusteria, today belonging to South-Tyrol (Südtirol/Alto Adige), Italy, will be gathered in order to describe and systematically analyse private book ownership in the respective administrative districts.

The main research questions are:

- Who owned books and which patterns can be observed regarding the book-owners? (gender, age, socioeconomic background, profession)
- Which and how many books were in circulation/popular in the region? (religious or profane content, authors, origin, value/price, effects of state/church censorship)
- Which differences and/or parallels come to light in comparison with the findings of existing studies?

A study like this would be pioneering work, not only for the area of historic Tyrol, but also for Austria, and even for the mainly Catholically oriented South of the German language area. The proposed project therefore would also make a significant contribution to the European history of books and reading, hence, the cultural and social history of the 18th century, at the dawn of the age of modernity.

In cooperation with the Austrian Center for Digital Humanities of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ACDH-ÖAW), the inventories that have been systematically examined in this project will subsequently be published in an XML-encoded online-database. Thus, substantial value is added by creating easy access to source material that can be relevant for many aspects of further scientific research as well as for an interested public.

- Univ.-Prof. Dr. Brigitte Mazohl from the Institute for History and European Ethnology (*Institut für Geschichtswissenschaften und Europäische Ethnologie*) at the University of Innsbruck will function as project manager.
- Mag. Mag. Dr. Michael Span (Institute for History and European Ethnology) will be the main responsible researcher for preparatory works, data collection, analyses of the collected data, synthesis and (analogue) dissemination of the results.