Sangallensia in Washington

The Arts and Letters in Medieval and Baroque St. Gall Viewed from the Late Twentieth Century

James C. King, Editor
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Foreword

The year 1991 marked the seven hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Swiss Confederation. At the North American opening of the exhibition "The Abbey of St. Gall: A Cultural Center," the George Washington University on May 13-15 hosted an international conference, "The Arts and Letters in Medieval and Baroque St. Gall Viewed from the Late Twentieth Century." Invited scholars from Canada, England, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States read fifteen papers in six sessions that were open to members and friends of the academic community in the metropolitan area and beyond.

The conference opened on Monday evening, May 13, in the Dorothy Betts Marvin Theatre with Dean Robert W. Kenny, of Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, serving as master of ceremonies. University President Stephen J. Trachtenberg and his wife, Francine Z. Trachtenberg, welcomed the participants. Dr. Sharon J. Rogers, University Librarian and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, spoke on behalf of the Melvin Gelman Library, scene of the exhibition and conference, and the Friends of the Libraries, who cosponsored the buffet reception held later that evening in the George Washington University Club. Professor James C. Xing introduced Dr. Werner Vogler, Abbey Archivist in St. Gall, who delivered the opening lecture, "The Abbey of St. Gall and the Swiss Confederation." The Collegium Musicum, a group of vocalists and instrumentalists directed by Professor Laura Youens, followed with an "Homage to St. Gall: Music from Renaissance Europe."

On Tuesday evening, May 14, Dr. Edouard Brunner, Ambassador of Switzerland, received the conference participants at the Embassy. Dr. Kurt Furgler, a former President of Switzerland, also spoke to the guests. The reception ended
Building, Lending, and Cancelling Debts:

Damian Hugo von Schönborn, Cardinal and Prince-Bishop of Speyer and Constance (d. 1743)

Lawrence G. Duggan
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I note with some interest that this conference, being held in the nation’s capital, begins with a session on finance. A question immediately popped into my mind: Is there an agenda here? I would hope that we would draw some lessons from the past about responsible financing, but I am considerably less hopeful about the interest or willingness of the statesmen out there to hear what those lessons might be. Nevertheless, the unalterable fact remains: everything must be paid for.

Although the House of Schönborn had few direct contacts with the Swiss Confederation, I suspect that this audience needs little or no introduction to it. They were an old family of Middle Rhenish knights which barely survived into the seventeenth century but then, precisely at that moment, catapulted onto center stage by rising rapidly in the service of the Church and the Empire, achieving the rank of Reichsfreiherrn in 1663 and Reichsgrafen in 1701. They were no mere servants or politicians, however, for they left their most brilliant and abiding mark in the world of culture as patrons of the arts. Indeed, according to Kenneth Clark, they deserve to be compared to the Medici, the godfathers of Florence and later grand dukes of Tuscany.¹ Lord Clark’s suggestion is a startling one, partly because the Schönborns do not seem to have cultivated their own “artisans of glory,” in-house historians to celebrate their achievements for the ages,² partly

because the Schönborns were not as lucky as the Medici in having men like Michelangelo, Ficino, Leonardo, Poliziano. Some members of the family are inevitably less well known than others, and one of them is my subject today, Damian Hugo, who, although he was created a cardinal (the first member of the family as well as the first bishop of Speyer to receive the red hat), did not receive an entry in the Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie. He has never been the subject of a full-length biography. I have chosen to examine him single-handed. He remains not because he was a cardinal, not because he remains unknown, but because all the other Schönborns have been studied to death, for they have not. There is, of course, the Speyer connection, and it was while I was doing dissertation research two decades ago that my attention was drawn to Damian Hugo, who appears again and again in the later medieval records of the bishopric and seemed to be the most intriguing of the later bishops. The impression that I had of the early days of the temporal focusing in particular on certain aspects of this period, including correspondence and administration. I now have a plan to write a book on the reader for help, since I ordinarily do not work on the limits in this eighteenth century. Any period, especially in the realm of financial history. Any advice, references, or criticisms offered will be most appreciated. On the other hand, I hope that the case of Damian Hugo can shed some light on what happened at St. Gall in the same century.

Damian Hugo von Schönborn was born in Mainz in 1676. The son of Melchior Friedrich, who later fulfilled one of the family ambitions by securing elevation into the Reichsrat in 1701. Damian’s eldest brothers were Johann Michael Franz, Bishop of Würzburg, and Friedrich Karl, Bishop of Bamberg and Würzburg. The pattern here of elder rather than younger sons’ becoming clerics confirms Peter Hersche’s observation to this effect in his study Die deutschen Domkapitel im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. In fact, of the seven sons of Melchior Friedrich, only the youngest, General Anselm Franz, was never a cleric. The next youngest, Rudolf Franz, Greiffenhain, of the Elector of Mainz, had once been a regular canon of the pope’s cathedral, the Church of St. John Lateran in Rome, but resigned, reverted to lay status, and married.

Whereas most of Damian’s other brothers pursued conventional careers on the way to the top of the imperial church by holding cathedral canons and offices, Damian Hugo did not. In addition to his study of the arts of administration in Leiden and Louvain, he was educated by the Jesuits in Würzburg and Aschaffenburg and then, between 1693 and 1695, at their Collegium Germanicum in Rome. Meanwhile he pursued a military career as an officer in the imperial army, and in 1699 moved to combine the clerical and military worlds by entering the Teutonic Knights, in which he became Landkomtur of Altenbien and Hessen. Anyone who thinks that this order had long outlived its usefulness should stop and consider the case of Damian Hugo, who commanded a battalion of infantry and served as imperial commissioner to resolve the grave situation in Hamburg between 1708 and 1712, as imperial legate in Berlin for two years, and then for another two as president of the Congress of Brunswick gathered to end the Second Nordic War. By comparison with most other members of the aristocratic Reichskirche, Damian was much better educated, professed a stricter rule of religious life and a more explicitly military one, moved in a much larger world of war and diplomacy, and had Roman background and experience. His world was a very large one.

All these factors, but above all his fine and loyal work in imperial service, won Damian Hugo the red hat in 1713 (although the elevation was not announced until two years later). It appears that the emperor and the king of Poland
pressed for his appointment despite some misgivings of the pope, although the reasons given on either side are not very clear to me yet. In any event, the honor conferred was by no means a common one. No one from any part of the Empire had been made a cardinal since 1689, and of 88 cardinals who died between 1727 and 1748 only three were imperial. These included Damian were created between 1714 and three, none of them received treatment in the Allgemeine deutsche Biographie. Damian's elevation capitalized on his background and rewarded past service, but also made him a significant western imperial link with the Roman court, which continued to rely on him to safeguard Catholic interests in the North.
In his administration of temporalities Damian was, by comparison, both a man of his age and yet set apart from it. Although he had used, his governing style was certainly "absolutist." He had more than the usual measure of difficulties with the imperial court, with the cathedral chapter (of which he was a younger brother), and with his subjects; or so it seems, for it is not hard to measure the scale and seriousness of such typically Capuchin, Damian expelled from the principality in 1733 a Camerist. He believed thoroughly in his own wisdom. It was not only in general but down to the tiniest detail. His hand never stopped writing; an endless stream of comments and directives flowed from his quill on such matters as the Oberschulp fortifi d (obligatory labor in transporting ice) of his Eichfelder, the stocking of the moats of old castles, the stocking of the moats of old castles in Bruchsal, which extended with a grand vista to the Rhine and in the planning (and correction) of which Balthasar Neumann was engaged. According to calculations made after Damian Hugo’s death, these diverse construction projects cost three million gulden or more while he lived, and in his testament he left several hundred thousand gulden more, including fifty thousand for the cathedral, which the chapter charged he had sorely neglected. It needs to be said that much of this activity was scarcely frivolous. Aside from the ordinary necessity of modernizing buildings, many had been badly damaged in the War of the Palatinate Succession in the 1680s, including the cathedral and old fortress-residence of Udenheim-Phillipensburg. The other princes of the Upper Rhine were similarly forced to relocate and rebuild in the same era. One thinks of the moves of the Electors Palatine from Heidelberg to Mannheim, the Margraves of Baden-Durlach to Karlsruhe, and the Margraves of Baden-Baden to Rastatt.

What is even more striking is that despite all these expenditures Damian Hugo left truly impressive reserves of money and produce: over 380,000 gulden in cash, another 100,000 Gütervermögensgeld and the equivalent of another 575,000 gulden in grain, wine, and wood. But apart from the reserves, he had also amortized many of the debts of the bishopric going back to the fifteenth century. My calculations are only tentative at the moment. Between 1720 and 1733 he paid...
off a minimum of 75,000 gulden in old debts. This amount does not seem like much when compared with his building expenses, but it does reflect his determination to clear the slate in the realm of finance.

Such goals and achievements would have put most princes of any era to shame, but they were not all. For besides building a large scale, paying off substantial debts, and leaving behind handsome reserves, Damian Hugo also lent out a great deal of money, usually at four or five percent. My very rough initial estimate is of over 1.3 million gulden lent between 1727 and 1733 alone, the principal recipients of which were (in descending order) the Franconian Kreis, the bishoprics of Mainz, Bamberg, Würzburg, and Trier, the monastery of Stadtbahn of Vienna. While some of these were repaid or changed hands before Damian’s death, in 1743 over 943,000 gulden were still outstanding as loans (Kreditgeschäften) yielding between four and five percent.

Of how many princes in any age can this be said — that he built on a grand scale, paid off debts, lent much more, and left the coffers overflowing? Would that we had such a man as the president! However, I have come not to praise Damian Hugo but to ask where all this money came from. For I am not sure that the spotsy figures I have unearthen to date add up to a complete explanation. On the side of expenditure we have disbursements on building must be kept in mind, the large disbursements on building must be kept in mind. In particular, the expensive rebuilding of the palace at Würzburg owed its existence to a lottery won by one of its bishops.

I am curious about such possibilities in the eighteenth century. I know that canon law has always forbidden clerics to gamble, but that prohibition was, of course, no impediment to the commission of such improprieties. But was the eighteenth-century equivalent of aristocratic beano potentially so lucrative as to account in substantial measure for the Schönborn palaces in Würzburg and Bruchsal?

But even if Damian Hugo was lucky at the numbers, I still believe his business acumen was sufficiently distinguished to have merited a D.B.A. from Harvard honoris causa. At the same time, I have no reason to think that it in any way obstructed his performance as a bishop; rather, in some ways it concluded how different costs were then from what we have come to expect, particularly for labor.
probably contributed to his success as a caretaker of souls. If my surmise sounds too strong, it is wise to remember that few bishops have made it into the ranks of the saintly (at least since the Early Middle Ages), that their principal task is to ensure the stability and strength of the institutional resources established for the pastoral care of souls and, hopefully, nourish holiness in some, and that, judged by these criteria, Damian Hugo did rather well. For if a good prince is a relative uncommon phenomenon, a good bishop is perhaps a relatively uncommon phenomenon, a good bishop is perhaps even rarer. And when the two offices are well discharged by one man, only one thing can be said - thanks be to God!

Notes


6 The principal archival repositories are lodged in the Badisches Gene-
rärendesarchiv in Karlsruhe and the Staatsarchiv in Würzburg (Schönborn Archiv, Korrespondenzarchiv, Damian Hugo von Schön-
born). These will heretofore be cited with the abbreviations GLA and SA, respectively.

7 NDB 10: 546 and 3: 492-93, respectively.
9 Strnad 108 n. 5.
11 Damian’s two elder brothers had also studied at the Collegium Germanicum for two years, and Damian was critical of its curriculum: see Peter Wotzka, "Zur Ausbildung am Collegium Germanicum im 18. Jahrhundert. Reformvorschläge von zwei jüdischen Rechtsadlern aus dem Hause Schönborn," Quellen und Forschungen aus österreichischen Archiven und Bibliotheken 61 (1981): 362-79.
13 Strnad 117-25; Press 279.
19 For such policies in Mainz, for example, see François Dureyfus, *Société et mentalités à Mayence dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Colin, 1968), and T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743-1803* (London and New York: Cambridge UP, 1974).