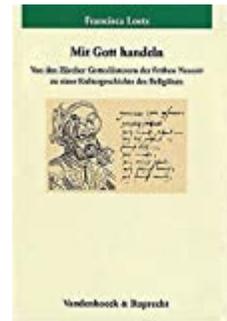


Francisca Loetz. *Mit Gott handeln: Von den Zürcher Gotteslästerern der Frühen Neuzeit zu einer Kulturgeschichte des Religiösen.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002. 576 S. EUR 64.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-525-35173-4.



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Blasphemy and Religiosity in Zurich

Francisca Loetz's fascinating examination of blasphemy and its prosecution in early modern Zurich serves as a vivid illustration of the lethal power that words could possess in early modern Europe. With *Mit Gott handeln*, Francisca Loetz delivers a detailed and interesting analysis of blasphemy and blasphemy prosecution in early modern Zurich that situates the offense—in essence a verbal assault on the honor of God—within the religious culture of the period. Drawing on the theoretical insights of innovative cultural historians like Ute Daniel, Loetz seeks to use blasphemy as a key for unlocking early modern religiosity, for delving into contemporary notions of belief and unbelief.[1] Meticulously constructed, Loetz's work offers a detailed examination of blasphemy and its regulation in light of local conditions as well as early modern behavioral norms.

Mit Gott handeln began as a Habilitationsschrift at the University of Heidelberg in 2001, and in its current form is a volume in the series of monographs issued by the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen. Loetz's contribution, a thorough examination of blasphemy prosecution in Zurich between the late-fifteenth

and early-eighteenth centuries, richly set within its contemporary cultural context, maintains the high standards set by earlier examples of the series. *Mit Gott handeln* is likewise a valuable contribution to one of the most energetic debates in recent Anglo-German historiography, concerning the application of social control in early modern Europe. Loetz's monograph confronts the most important contributions of the past sixty-five years, including the theories of Norbert Elias and Gerhard Oestreich (whose models, known as the "Civilizing Process" and "Sozialdisziplinierung" respectively, she groups together under the rubric "Disziplinierungsparadigma"), Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling ("Konfessionalisierung"), as well as recent works that situate early modern social control initiatives in terms of gradual cultural shifts involving increasing secularization and the imposition of new elite cultural norms ("Akkulturationsprozesse").[2] Judging by Loetz's arguments (as well as the content of her copious footnotes), recent German scholarship on the function of "Justiz," scholarship that highlights the role of horizontal social control and communal self-regulation, was particularly important in framing her analysis.[3]

Loetz begins her examination of blasphemy in Zurich with a detailed description of religious developments in the territory during the sixteenth century. A thorough examination of theological understandings of blasphemy, drawn from the writings of Zwingli and Bullinger, provides a basis for Loetz's arguments concerning the tension between irreligious speech and orthodox religiosity. Loetz's treatment of secular legislation aimed at discouraging blasphemy is just as thorough, tracing the development of anti-blasphemy legislation in Zurich from its origins in an official mandate from 1344 until such legislation began to fade in the early-eighteenth century. This section includes a methodologically sophisticated examination of the source material upon which her study is based.

Here Loetz provides an exhaustive examination of the current "Forschungsstand" in the study of early modern criminality and social control. Her lucid discussion of this important area of historiography is among the strongest elements of the book, and highlights the central issues that divide major explanations of social control and disciplining. A particularly useful part of Loetz's discussion of the theoretical and methodological approaches most relevant to her topic is her treatment of recent approaches to the texts generated by early modern authorities (e.g., scholarship that focuses on the narrative construction of legal texts) and to the meaning of speech acts.^[4] Loetz's analysis of the relationship between courtroom testimony and text creation is particularly enlightening and informative and should illuminate the issue of how to deal with criminal records for any scholars grappling with the methodological complexities inherent in such sources. Here Loetz's explanation of how her own interpretations of the source material from the Zurich archives differs from accounts that treat legal records as purely "fictional" texts is most interesting. For scholars interested in criminality and social control as well as innovative ways of interpreting archival sources, Loetz's lucid presentation of these historiographical and methodological issues makes this book a useful addition to their research library.

Loetz's examination of blasphemy cases from early modern Zurich and their social meaning begins with an analysis of official sanctions against this form of behavior and an examination of the energetic official campaign to detect and punish blasphemers drawn from extensive archival research. Loetz provides a thorough statistical analysis of blasphemy prosecution trends in early modern Zurich from a comparative perspective, weighing local blasphemy penalties against sanctions for

other offenses in Zurich and in other territories. Her research indicates that secular and ecclesiastical authorities in Zurich punished over 500 blasphemers between 1501 and 1747, applying penalties that ranged from fines and public humiliation to banishment and even capital punishment. Loetz fleshes out this statistical analysis with a wealth of examples drawn from Zurich's criminal archives. While Loetz's analysis of the official campaign against blasphemy focuses on consideration of the aims of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities in Zurich, it does not neglect unofficial "horizontal" regulation of public behavior that was so crucial to early modern moral initiatives. In this context her examination of popular participation in criminal prosecution through denouncing blasphemers and through extrajudicial regulation are path-breaking.

Another important aspect of Loetz's examination of blasphemy is an enlightening analysis of the meaning of this complicated "verbal" crime within local society and in the context of the dramatic religious changes of the period. According to Loetz, blasphemy, in terms of how it was understood within local society, ranged in different contexts from a form of protest against central authority to a verbal weapon in the complex struggles for honor that marked early modern social relations. For Loetz, blasphemous utterances can even be profitably understood as a form of transgressive sociability throughout many local social strata.

Mit Gott handeln not only examines blasphemy within its specific social contexts, but also within its religious ones. The heart of the book, Loetz's treatment of the religious significance of blasphemy, is perhaps also its most provocative section. Loetz argues that the religious tensions of the period were often expressed through blasphemy and its regulation: for authorities its repression represented a crucial means for enforcing doctrinal orthodoxy, and for blasphemers sacrilegious speech sometimes represented expressions of personal, unorthodox religious belief or a symbolic struggle with or rebellion against God. Loetz goes so far as to suggest that at its most extreme blasphemy can be understood as an expression of "unbelief" or even as a sort of "pre-modern atheism" (pp. 468-471).

The production quality of this work is absolutely first-rate, with excellent editing and clear reproduction of the tables and charts included in the text, but the most serious weaknesses of this otherwise fine book concern its index and bibliography. Loetz's index is very cursory, just three pages long, which limits the usefulness of this

lengthy work for scholarly research on specific topics. The bibliography, which is of more impressive length and breadth, does not include all of the major works cited in Loetz's footnotes: Norbert Elias, for example, an important scholar dealt with at length in Loetz's discussion of the historiographical tradition, is missing entirely from the bibliography.

The most important contribution of Loetz's book is the exhaustive examination of blasphemy and its regulation in early modern Zurich that it provides, an examination informed by a painstaking analysis of the cultural and religious meanings of the delict as well as fruitful engagement with the most important historiography in the field. Scholars interested in early modern criminality and social control, religiosity, or the history of Zwinglianism or Zurich will no doubt find *Mit Gott handeln* quite interesting. Overall, Loetz's monograph stands as a valuable contribution to the historiography on social control in early modern central Europe, joining earlier works on illicit speech ("Wortschande") in early modern central Europe by Richard van Dülmen, Gerd Schwerhoff, and Heinrich Schmidt.[5]

Notes

[1]. See Ute Daniel, "Kultur und Gesellschaft. Überlegungen zum Gegenstandsbereich der Sozialgeschichte," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19 (1993): pp. 69-99.

[2]. Seminal works involving these historiographical trends analyzed by Loetz include Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939; English reprint edition: Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Gerhard Oestreich, "Strukturprobleme des europäischen Absolutismus," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 55 (1969): pp. 329-347; Wolfgang Reinhard, "Zwang zur Konfessionalisierung?

Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 10 (1983): pp. 437-460; Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung. Eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühen Neuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1981). For early works that adopt an "Akkulturation" approach, see Robert Muchembled, *L'invention de l'homme moderne. Culture et sensibilités en France du X^e au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1988); and Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

[3]. For an example of such recent "Justizforschung," see Andreas Blauert and Gerd Schwerhoff, eds., *Kriminalitätsgeschichte. Beiträge zu einer Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der Vormoderne* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1999).

[4]. Here Natalie Zemon Davis's *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) on the narrative construction of texts is important.

[5]. For seminal works in this area, see Heinrich Schmidt, "Die Ächtung des Fluchens durch reformierte Sittengerichte," in *Der Fluch und der Eid. Die metaphysische Begründung gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens und politischer Ordnung in der ständischen Gesellschaft*, ed. Peter Blickle and Andre Holenstein (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993); Richard van Dülmen, "Wider der Ehre Gottes. Unglaube und Gotteslästerung in der Frühen Neuzeit," *Historische Anthropologie*, 2 (1994): pp. 20-38; and Gerd Schwerhoff, *Gott und die Welt herausfordern. Theologische Konstruktion, rechtliche Bekämpfung und soziale Praxis der Blasphemie vom 13. bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Habilitationsschrift Bielefeld, 1996).

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