

Report on my Von Trott Bursary stay in Göttingen,
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I applied for the von Trott bursary with a two-fold objective: to be able to conduct research at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek for sources on 1600-1800 church rituals and to make contact with early modern scholars at Göttingen University. I can only say that when I was so fortunate as to receive the scholarship, the bursary not only fulfilled these expectations but far exceeded them.

I arrived in Göttingen in the autumn of 2019 and was greeted by Lars Jakob, the von Trott project manager, who went out of his way to sort out the administrative side of things and afterwards took me on a guided tour of the main University building with its Aula, meeting rooms – and former student prison cells with their famous 19th and early 20th century graffiti on the walls.

I began work by familiarising myself with the library sourcing system as well as getting to grips with relevant talks and events, the so-called *Veranstaltungen*. The timing of the bursary could not have been more ideal as I had just finished my doctoral degree in Oxford which centres on *The Ritual of Churching of Women after Childbirth in Denmark, 1500-1900*. Briefly explained, churching is based on Levitical impurity laws which stated that childbirth rendered the mother impure and she therefore had to stay isolated at home for a set cleansing period after which she was taken through a purification ritual which enabled her to resume her place in Church and society. This Levitical law was adopted into Christianity and later reshaped into a rite of thanksgiving by 16th century Lutheran Reformers. Although churching affected most childbearing women not just in Denmark but in most of early modern Europe, very little research has been conducted on the subject. My work has established, however, that far from having been a ritual imposed from above, Lutheran mothers were active agents in the retention of churching which they reshaped to fit their personal needs and marked with festive celebrations. Churching thus sheds new light on the process of religious reform, its complicated relationship with State and ecclesiastical authority, and its reception, resistance and reconfiguration at parish level. Unmarried mothers were barred from churching and were instead subjected to humiliating *public confession*, another rite which has hitherto received little exposure.

My initial research took me to the *Historische Bibliothek* where the staff was extremely helpful. I soon had a good collection on confession, particularly from the 18th century as sources were relatively plentiful. As for churching material, this is much rarer and always a game of patience because the rite is usually discussed in connection with other topics and often called a variety of names – ‘geseegneten Kirchgang’ being one of them. I was fortunate enough, however, to identify a small, but precious collection of churching hymns, sermons and liturgy. Of particular note was the rare find of a detailed report on the 1783 churching of Louise, Herzogin zu Sachsen (1757 – 1830), the wife of Herzog Karl August of Sachsen-Eisenach upon which occasion a specific churching-cum-baptism hymn (extant) was composed and printed.

Churching is inextricably linked to childbirth, which means that the study of churching intersects not just with church history and social history but also with medical history and anthropology. I therefore divided my time to include visits to the libraries of the *Theologische*

Fakultät, the SUB (the main library) and the *Bereichsbibliothek*. The latter holds important secondary literature on obstetrics and in this connection, I made an unforgettable visit to the *Sammlung zur Geschichte der Geburtsmedizin*. The exhibition is only open by appointment, and I was given a private tour of its 18th - and 19th century collection of obstetric instruments, body parts in the *Präparatesammlung* – the foetuses of conjoined twins will forever stick in my memory – and excerpts of medical reports on 18th century childbirths from Göttingen's first *Accouchierhaus* (birth clinic) established in 1785. In this connection, I learned the name of a leading Göttingen scholar on 18th-century obstetrics with whom I later met up for a fruitful and stimulating conversation. In the course of my stay, I also contacted and met up with other influential Reformation/early modern church history scholars and was granted access to their lectures.

As to general cultural intake, Göttingen has much to offer, and I can only list some of the highlights. I was given a private tour of the Scull collection, and I thoroughly enjoyed the *Kunstsammlung* (only open on Sundays), in particular its permanent exhibition with its rich collection of 17th-century everyday motifs and other outstanding works.

The churches of Göttingen are another *must*, from the Paulinerkirche which now houses archival material to the St. Johannis Kirche with its magnificent stained-glass windows with Reformation motifs. The *Städtisches Museum* is a small gem to which I made several visits because of its many 15th - and 16th-century Marian sculptures and triptychs. Moreover, I visited the museum's current exhibition, *Unter Verdacht*, which focussed on Göttingen and the role of the University during the Nazi years. This was a fitting preparation for the annual Von Trott Lecture, which fortunately took place during my stay. The well-attended event included a presentation by Frau Dorothee Engelhard, chair of the Von Trott Foundation, who spoke on the work and plans of the Trott Foundation, followed by the main speech given by the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Sebastian Wood, centring on the ramifications of Brexit.

To the early modern scholar, Göttingen is ideally situated for excursions into the wider region. I had hoped to visit the von Trott Museum in Imshausen, but it was 'between exhibitions' and remains on my wish list. Instead, I took the opportunity to visit the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel, some two hours train ride away, and over a weekend I met up with my former Oxford supervisor, Professor Lyndal Roper, for a study-trip on the Peasants' War (1524-25) with her final-year students to Mühlhausen, where we enjoyed the guidance of local scholars in the *Rathaus* and Archives, the *Marienkirche* and the *Bauernkriegsmuseum*. The following day we visited the *Panoramamuseum* in Bad Frankenhausen and rounded off the trip with a visit to Erfurt to see the Gothic cathedral.

As for non-academic pursuits, my *Gästeausweis* not only acted as library card but also provided access to cheap lunches in the *Mensas*, the student canteens, as well as giving reduction at the *Hochschulsport* (<https://my.sport.uni-goettingen.de>), the University sports centre with its 25m swimming pool where I became a regular. I also enjoyed running in Thorer Park and the *Alte Botanischer Garten*.

Göttingen is a city of bicycles, and although I had rented a good bike for the duration, I soon took to walking as distances are small and it better allowed for enjoying the many historic buildings *en route*. My stay extended into December which meant I was even in time to enjoy the annual Christmas market by the old *Rathaus* with its plethora of *heiße Schokolade*, *Glühwein*, *Bratwurst* (half a metre long!) and warm waffles.

One may reasonably round off by asking how research into early modern church rituals connects to the Adam von Trott Study Bursary with its key focus on *democracy, peace, resistance, conscientious thinking*, and *European and international affair*? To this, I would answer: because early modern churching and confession were pan-European rituals that were forever renegotiated by church leaders and parishioners alike, and which resonate with gender and religious issues of today.

I thank the von Trott Bursary warmly for giving me this opportunity to research in the many libraries and archives, to make contact with a range of distinguished scholars and to take advantage of the many cultural offers in and around the city. It has enriched my life.