

Reforming Church History. The Impact of the Reformation on Early Modern European Historiography, edited by Gehrt D., Matthias M, and Salatowsky S2023

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This book sheds new light on a matter that we have often taken for granted: the historiography of the early modern period was static and adds little to our knowledge of the Reformation and early post-Reformation period. Yet, the works gathered together in this volume challenge such an assumption as newly uncovered materials, mainly correspondence from the library of Ernst Salomon Cyprian, have become available. They derive from the early 18th century when, through correspondence and other means, the Reformation was becoming internationalised. This was the period of late Lutheran orthodoxy, Pietism and the early Enlightenment. Investigations relating to these documents show how historiographical works on the Reformation can assist us in enlarging our understanding of approaches to Reformation studies.

The study is divided into four sections—emerging narratives, cultivation of Protestant perspectives, historiographic contentions, and changing approaches. There are 13 chapters in all, by experts in their respective fields, exploring these themes and offering new insights into Reformation and Protestant discourses.

One example from the Pietist tradition which challenges our assumptions regarding Luther and Zwingli emerges from the Hutterite chronicles, significantly authored by victims rather than victors giving them a certain integrity as they interrogate commonly held assumptions about the restoration of the true apostolic church.

Perhaps the highlight of the development of historiography can be found in the work of Barthold Nicolaus Krohn during the Enlightenment period when he integrated handwriting, critical methods, and historical interpretation. A number of issues arise from his work. His treatment of Melchior Hoffman's book on the Anabaptists is



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considered to be impartial as the movement is interpreted in terms of environment and context. Then, his work is based in a wider context than the university and includes both academics and pastors. As he wrote Anabaptist historiography, it was still an emerging discipline. The actual process of writing history was the creation of historical understanding. For Krohn, compiling a comprehensive bibliography was crucial to writing a critical history based on impartiality, a valuable criterion in his writing, expanding and annotating detailed notes. His extensive reading was the foundation of his communication, indicating his pragmatism and realism in writing history. This resulted from his constant return to original sources and interpretations internally and with other scholars and their writings. He constantly compiled lists and revisited them in the organisation of his work. From this, he developed research questions and returned to his sources and research material. Then, he moved from his structured evidence to the production of a historical narrative. Reading and writing about reading form the basis of Krohn's historical method. In this, he gave us the basic guidelines for a modern historiographical methodology.