

ABSTRACT

This book based on my dissertation looks at the history of the Cistercian convent in Gutenzell, near Biberach in southwest Germany. Founded around 1237 it was secularised in 1803. The women of the convent continued to live together after 1803 and the last nun died in 1851. Several factors made a study of this convent compelling, among them that it was an imperial convent with a continuous history to 1803, that no comprehensive study of the convent has hitherto been made, and that outstanding access to sources was available.

A well-preserved and extensive archive of the former convent, now in the Kreisarchiv of Biberach, and rich sources in seven additional archives, formed the basis for this study. The archive of the former convent includes extensive documents from 1238 to 1803. In addition, the material of several other archives was used in the study, among them the archive of the former monastery of Salem whose abbots functioned as *pater immediatus* to the Gutenzell convent from 1238 to 1753. This made it possible to study the convent from a variety of different perspectives. What really makes this an unusual study was the existence of files and correspondence after 1803. Almost all of the reports of the administrator of the former convent's territory to the Count and many of the Count's resolutions up to the 1860s are preserved in the Kreisarchiv of Biberach. In addition to this, further correspondence with the Diocese can be found in the Diözesanarchiv of Rottenburg and with the government of Württemberg in the Staatsarchiv of Ludwigsburg. This created an ideal basis for a study of the convent after 1803.

The main focus of the study is the convent's self-conception (*Selbstverständnis*) over the long term, the Secularisation in 1803, and the aftermath of this event. For this the main questions asked were: How did the historical experience and the self-conception of the convent look like before and after the Secularisation? How did the Secularisation affect the convent and how did the women react to this? Were they offered any alternatives and did the Secularisation have any consequence on their existence?

The aim of the study is to confront traditional approaches to the history of convents with specific questions relating to gender studies, combined with a micro-historical methodology. A multidimensional approach is substituted for a merely chronological approach. The methods of analysis, therefore, are gender, space-perception and the social status of the nuns. These three categories are used in combination to analyse specific main topics and in this way to illuminate potential dimensions in the history of the convent.

The specific themes of the history of the convent that were selected are reflected in the structure of the dissertation. The first chapter provides an introduction to the specific situation of Cistercian nuns and women in early modern times, following this with a historical survey of Gutenzell itself, concentrating on the main developments and their historical contexts. It then describes the convent in terms of »space«. For this, space is defined in a variety of different ways, such as the living space (everyday life within the immediate surroundings), the space of the people involved (nuns and lay sisters), the regulated space limited by rules and norms, the organisational space and the space for action.

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This analysis shows that the women of the convent were using these different spaces simultaneously and were even able to find and create new spaces for themselves in between these externally defined spaces.

The second chapter analyses four constitutive elements of space and of the self-conception of the convent: the social history of the convent's nuns and lay sisters, including the role of social status and education; the power and jurisdiction of the convent, with special emphasis on the vigorous disputes with Salem over matters of high jurisdiction; the order itself, the significance of the visitations and the convent's relationship to the *pater immediatus*; and finally the tradition of the convent and its representation in historiography and iconography. In exploring these elements it becomes clear that the women of the convent had a variety of different conceptions of themselves: as women of status, as rulers of their territory, as Cistercians and specifically as members of the Gutenzell convent itself. These identities could vary in focus, but were also used consciously when this proved necessary.

The third chapter examines the Secularisation of the convent in 1803 and its consequences for the nuns and lay sisters of Gutenzell. This constitutes the main focus of the dissertation and builds on the findings of the first two chapters. After accepting the loss of their former space, the women of the convent had to find a completely new orientation for themselves. Apart from staying in the former convent's building and continuing their communal life as best they could no other acceptable alternatives were given. For the study of the Secularisation and its aftermath, several phases can be distinguished. The first phase is the period immediately preceding the Secularisation, and is characterized in terms of the specific social and economic situation in Gutenzell. The second phase involves the preparation for the break itself, followed by the shift in power that occurred when Count Toerring appropriated the property in March 1803. The third phase is the slow establishment of an adapted world for the women of the convent between 1803 and 1809. The following years are described on the basis of the reports of the Count's administrator and the correspondence of the abbess, the Count, the Bishop in Konstanz and Freiherr von Wessenberg, and the first secular parish priest of Gutenzell, Augustin Rugel. The fourth phase is characterized by the coexistence between the Count's administration and the convent after the death of the last abbess in 1809, Maria Justina von Erolzheim, and by the way in which the women of the convent tried to redefine and re-establish a life for themselves. The last phase is characterized by the slow disappearance of the convent from the everyday life of Gutenzell up to the point at which the last nun died in 1851 and the convent's building was left empty for several years. The extensive available sources make it possible to create a detailed picture of the convent's life after 1803. It becomes apparent that the period after 1803 was characterized by continuity as well as change. The women in the convent continued to follow their religious life almost without alteration until 1808, while the abbess tried to cling to her privileges and rights for as long as possible, struggling vigorously against each additional loss. At the same time the status of the convent had changed dramatically: the territory was now ruled by a secular Count and the connection to the order of the Cistercians had been broken. The abbess gradually lost all her former rights both inside and outside the convent. The parallels of continuity and change created tension within the convent and between the convent and the administration. Only when the last abbess died did the convent try to adapt its life to the new political and social surroundings.

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One of the few careers that women could follow within a convent was that of apothecary, but they were not allowed to practise outside the convent. Therefore the last chapter deals with the convent's apothecary (*Klosterapotheke*) and the apothecaries, covering the period from the seventeenth century up to 1839, the year it was finally closed down. This serves as an example of continuity in one of the convent's areas for women's specialised work, which was only accessible for women within a convent and from where they were finally excluded with the dissolution of convent and apothecary. The convent's apothecary was one of the strongest elements of the convent's self-conception, which survived the Secularisation of 1803. During the eighteenth century it became very important and famous in the region. Even after 1803 it supplied Gutenzell and the surrounding villages, especially the poor, with medicines. The last apothecary, Juliana Rundel, was able to run the convent's apothecary with the strong support of the Count's administrator. But after her death the convent's apothecary was shut down.

Using the approach described above, it proved possible to illuminate in detail both continuity and change in the convent after 1803. The micro-historical approach helped in revealing aspects of the history of the Secularisation in 1803 which have hitherto attracted little attention. With the Secularisation it became clear that the various spaces the women had used before 1803 were taken from them without their being provided with any real alternatives. New spaces and new forms of living had to be created by the women themselves. The combination of the categories of gender and space proves to be particularly enlightening, because the Secularisation of 1803 not only altered the religious and (eventually) the political landscape of the German Southwest, but also the lives of women and the concept of gender itself.