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Brief Biography:

I studied history and political science at the University of Vienna and at École normale supérieure (Paris). After working in multiple projects for the edition of primary sources, I am currently employed as a researcher in this capacity at the University of Eichstätt- Ingolstadt. My research interests include various aspects of the history of historical science, notably the development of historical criticism in the 17th and 18th centuries, and I have published several articles on these questions centred on the persons of Bernhard Pez and his correspondents, as well as (with Thomas Wallnig) a volume of letters to and from Pez.

Paper Title:

Nobilissimus Benedictinorum exercitus: Benedictine historia litteraria and its sources

Paper Abstract:

Historia litteraria was a key element in Early Modern approaches to the organisation of knowledge: a field of bibliographic meta-learning that attempted to survey existing literary production. It was at once a tool for keeping the ever-expanding wealth of available written knowledge manageable, and a reflection of shifts in the subdivision of this plethora into sections perceived as thematically coherent. Of course, in historia litteraria as in other fields, choices and interests were hardly a product of purely internal logic, but were closely bound up with political and societal conditions and intentions. Thus, it was frequent to write the historia litteraria or assemble the Bibliotheca (the most common title for bibliographic works) of a political or institutional entity, be it a principality, a city or a religious order. The collection of authors and their works served, in these cases, to increase the prestige and bolster the collective identity of a group by documenting the intellectual achievements of its members.

Bernhard Pez's uncompleted lifelong project, the Bibliotheca Benedictina, illustrates both the epistemologically innovative and the institutionally interested aspects of historia litteraria, and allows analysis of their complex interaction. Pez was quite explicit that his efforts to collect and publish information on Benedictine authors were aimed at upholding the eminent status of his order, not only in general terms but also in concrete rivalries, especially with the Jesuits: he was assembling a "most noble host" of learned Benedictine witnesses to defend against all comers. At the same time, he engaged in intense methodological reflection on the criteria of such work, and intended to excel prior efforts not only in completeness, but in accuracy, in standardisation of the individual articles, and in the use of manuscript sources for the critical evaluation of traditional knowledge.

While the Bibliotheca Benedictina never came into existence, Pez's prefaces to his Thesaurus anecdotorum novissimus give us an impression of what his approach looked like in action. In my contribution, I will examine several cases of Pez's assembling, weighing and presenting of information on Medieval Benedictine authors gleaned from a wide array of sources. We will see that critical rigour could be by turns enhanced or dulled by the demands of the institutional interests motivating Pez's efforts.