

Call for Sessions for the 50th German Historikertag : “Winners and Losers”

Organized by: German Historical Association (VHD)

Date and location: September 23 – 26, 2014, Göttingen, Georg August University

Deadline: October 31, 2013

Call for Sessions for the 50th German Historikertag in Göttingen, 2014

The 50th German Historikertag will be held from September 23 – 26, 2014, at the Georg August University in Göttingen. As in previous years, the board and committee of the German Historical Association (VHD) have selected a theme to serve as a general orientation for all session applications. The theme is

Winners and Losers

Since antiquity, the idea of “winners and losers” has been a central component in the interpretation of historical events. Our image of winners and losers has been shaped by competitive scenarios such as athletic contests, democratic elections, and rule-governed conflicts that leave the victor and the vanquished face-to-face. Historical processes, such as the creation or collapse of statehood, the opening up of trade routes, colonial expansion, and the concentration of spaces of communication, also have winners and losers. They need not directly interact against one another but emerge as opponents only in the wake of historical research and as a result of historical judgment.

All talk about winners and losers is always dependent on perspective. Assumptions about what “game” is actually being played and the expectations regarding future developments help determine who is considered a winner and a loser. Teleological concepts of history, such as Marxism-Leninism or what the British historian Herbert Butterfield criticized already in 1931 as the “Whig Interpretation of History,” have arranged history in consecutive stages marked by the struggle to achieve history’s ultimate goal. However, all narratives of “victorious” concepts must be scrutinized for the blind spots of such perspectives, be it in the history of political ideas or the history of science. In order to detect unrealized possibilities, byways, or supposed dead-ends in history, we need a methodical approach that takes into account the heuristic problems inherent in the dichotomy of “winner and loser.”

The historical attribution of victory and defeat, of winning and losing, is pitted against the self-image of the actors. It is only through the perspectives of the affected groups and individuals that we can access and understand the ways in which defeat or loss is experienced and communicated. Discourses

of the losers can be a necessary corrective for a historiography that may find it hard to incorporate this perspective, despite its claim to objectivity.

The theme of the meeting focuses on the following questions, among others, concerning both historical events and categories of historical interpretation:

- Which presuppositions are at work when historiography labels historical actors as “winners” and “losers”? Under what circumstances are reinterpretations of these roles possible?
- How do historical actors deal with winning and losing, victory and defeat? How do they react to the loss of, among other things, symbolic capital like honor? What good can come from the experience of loss? What can the victor or winner lose with respect, say, to political circumspection?
- What forms of social interaction can be observed between “winners” and “losers”? Under what conditions is interaction deliberately avoided with regard to future cooperation?
- How are “winners” and “losers” present in our collective memory? How do the depictions of victory and defeat, winning and losing that are found in history books, films, museums, and history lessons influence the roles attributed to and public perception of “winners” and “losers”?
- What role does the idea of a close correlation between winning and losing play in the zero-sum game in historiography? How is this aspect handled in, for example, military and diplomatic history, environmental history, economic history, or gender history?
- What historiographical concepts and narratives offer an alternative to the binary classification of “winners” and “losers”?

As has been the case at previous meetings, not all sessions will pertain to this theme. A certain part of the overall program will focus instead on other topics in order to adequately facilitate the presentation of the full range of current research.

The committee asks that all proposals for sessions at the 50th German Historikertag be sent in by October 31, 2013. Submissions can be made either online at (www.historikerverband.de/historikertag/50-deutscher-historikertag-2014/einreichungen.html), by e-mail (PDF format), or by mail to our executive office (address listed below). The application should include:

- Name(s) of the applicant(s)
- Title of the session
- Time period (ancient history, medieval history, early modern history, modern and recent history, contemporary history, epoch-spanning)
- Panel discussion (yes/no)
- Abstract (max. 7,500 characters with spaces). The abstract should indicate the central issue, content, and aims of the session, as well as its mode of presentation.
- List of contributors (as final as possible) and titles of papers
- Address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the applicant(s)

Only members of the German Historical Association may submit session applications. If you are not a member, it is possible to join the VHD at the same time you submit your proposal. The necessary

forms can be found at the VHD website or can be obtained from the executive office. Foreign scholars may also submit a proposal in cooperation with at least one VHD member.

Sessions at the German Historikertag are meant to spark controversial discussions. Thus, applicants are discouraged from replicating certain existing professional relationships, such as research groups, in the proposed session. Please make sure the session includes a well-balanced variety of subjects and presenters.

Aside from the traditional session format in which a number of papers are presented, alternative modes of presentation are also possible at this meeting, including shorter sessions (about 2 hours in length).

Additional information about the meeting in Göttingen will be available shortly at the homepage of both the Historikertag (www.historikertag.de) and the German Historical Association (www.historikerverband.de).

If you have any further questions about the meeting or the session application process, do not hesitate to contact us.

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