



Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a Nineteenth-Century German Village

David Blackbourn

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In a riveting work of historical research, David Blackbourn brings might the period surrounding the days in July 1876 when three young girls claimed to have sighted the Virgin Mary in the fields outside the German town of Marpingen.

As journalists, priests, and sellers of pious memorabilia descended on Marpingen, the sleepy town rapidly metamorphosed into a cause celebre, with supporters and opponents referring to it as "the German Lourdes," and even "the Bethlehem of Germany." "It is an undeniable fact that the whole world is talking about Marpingen," wrote one sympathetic commentator. "Marpingen has become the center of events that have shaken the world," suggested another.

Tens of thousands of pilgrims flocked to the town, prompting numerous claims of miraculous cures -- as well as military intervention, the dispatch of an undercover detective, parliamentary debate, and a dramatic trial.

Pondering what had happened from another perspective was a man on whom the drama placed a heavy burden. "The events are so tremendous," wrote a Marpingen parish priest, "that a true account of them would already fill a book."

Blackbourn, a leading historian of modern Germany, vividly portrays the Catholic world of the Bismarckian era through a detailed exploration of the changing social, economic, and community structures that formed its matrix, and provides a sensitive account of popular religious beliefs. Ranging widely across the fields of social, cultural, and political history, he powerfully evokes the crisis-laden atmosphere of the 1870s, revealing the subtle interplay between politics and religion, the changing nature of the family itself, and the ferment of ideas that fueled the great debate over "modernity." And in a final chapter, he looks ahead to the renewed apparitions of the Virgin in twentieth-century Marpingen against the background of war, Nazism, and the Cold War. A remarkable piece of historical detective work by an important scholar.

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