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Monastic Prisons and Torture Chambers: Crime and Punishment in Central European Monasteries, 16001800

Ulrich L. Lehner

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Following the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Catholic religious orders underwent substantial reform. Nevertheless, on occasion monks and nuns had to be disciplined and--if they had committed a crime--punished. Consequently, many religious orders relied on sophisticated criminal law traditions that included torture, physical punishment, and prison sentences. Ulrich L. Lehner provides for the first time an overview of how monasteries in central Europe prosecuted crime and punished their members, and thus introduces a host of new questions for anyone interested in state-church relations, gender questions, the history of violence, or the development of modern monasticism. "Lehner's brave, ambitious, and learned study uncovers the little-known history of secret monastic prisons for wayward monks and nuns, and the clandestine use of torture in monastic legal proceedings. . . . This is church history at its best. It deserves to be widely known and imitated." --H. C. Erik Midelfort, University of Virginia "In this path-breaking, lucid book, Ulrich Lehner challenges conventional wisdom on the nature and purpose of prisons and punishment in early modern central Europe. Exploiting neglected evidence on monastic prisons and trial procedures, he demonstrates that the Mendicant orders continued medieval standards as the post-Tridentine religious adopted milder discipline. . . . A book of major significance, it will spur further research into our understanding of confinement and punishment." --Gregg Roeber, Pennsylvania State University "Ulrich Lehner, who has become a master of all things Catholic in eighteenth-century Europe, here examines the sorry record of crime and punishment within selected European monasteries. His conclusion is persuasive--that moral failings of these institutions should not overwhelm other evidence of improved moral standards in the Tridentine Church. All who look for a fuller account of official Catholicism in the era whipsawed by both the Enlightenment and rising governmental absolutism will thank him for the careful research underlying this book." --Mark A. Noll, University of Notre Dame

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