



Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night (Studies in Early Modern German History)

Wolfgang Behringer

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Shaman of Oberstdorf tells the fascinating story of a sixteenth-century mountain village caught in a panic of its own making. Four hundred years ago the Bavarian alpine town of Oberstdorf, surrounded by the towering peaks of the Vorarlberg, was awash in legends and rumors of prophets and healers, of spirits and specters, of witches and soothsayers. The book focuses on the life of a horse wrangler named Chonrad Stoeckhlin [1549–1587], whose extraordinary visions of the afterlife and enthusiastic practice of the occult eventually led to his death?and to the death of a number of village women?for crimes of witchcraft.

In addition to recounting Stoeckhlin's tale, this book examines the larger world of alpine myths concerning ghosts and other spirits of the night, documenting how these myths have been abused by German political movements over the years. As an introduction to modern German witchcraft research, as a study of the local impact of the Counter Reformation, and as a historical investigation into popular culture, Behringer's book has the advantage of telling a compelling individual story amidst larger discussions of peasant raptures, magical healing, and unfamiliar alpine notions such as the "furious army," the "wild hunt," popular bonfire festivals, and eerie echoes of pagan Wotan.

Wolfgang Behringer is one of the premier historians of German witchcraft, not only because of his mastery of the subject at the regional level, but because he also writes movingly, forcefully, and with an eye for the telling anecdote. Reminiscent of such classics as *The Cheese and the Worms* and *The Return of Martin Guerre*, *Shaman of Oberstdorf* is an unforgettable look at early modern German folklore and culture.

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