

## **MEDICAL SPACE, PRACTICES AND IMAGE OF PSYCHIATRY IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE FROM EARLY MODERN PERIOD TO MID-20TH CENTURY**

**Christina EIDEN**, University of Augsburg

**Sabine JESNER**, Museum of Military History, Vienna

**Anastassiya SCHACHT**, Heidelberg University

Panel Moderation / Panel Chair:

**Heike KARGE**, University of Graz

The proposed panel explores the historical development of medical spaces in Europe, emphasizing the transformation of psychiatric institutions, practices, and their societal perceptions. Beginning in the early modern period, the evolution of psychiatric spaces reflects broader shifts in medical theory, social attitudes, and therapeutic approaches. Key periods, such as the Enlightenment, witnessed the rise of asylums designed to isolate and treat mental illness, embodying a tension between therapeutic intent and social control. During the 19th century, psychiatry gained institutional authority, with practices increasingly formalized through advances in medical science and the professionalization of psychiatric care. These developments influenced public perceptions, which oscillated between stigmatization and empathy for the mentally ill. In the 20th century, reforms in psychiatric care redefined the approach to treatment. The panel shows how the interplay of medical practice and cultural image has shaped not only the treatment of mental illness but also the broader conception of health and care.

The crossroads of three empires, Central Europe has been the hub for intensive exchange of medical ideas and practices from the early modernity to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several German-speaking psychiatric schools – in Munich, Prague, Vienna, or Berlin, – engaged in avid circulation of knowledge across the crown lands and beyond the imperial borders. Fellow experts not only from the German and Habsburg, but also from the Romanov empire regularly visited laboratories, enrolled in universities, and attended mental institutions for practical experience.

Suggested panel studies how psychiatric knowledge and practices evolved, circulated, were mutually enriched or refuted in a highly entangled space of Central Europe and contact zones. With its longue durée lens, the panel allows tracing continuities and innovation across the three empires from the Early Modern era and into the mid-twentieth century. Sabine Jesner examines how the Habsburg Monarchy in the 18th century perceived and addressed mental health issues arising from war, analyzing the factors that shaped these interpretations and the strategies employed by the Empire to manage them. A comparison of rural psychiatric structures in southern Bavarian Swabia with the only psychiatric hospital in Habsburg Bukovina in Czernowitz concludes Christina Eiden's contribution. The socio-economic background of the patients is analysed, taking into account the developing and volatile medical diagnostic criteria at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Anastassiya Schacht discusses how global developments of the 20th century impacted upon the region's networks of psychiatric knowledge and cooperation and allowed for local actors to develop their new highly complex agencies as international diplomats across the increasingly split and estranged global psychiatric community.

The proposed panel addresses several themes outlined in the call for papers, offering fresh perspectives on the historical treatment of mental illness. The approaches form interfaces with the

Cultural and Social History, the Military History, the Administrative History, the History of Science and Technology, and their connections to the History of Medicine.

Individual Abstracts (in chronological order) & CVs:

**SABINE JESNER**

**FIRST STEPS IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN THE HABSBURG MONARCHY: UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING WAR-RELATED ILLNESSES**

This paper examines the intersection of war and mental health within the Habsburg Monarchy during the 18th century, a period characterized by frequent and protracted military conflicts. Warfare imposed significant psychological strain on soldiers and the civilian population. Symptoms resembling what is now understood as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — including chronic anxiety, melancholia, and unexplained physical ailments — were observed but poorly understood. Military and medical authorities often struggled to interpret these conditions, framing them variously as moral weakness, divine punishment, or imbalances in physical humors. The contribution explores the cultural and institutional factors that influenced the perception and management of mental illness in the Habsburg Monarchy. However, the analysis is complicated by a notable lack of detailed source material, particularly from the perspectives of afflicted individuals, as surviving records are often filtered through the biases of medical or military authorities. Additionally, the role of Catholic theology in framing suffering and healing provided a distinctive lens through which mental afflictions were interpreted and treated. By situating the psychological toll of war within the broader narrative of early modern European medicine and Habsburg statecraft, this research contributes to the historiography of war trauma. It reveals how pre-modern societies in central Europe and contact zones grappled with the invisible wounds of conflict and highlights the enduring legacies of these early understandings in contemporary discussions on the psychological impacts of war.

**CV:**

Sabine Jesner is an early modern historian and currently a researcher at the Museum of Military History (Heeresgeschichtliches Museum) in Vienna. Previously, she worked as a project head, principal investigator, and senior lecturer in the Section for Southeast European History and Anthropology (SEEHA) at the University of Graz, as well as an external lecturer at the University of Innsbruck. She studied history and law at the University of Graz, earning her doctorate in 2013 in the history of Southeast Europe. Her doctoral thesis examined Habsburg border policy in the Transylvanian Military Border, focusing on defense and plague prevention strategies. Starting in 2015, she collaborated on a research project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), investigating Habsburg personnel management in the Banat. Until 2023, she held a Hertha Firnberg fellowship (also funded by the FWF), during which she explored the emerging Habsburg health systems. She identifies as a military and medical historian with a strong interest in socio-cultural dynamics. Her research adopts a historical-anthropological approach, incorporating gendered perspectives.

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**CHRISTINA EIDEN**

**ARSON, 'SENILE MARASMUS' AND DELINQUENCY - A COMPARISON OF THE EARLY YEARS OF THE „HEIL- UND PFLEGEANSTALTEN“ IRSEE AND KAUFBEUREN WITH THE „BUKOWINAER LANDES-HEIL- UND PFLEGEANSTALT CZERNOWITZ“**

This paper examines the founding years of Swabian psychiatric institutions in comparison with the "Bukowinaer Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Czernowitz" (founded in 1902), the only psychiatric institution in the former outermost Habsburg crown land of Bukovina. The second modern psychiatric institution in Bavaria was opened in 1849 in the secularised Irsee monastery as the first Swabian "district asylum", which, after the construction of the new "Sanatorium for the Mentally Ill" in Kaufbeuren in 1876, became the department for the chronically ill of the latter.

The chronologically almost complete and unique source material makes it possible to carry out a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of the patients while taking into account the developing and volatile medical diagnostic criteria in the early years as well as in specific periods of crisis, and to investigate previously unexplored deviations and peculiarities of the founding processes from a normative research perspective.

Questions concerning the characterisation of the socio-economic environment as well as group and gender dynamics with regard to the patients, but also in relation to the doctors, the authorities and social perception offer the opportunity to examine time-bound structures in different political environments (Habsburg Monarchy with the crown land Bukovina, Kingdom of Bavaria, Parliamentary Democracy and National Socialist Dictatorship).

The additional comparative perspective examines the similarities and differences of the psychiatric institutions in an international context and illustrates the national and regional influences on the diagnosis and treatment of the patient as well as the institutions themselves. This will enable us to analyse new insights into the development of the welfare and psychiatric system, which can also be seen as an indicator of economic and socio-political developments in the state, and to draw conclusions about the progress and the changes in medical practice in the crown lands.

**CV:**

Christina Eiden is a modern historian and currently works as a cultural and project manager at the Bukowina Institute, an academic affiliate of Augsburg University, while completing her doctorate at the University of Augsburg Professorship "History of the Interrelationship of Germany with Eastern Europe." Her dissertation 'Arson, "senile marasmus" and delinquency - socio-economic and medical-historical analyses of psychiatric documents in the 19th and 20th centuries' deals with the analysis of annual reports and patient files of Swabian psychiatric institutions in their early years in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as in times of crisis and compares them with the 'Bukowinaer Landes-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Czernowitz' (founded in 1902) in Bukovina.

She studied at Augsburg University and graduated with a Master's degree in 'Interdisciplinary European Studies'. Her studies focused on medical history and the analysis of social developments of various groups in an (inter)national context. She has supervised multiple projects, such as the project 'Inklusion-Inklusija', funded by the Foundation "Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft".

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**ANASTASSIYA SCHACHT**

**FRIENDLY ALIENS – CIRCULATING PSYCHIATRIC KNOWLEDGE ACROSS THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY CENTRAL EUROPE**

The lion-share of research in the history of psychiatry in Russian (post-)imperial context tilts heavily towards Russo-German medical internationalism, and largely overlooks post-Habsburg Central Europe or only considers it as a victim of forced Sovietization in the postwar decades. However, a closer look into the medical and specifically psychiatric entanglements of the last imperial decades of both Habsburg and Romanov empires reveals a far more intricate pattern of transimperial knowledge exchange, cooperation, and academic diplomacy. This dense exchange of knowledge impacted creation and adjustment of clinical pictures, e.g. of schizophrenia, categorization of mental disease, collection of psychiatric statistics, and treatment approaches. This exchange, too, pathed the way for a highly original way how the region interacted throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

The talk rediscovers the Central European scholarly imprint that influenced postimperial/early Soviet ideas about the nature, progress and treatment of schizophrenia. It reconstructs how early Soviet psychiatrists acquired, contextualized, made use of and interacted with the “schizophrenic” research in Vienna, Prague and beyond.

The rise of social medicine and highly innovative approaches to the treatment of the schizophrenic spectrum in the interwar Vienna included the early autism research, which dialogued with the work done by early Soviet scholars (e.g. Sukhareva) and appealed greatly to the Bolshevik project of nurturing the “new man” free of mental disease and ailment.

Finally, this emerging role of arguably no ideological friend, nor foe, but a “friendly alien” continued into the postwar decades, when the Cold War propelled Central European states into a new role of either a satellite (for State Socialist bloc) or the block-free intermediary (for Austria). With ideological tensions mounting over the decades to come, the region grew to embrace their newly acquired agency as a stage of psychiatric internationalism and mediating ground between the blocs.

**CV:**

Anastassiya Schacht obtained her PhD from the University of Vienna, where her project was supported by a grant from the Vienna Doctoral School of Historical and Cultural Studies. Her doctoral project analysed the conflict around the political abuse of psychiatry against dissidents in the USSR and the strategies of dealing with ethical rule-breaking by a Cold War superpower in and on behalf of international psychiatry in the 1970s-1990s.

Her recent and upcoming publications deal with the history of psychiatry, public health and international networks of expert knowledge, as well as with the lasting impact of dictatorships upon intellectual communities in East Central Europe. Starting in September 2024, she joined the Historical Seminar of Heidelberg University to work on her new project on rejected statehoods of the post-1917 Russian empire.

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