

## Historical Theme and Author

The castle of Trifels was a place of huge political significance throughout the 1190s - the same decade that in traditional interpretations of German history has long been accorded the status of being a major turning point. The medieval Reich was said to have reached its apex in 1194, when King Richard of England did homage and when Henry VI conquered Sicily, only to go into decline very soon afterwards when the double election of 1198 marked the beginning of the long and damaging civil war between Staufens and Welf. In this story of decline the princes and the papacy have always been regarded as the 'Totengräber einer starken monarchischen Zentralgewalt' (Knut Görich). But Richard the Lionheart also played a decisive political role in 1198.

In this talk I pose a counterfactual question. How different might the history of Germany have been if Henry VI had freed the crusader-king as soon as it had been politically feasible? What, in other words, might have happened if King Richard had never been sent as a prisoner to the Trifels?

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