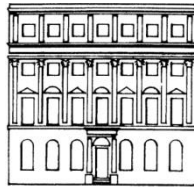


German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Martin Stier:

Society, Rule, and their Representation in Medieval Britain

Conference Report

German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 37, No. 1

(May 2015), pp146-149

Society, Rule, and their Representation in Medieval Britain. Conference held at the German Historical Institute London, 13–14 November 2014. Organizers: Julia Crispin (University of Münster) and Cornelia Linde (GHIL). Conveners: Katherine Harvey (Birkbeck, University of London), Alexandra Sapoznik (King’s, University of London), Alixe Bovey (University of Kent), and Ian Forrest (University of Oxford).

On 13–14 November 2014, thirteen young medievalists from German universities, most of them doctoral students working on British and Irish medieval history, were invited to present and discuss their current research at the GHIL. They included historians as well as art historians and their papers represented a wide range of different disciplinary and methodological approaches. After a welcome address by Andreas Gestrich, director of the GHIL, the first panel was opened by Thorben Gebhardt (Münster) with a paper on the self-categorization of medieval rulers from 1016 to 1138 in England and the Holy Roman Empire. Based on the concept that social identity comprised group affiliation, Gebhardt argued that the Norman kings incorporated the laws of their Anglo-Saxon predecessors into their own authoritative legal codes in order to present themselves as ‘English’ rulers. This could best be observed through an examination of the legislation of Henry I, who adopted laws of Edward the Confessor.

The second paper, by Isabelle Chwalka (Mainz), presented some of the results of her research on the conception and perception of England and the Empire in the twelfth century. A thorough study and statistical analysis of thirty-one chronicles of both countries showed that the writers on both sides of the Channel were aware of at least important topics and events such as the papal schism and sometimes even of internal political developments. Most important for Chwalka’s project was the question of where the authors obtained their information about the other country. In the case of the capture of Richard Lionheart, the evidence strongly suggests that rumours were the source.

Stephan Bruhn (Kiel) analysed the discursive formation of elites in the biographical and hagiographical writings of the Anglo-Saxon and early Norman period. Tracing the origins of early medieval

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL’s website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

forms of noble conduct, a close study of the lives of saints showed how ecclesiastical writers conceived the lay elite of their time. One example was the role of eloquence, which the author of the *Vita Dunstani* restricted as a virtue to a social group of elites. It was incorporated into the ideal role models that emerged during this period. Further examination of these role models would contribute to a better understanding of normative self-perception and perception by others of lay and ecclesiastical elites in early medieval England.

The second panel began with Grischa Vercamer's (Berlin) study of descriptions of power and rulers through close reading and statistical analysis of selected chronicles from Germany, Poland, and England in the High Middle Ages. Lordship, for example, was depicted very differently in these three countries. An English ruler, for instance, was described mainly in terms of his administrative tasks, whereas Polish chronicles focused heavily on the king's qualities as a warrior. Vercamer stressed that these different conceptions of lordship were to a large extent shaped by different structures within these countries, which led him to question whether a common conception of lordship existed in medieval Europe.

A comparative approach was also taken by Bastian Walter-Bogedain (Wuppertal) in his research on kings in captivity in western Europe in the later Middle Ages. The famous case of the capture and imprisonment of Richard Lionheart was by no means unique. The act of capturing and the conditions of captivity, however, seem to have depended on the actual circumstances and, by comparing cases, only a few similarities could be observed. Examining the consequences captivity had on a ruler's kingship, Walter-Bogedain stated that it was not clear whether released kings could return to their thrones, merely facing more difficulties than before.

Ulla Kypta (Frankfurt) presented an overview of her completed dissertation on the emergence of the English exchequer during the twelfth century. Through a close reading and analysis of the technical language in the pipe rolls, she showed that the clerks unintentionally invented a specialized accounting language. Kypta argued that it was this successive development of a professional language, rather than royal reforms, that created the framework for the emergence of the courts of the exchequer. This gradual transformation of their employer into an institution gave the clerks of the exchequer a sense of identity and legitimacy.

Conference Reports

In his paper on rank in the English baronage in the fourteenth century, Martin Stier (Heidelberg) analysed the process of stratification and definition within the English higher nobility in the later Middle Ages. The emergence of new titles during the first half of the fourteenth century for those personally summoned to parliament corresponded closely to developments in heraldry, especially the practice of quartering of arms. Apart from in rolls of arms, these developments can best be studied in baronial seals. Stier argued that these new forms of social distinction were used by barons to signal their rank, which marked them off from the group of knights.

Veronika Decker (Vienna) launched the third panel with her paper on the patronage of William of Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, in fourteenth-century England. Combining an examination of the iconography of the stained glass in the chapel of Wykeham's foundation of New College Oxford with a close reading of the college statutes, Decker argued that the architecture served as a medium for promoting educational ideas. The imagery of a flourishing vineyard and a *virgo lactans*, which closely relates to the metaphorical language in the college foundation documents, can also be observed in the chapel of Winchester College, another of Wykeham's foundations.

The collections of French illuminated books in the possession of John of Bedford, regent of the English-occupied parts of France, were the topic of the paper delivered by Julia Crispin (Münster). As well as providing an opportunity for self-display on the part of their commissioner, the books could also serve as devotional aids and pedagogical tools, which was demonstrated here on the basis of two case studies. Crispin looked at a collection of books from the Louvre and at the Bedford Hours, a manuscript which included genealogies and a French coronation order and was presented to the young English king Henry VI before his coronation as king of France.

In her paper on cultural networks and artistic exchanges in fifteenth-century England and Germany, Antje Fehrmann (Berlin) focused first on the tombs of English kings and their relatives, and secondly on two major events of this period: the council in Constance with the participation of an impressive English delegation, and King Sigismund's journey to England in 1416. The exchange of gifts during Sigismund's stay in London, in particular, played a major part in the negotiations between the two monarchs.

The fourth and final panel was opened by Franziska Klein (Duisburg-Essen) with a paper on the house of converts in medieval London. Arguing against older research, Klein suggested that the foundation of this institution by Henry III should not be interpreted as a centre of Christian mission to the Jews, but as a royal attempt to control the borders between Christianity and Judaism. As converts with their often ambiguous religious and social identities presented a challenge to the orders of medieval society, it was in the crown's vital interests to keep them under control. A range of mechanisms, such as registration and physical isolation, were introduced for this purpose.

In her paper on children, liturgy, and festive culture in medieval London, Tanja Skambraks (Mannheim) focused on the feast of the boy bishop in London. Drawing on a broad basis of available source material and her analysis of the ritual character of the feast, she revised earlier views that saw it as a carnivalesque festival. Skambraks argued that this was a genuine liturgical feast performed by children in commemoration of their patron, St Nicholas.

The last paper of the conference, delivered by Ute Kühlmann (Mannheim), was an overview of her recently completed dissertation on Celtic fosterage. Sending children away from home at a relatively young age to be educated by another family was not an insular Celtic phenomenon. As well as broadly discussing the different practices of this form of education and socialization, Kühlmann stressed the importance of fosterage for building and strengthening alliances, friendships, and communities between families through these emotional bonds. This institution was also used by families for the consolidation of power and lordship.

After two days of presentations and lively discussions the conference ended with closing remarks by Cornelia Linde, who emphasized that despite the impressive diversity of topics, the papers also presented considerable overlaps regarding general themes and approaches. Overall, the German Historical Institute London, as the host of this conference, plays a vital role in bringing together an academic community of young German scholars working in the field of British and Irish medieval history.

MARTIN STIER (University of Heidelberg)