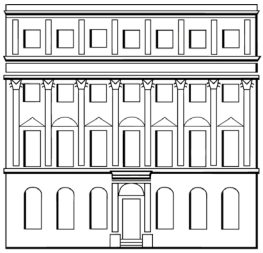

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Review of Simon Huemer, *Die europäische Wahrnehmung des Königreichs Dänemark nach der Einführung der Lex Regia: Die Rezeption von und Debatte über Robert Molesworths Account of Denmark als Diskurs über die absolute Monarchie anhand seiner Deutung der danske Enevælde von 1694 bis ca. 1770*

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SIMON HUEMER, *Die europäische Wahrnehmung des Königreichs Dänemark nach der Einführung der Lex Regia: Die Rezeption von und Debatte über Robert Molesworths Account of Denmark als Diskurs über die absolute Monarchie anhand seiner Deutung der danske Enevælde von 1694 bis ca. 1770* (Kiel: Solivagus, 2022), 617 pp. ISBN 978 3 943 02562 0. €48.00

The centrepiece of Simon Huemer's Ph.D. thesis is Robert Molesworth's (1656–1725) pamphlet *An Account of Denmark*, published in 1694, two years after he was recalled as the British Crown's envoy to the Danish court—a position he had held for three years. Denmark was an ally of the new British King, William III of Orange, and remained so in the years that followed. Molesworth's publication, on the other hand, presented Denmark to the British public as a cautionary example of a formerly free country that had enjoyed individual liberties since the time of the Goths, but which had abandoned those liberties as a result of complacency, corruption, and degeneracy. The Danish had instead officially conceded that their king could rule Denmark as an absolute monarch or, in Molesworth's terms, as a tyrant over slaves. In his study, Huemer first traces the genesis of the *Lex Regia*, which marked Denmark's transition to absolute kingship, before situating Robert Molesworth in the context of the debates at the time of the Glorious Revolution (1688–9). He then summarizes the contents of Molesworth's *Account of Denmark*, and finally looks at the intense debate over the treatise in Britain and subsequently in Denmark. Huemer's work focuses in particular on the central ideas and concepts, rhetorical strategies, and legitimation narratives of these debates, and he refers to the Cambridge School of political thought in his approach. In particular, Quentin Skinner and John Pocock are extensively used as authorities.

Molesworth saw the disunity of the Estates as the main reason for the Danish king's authorization of tyrannical rule via the *Lex Regia*. Danish subjects wanted to free themselves from the slavery that the nobility had imposed on them, and so the king appeared to them as an ally. Courtly nobles also participated in the plot because of their service relationship with the king. Furthermore, Molesworth argued, the desire for absolute power did not come from the reigning King Frederick III himself, but from his wife, Sophie Amalie. The clergy likewise supported the *Lex Regia* because they hoped that the new constitution

would give them greater authority and strengthen their own leadership position in the church.

Molesworth portrayed the events surrounding the *Lex Regia* in such a way that they could be understood as a warning against the dangers of popish tyranny. In this context, the hostile image of popery could easily be expanded to include the claim of Protestant clergymen to a leadership position in the church. He further concluded that Denmark had given away all rights and freedoms and submitted to government by the king in the 'Turkish manner' (p. 197). From then on, Molesworth claimed, the king's main goal was to use the new constitution to build a standing army, and ultimately to create a monster: a head without a body; a state with soldiers, but no subjects.

Molesworth's terrifying portrayal of royal rule in Denmark gave rise to a wide-ranging debate in Europe. Huemer addresses this controversy by first examining in more detail three counter-arguments made by a Hamburg physician, two English authors from the Tory camp, and certain Huguenots in Danish service. In particular, these figures criticized Molesworth's antagonistic juxtaposition of kingship and liberty, arguing that wise and virtuous kings were the best guarantors of liberty. They also attacked the sweeping equation of health and liberty, arguing that unrestrained freedom led to disorder and thus to disease in the body politic. The two Tory authors also emphasized the *ius divinum* with regard to the English church hierarchy and the need for subjects to obey their monarchs. Molesworth was, in their eyes, a republican agitator and a proponent of the Commonwealth, or in other words, the kingless period in England.

In the final chapter, Huemer then addresses Danish contributions to this debate, which can largely be classified as belonging to the genre of 'country descriptions' (*Landesbeschreibungen*) and which set out Denmark's history and contemporary political conditions for Danish as well as European readers. In these texts, the *Lex Regia* was defended with a variety of arguments by authors who were in one way or another connected to the Danish royal house through patronage relations.

Huemer's book provides an overview of the debate on the *Lex Regia* in Denmark by discussing in detail the main responses to Molesworth's *Account of Denmark*. His analysis, however, is not always convincing.

For example, the comparative authors used to outline the context of the political debate in England at the time of the Glorious Revolution are not coherently chosen. Molesworth's account is set in relation to texts from the 1650s by Marchamont Nedham and James Harrington, presumably because both authors were used by Quentin Skinner as key witnesses to his concept of English republicanism (Skinner called them neo-Roman authors). A much more logical choice would have been John Locke and his *Two Treatises of Government*, written during the Exclusion Crisis and published immediately after the Glorious Revolution, and containing numerous parallels to Molesworth's discussion of the right to resist a ruler who disregards the will of the people. Locke, however, is not mentioned at all in Huemer's presentation of the context surrounding the debate over the English monarchy.

The contextualization of Molesworth in the network of political groups and actors at the time is also not entirely convincing. Huemer takes terms such as 'Whig Junto', 'Old Whig', and 'court and country' from the research debate and uses them uncritically, as if they were clearly defined groups of people. There is no detailed discussion of what these party terms could mean, the extent to which they were actually associated with clearly distinguishable groups, how far they could be assigned to different world views, or whether they were in fact primarily pejorative, polemical terms used to mark out opponents in the controversies of the 1690s, which were characterized by rapid changes in the political loyalties of many participants.

Above all, however, reading Huemer's work is extremely arduous, as one has to slog through lengthy summaries of texts that teem with redundancies. The length of the study could have been reduced by half without loss of substance. It would also have done the book good if Huemer had been less inclined to load his analysis with technical terms from the sociology of knowledge, even where these are neither necessary nor useful. There is talk of discourses (*Diskurse*) where debates are meant. When foreign lands are presented in 'country descriptions', this has little to do with the concept of the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*; p. 152), which has its place as a technical term in studies of phenomenology. To point out that Molesworth perceives the *Lex Regia* from a specifically English perspective—one that was strongly shaped by the events and conflicts surrounding the Glorious Revolution—does not

require terms such as 'knowledge constitution' (*Wissenskonstitution*; p. 191). At the end of the book, after 574 pages, the final conclusion is that Molesworth's opponents 'defended the monarchy per se through the semantic–conceptual and historical–argumentative mechanisms of the early modern metastructure' (p. 574). With these interpretations, Huemer overambitiously presents his study as a contribution to the sociology of knowledge, instead of offering concrete answers to concrete questions.

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