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Flags of Many Colours

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This anthology, a *festschrift* for the Göttingen medievalist Frank Rexroth, opens with the assessment that »[m]edieval studies are not doing well« (1). It closes with the proposal that »[p]erhaps medieval studies will even come up with suggestions as to how, in the face of omnipresent uncertainty, it is possible to live and coexist under the conditions of our present age« (463). In between these two sentences, 17 individual contributions in three sections offer a closer look at medieval studies – more specifically, not medieval studies as such but rather the many individuals whose work or phases of their professional life are connected to the honouree.

The first section comprises five contributions that address the history of medieval studies and »past certainties« in various ways. These include »sociological perspectives on knowledge« up to the 1960s (Marcel Bubert, 21–46), a comparison between Ernst Kantorowicz and Carl Erdmann (Folker Reichert, 47–80), the work of Sir Richard W. Southern (Sita Steckel, 81–123), the USA and the Middle Ages from the perspective of the history of science (Catherine König-Pralong, 125–140), and the competition between Western constitutionalism and political theology (Karl Ubl, 141–159). Different approaches notwithstanding, all contributions skillfully elaborate period-specific narratives at national and international level and use the term »constructed continuity«. The conclusion that »the« Middle Ages did not actually exist comes as no surprise – and Bernhard Jussen argues once again that therefore medieval studies should not exist either.

The second section is devoted to a »new lack of clarity« (in the sense of Jürgen Habermas' *Neue Unübersichtlichkeit*) as one of the »challenges faced by contemporary medieval studies«. Dorothea

Weltecke uses her own intellectual biography to investigate (and eventually repudiate) the very concept of »religion« in the Middle Ages (163–177). She begins by stating that the term »Middle Ages« is entirely appropriate (163) and expresses doubt that Bernhard Jussen's demand to banish it once and for all is helpful in terms of epistemology (173). Jussen then repeats his call to abolish the term, which he characterises as a »harbinger of irrelevancy« (179–199). Whether this might move beyond polemics and actually happen remains to be seen, especially since there is more at stake than just the future of medieval studies.

The reappraisal of late antiquity, which has been making gratifying progress in recent years, forms the backdrop for an examination of the first millennium by Steffen Patzold (201–215). Early on in his contribution (201), Patzold, like Weltecke, expresses scepticism about Jussen's proposal; he advocates the term »first millennium« to describe this epoch instead of the distinctions usually made on a case-by-case basis between antiquity, late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Given that this aligns with the terminology used at the Max Planck Institute, the reviewer expressly supports this suggestion.

Klaus Oschema investigates the »limits and risks of »European« Medieval Studies« (217–248), deliberately giving greater weight to the concept of Europe than to that of the Middle Ages, a term he continues to consider appropriate. However, Thomas Bauer's contribution »Between Eurocentrism and Teleology: the Old and the New Malady of Arab Studies« (249–265) expresses sharp criticism of the concept of the Middle Ages as it has been developed in Europe, arguing that from the perspective of his discipline, there are no epochs between »antiquity« and »modernity«

* JAN-HENDRYK DE BOER, MARCEL BUBERT, KATHARINA ULRIKE MERSCH (Hg.), *Die Mediävistik und ihr Mittelalter* (Europa im Mittelalter 45), Berlin: de Gruyter Brill 2024, 484 S., ISBN 978-3-11-078453-4, Open Access: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111216140>; English translations by Caspar Ehlers and Vera Mark

(255, diagram). Patrick J. Geary, in his contribution »Constructing and Deconstructing the Middle Ages« (267–282), makes an impassioned plea for cooperation between medieval studies and the diverse natural sciences (278–282). The latter provide reliable data on human and Earth history, fauna and flora, epidemics and natural disasters, but the humanities fail to take adequate note of this or to show themselves capable of understanding the methodological prerequisites. Geary therefore appeals to the *humilitas* of historians, asking them to yield to scientific findings by not formulating statements without first acquiring the heuristics of the natural sciences. On the other hand and with all due respect for this author's enthusiasm, the natural sciences should reciprocate this approach if the aim is to achieve results and generate knowledge on an equal footing.

Section three is devoted to a »broadening of perspectives« on the basis of »selected topics and trends in medieval studies«, bringing the book closer in character to that of a *festschrift*. The reviewer's colleague from his time in Göttingen, Uwe Israel, who sadly died far too young, deals with this topic in his posthumously published contribution »Sine ira et studio? Medieval Studies and the (De-)Construction of an Early Medieval Jewish World« (291–313), using the example of the academic debate between Friedrich Lotter and Michael Toch about, among other things, their respective intellectual backgrounds. Hedwig Röckelein uses the example of »Astronomical and Medical Knowledge in the Carolingian Period« to elaborate on whether there were »cultures of experts before the cultures of experts« (315–338), and Wolfgang Eric Wagner asks: »Who were the worst hooligans at the late medieval University of Rostock? Tracing personal histories« (339–369). Benjamin Scheller discusses »Long-distance trade as a culture of (non-)knowledge. Future-oriented information and teachings »as true as the Lord's Prayer« in the letters of Francesco Datini (1335–1410) and his business partnerships« (371–390), while Kristin Skottki's »Racism and anti-Semitism in the European Middle Ages. A search for historical roots« (391–428) addresses a topic of high relevance for the present day.

The volume concludes with Jan-Hendryk de Boers' summary »Medieval Studies and their present. An attempt at medieval research after modernity« (429–471). He warns against teleology of any kind and argues for »highlighting develop-

ments of medium duration« (433–443, quote 436). The longer reflections on »uncertainties« (in the epoch as in the discipline: 443–463) end with the quote already offered above.

Incidentally, a look at the large overlap between the bibliographies appended to the individual contributions confirms the reviewer's initial comment that there is no such thing as »the« medieval studies, not even in Germany, where the discipline is – and has for quite some time been – practised on numerous separate islands, each with the requisite flag which reads (or at some point read) »Medieval Studies and ...«.

This finding is also supported by the virtual absence of interdisciplinary research approaches in the sense of in-depth cooperation between medievalists and their neighbouring disciplines. Catherine König-Pralong uses the term »indiscipline« to address matters of modern philosophy and the history of knowledge and emphatically flags up (no pun intended) the consequences, for example, those of historicising philosophy as a separate discipline (128 f.).

The aforementioned contribution by Karl Ubl is explicitly based on legal history, positioning »two competing narratives« and naming scholars such as Ernst Kantorowicz, Charles Howard McIlwain and Max Radin, as well as Brian Tierney and Giorgio Agamben, as examples for historians representing these narratives. This raises the question of whether the concept of a »second Middle Ages«, which seems to begin with the teaching of law at Italian universities and heralds the »development of Western Constitutionalism«, underlies the general neglect of the early Middle Ages in favour of the approach of political theology, where this epoch occupies a »key position« (152 f.). Karl Ubl makes it clear that the contrasting perspectives of these narratives – Western Constitutionalism and political theology – result in phenomena being viewed in isolation in order to construct continuities, similar to a teleological diachrony. He recommends that legal history overcome this constellation, recognise both narratives as rooted in their respective time-bound contexts of origin, and bring them into dialogue with each other.

What is needed, therefore, is for research to adopt more open perspectives that joyfully transcend its self-imposed narrow boundaries. This applies not only within the discipline described as at risk in this work, which is »not doing well«, but also and above all to more openness towards

other disciplines, including the natural and life sciences. Perhaps this will yield answers that offer »suggestions as to how, in the face of omnipresent

uncertainty, it is possible to live and coexist under the conditions of our present age«. Who knows? ■

Caspar Ehlers

To Have and to Hold*

The title of this new series, of which the book under review is the first volume, is intriguing: »Constitutional History of the Middle Ages«. This anthology submits its particular subject, lending, to meticulous scrutiny in 15 articles, which cannot all be discussed here in detail. The terminology deliberately abstains from using the seemingly established but rather vague term »feudalism« (9, and the introductory article by Jürgen Dendorfer and Steffen Patzold, 11–23), a term that has been the subject of criticism for decades.¹ The volume is built on a periodisation into early and high Middle Ages and presents a number of European case studies; some of these are broader in scope (dealing with corpora containing sovereign and private documents), while others are more specific (looking at regions or individual monasteries or bishoprics).

With regard to the early Middle Ages, the contributions unanimously conclude that it is more likely that loan relationships were the results of individual negotiations rather than predetermined legal acts within a fixed framework. This is further confirmation of what other examples have shown for the so-called early Middle Ages (Carolingian and Ottonian periods): variable norms and legal concepts were gradually consolidated, a long process with different temporal and spatial dynamics.

Christoph Haack's discussion (27–52) of »legal foundations« in the early Middle Ages focuses on

the corpus of sources contained in the capitularies. Among these, the so-called Will of Charlemagne² from 806 is significant, as it appears to use the term *beneficium* in the sense of »fief« and to distinguish it from the concept of *res immobiles*. Haack points out, though, that the range of applications of the word *beneficium* also includes »beneficence«, and that therefore it is not possible to assign a legal character to the word (30 f.). However, the distinction between *beneficium* and *allod* (freehold property), made five years later in another of Charlemagne's capitularies,³ indicates precisely such legal character. Haack identifies four expressions for loaned property in the capitularies – *beneficium*, *precaria*, *res* and *terram habere* (34–36) – and offers a detailed discussion of the distinction between royal property and church property as categories with regard to the loans (3–43). He concludes (51 f.) that the regulations on services and taxes attached to granted land and on heritability do not indicate that there was any system for the legal norms contained in the capitularies.

The contributions by Daniel Ludwig, evaluating the Carolingian royal charters from the 9th century (53–84), and by Thomas Kohl, who analyses East Frankish private charters from the same period (85–102), offer complementary perspectives to Haack's text. Like the capitularies, these two corpora lack stringent terminology, which furthermore is also true of the West Frankish private charters (Fraser McNair, 103–130).

* JÜRGEN DENDORFER, STEFFEN PATZOLD (Hg.), *Tenere et habere*. Leihen als soziale Praxis im frühen und hohen Mittelalter (Besitz und Beziehungen. Studien zur Verfassungsgeschichte des Mittelalters 1), Ostfildern: Thorbecke 2023, 484 S., ISBN 978-3-7995-5040-6; English translations by Caspar Ehlers and Vera Mark

1 OLIVER AUGE, Art. Lehnrecht, Lehnswesen, in: Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte (HRG), vol. 3, 2nd ed. 2014, col. 717–736.

2 MGH Capitularia 1, No. 45.

3 MGH Capitularia 1, No. 80.