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REVIEWS

Tuomas Heikkilä, *Das Kloster Fulda und der Goslarer Rangstreit*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, ser. Humaniora, vol. 298 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica 1998) 222 pp.

The subject of Tuomas Heikkilä's (TH) new book, the so-called *Goslarer Rangstreit*, is a topic familiar to many specialists of medieval German ecclesiastical and political history, but up until now has not attracted much scholarly attention outside the confines of Hessian or Thuringian *Landesgeschichte*. It has long deserved a monographic treatment which analyzes it in the context of some larger historical problems in eleventh-century German history. The story of the *Rangstreit*, as shown below, also presents some difficult and fascinating questions about textuality and mentality in the Middle Ages. TH's book is far more successful in dealing with the former set of issues than the latter. Below I summarize the book's conclusions and discuss some problems raised by TH's methods of textual criticism.

The *Goslarer Rangstreit* was a violent dispute that erupted at the royal estate of Goslar in Christmas 1062 and over Pentecost 1063 between Widerad, the abbot of Fulda, Germany's largest and wealthiest Benedictine monastery, and Hezilo (or Wezel), the bishop of Hildesheim, over which prelate ought to be seated next to the archbishop of Mainz at the assembly. The armed retainers of both men nearly came to blows over their respective lord's place of honor next to the archbishop during Christmas 1062. The abbot of Fulda claimed the spot on the basis of a long-standing tradition of his monastery's primacy, whereas Hezilo believed he should sit next to the archbishop because Goslar was in his diocese. At Pentecost the following year, the dispute flared up again, this time with devastating results. When the seating arrangements still could not be resolved, both sides went for their weapons—allegedly in the middle of the church service—with many deaths and injuries resulting. An ad hoc inquest into the cause of the riot found the abbot of Fulda guilty of provoking the fight and he was forced to absolve himself with massive payoffs to various parties, a situation which impoverished the monastery and caused a rebellion among the monks. The *Rangstreit* receives attention in several contemporary sources, the most detailed being the account in the *Annales* of Lampert of Hersfeld, a monk who may even have been an eyewitness to some of the events.³³

TH presents a well-articulated and clearly-written analysis of the dispute, moving carefully through issues of comparative source criticism, background history, and a detailed presentation of the events themselves and their aftermath, particularly the rebellion of the Fulda monks following Widerad's punishing liquidation of the abbey's property. In his main analysis, TH attempts to bring the political motivations of both the bishop's and the abbot's parties into

³³*Annales* in *Lamperti monachi Hersfeldensis opera*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. (Leipzig and Hannover 1894) 1–304. The dispute is related on 81–87. Another near-contemporary treatment is in the *Liber de unitate ecclesiae conservanda*, ed. W. Schwenkenbecker, MGH SS rer. Germ. (Hannover 1883) 109–110, a pro-imperial *Streitschrift* generated during the Investiture controversy, possibly by another monk of Hersfeld.

sharper relief and elucidate them in the context of struggles for dominance among the empire's power elite during the tumultuous regency of Henry IV (1056–1106). TH argues that the *Rangstreit's* fundamental importance lies in the fact that it was part of a larger power struggle between two key political factions in the empire, one surrounding archbishop Anno of Cologne, and the other Siegfried of Mainz. Widerad was Siegfried's successor as abbot of Fulda and a relative; Hezilo was a former student and close ally of Anno. Both groups were competing at court for influence over the young king Henry IV and his regent-mother, Agnes. As a bishop, Hezilo would have traditionally been accorded a seat nearer the archbishop, but Siegfried and Widerad were using the meeting as a forum for consolidating their own political positions. Hezilo was squeezed out, at least ceremonially, and felt he had to retaliate at Pentecost. Widerad's humiliating punishment was a final blow both for him and Siegfried of Mainz at the hands of Hezilo and Anno's powerful lay allies, particularly the Saxon count Ekbert, who had actually instigated the brawl at Pentecost but managed to deflect all guilt onto the abbot. One interesting argument made by TH is that the first gathering at Christmas was actually a regional synod, not a royal assembly as has been previously assumed. This, argues TH, better explains why Hezilo would have felt he needed the place next to the archbishop and also accounts for his indignation at the abbot's behavior.

The book's style and organization are among its strongest points. Only a few minor problems escaped the editor's eye: Between pages 58 and 61, for example, it is reiterated no less than three times that Anno of Cologne was Hezilo's teacher in the cathedral school of Bamberg and that the two had a close friendship—each time citing different sources. Between pages 138 and 146 the assertion that Siegfried of Mainz was losing influence at court to Anno of Cologne is reiterated at least four times.

TH succeeds in sketching a vivid picture of the high-stakes political maneuvering and strategizing in which the ecclesiastical elite of the eleventh century engaged. The punishment visited upon Fulda shows with equal clarity how high the stakes could be for the party that lost. In doing so, it connects with some broader issues in eleventh-century historiography. If this is all one expects, then TH has done his job and there is not much to discuss. However, there are weaknesses that overshadow the book in ways that do not undercut the main thesis about the importance of the Goslar *Rangstreit* so much as they cast doubt on its relevance and potential to make an important contribution to medieval history in Germany or elsewhere.

Marc Bloch, a great believer in the importance of understanding not only facts, but deeper historical relationships, once observed regarding forgeries that to merely prove something is not authentic "is to avoid error, but not to acquire knowledge."³⁴ This is essentially the problem with this book: many facts are ascertained and errors avoided, but in the end, it makes for a frustratingly thin body of knowledge. With his careful collation and explication of the sources, informed by a clear desire for gleaning the "glaubwürdig" (credible) from the "unglaubwürdig" (not credible), TH glides by a number of important issues that ultimately come back to haunt his overall analysis of the event.

³⁴Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York 1953) 93.

An important example of this can be drawn from chapter 3, entitled “Die Gründen für den Streit,” (The Reasons for the Conflict) which provides a detailed study of the claim made in the sources that the abbot of Fulda had traditionally been allowed the seat of honor next to the archbishop. TH poses the question: “hatte der Abt von Fulda ein Recht auf Vorrang?” (Did the abbot of Fulda have a right to primacy?) and having carefully examined the entire corpus of papal exemptions and privileges pertaining to the primacy of Fulda’s abbot, can only conclude that “[a]lles in allem ist kein klares Bild über das eventuelle Sonderrecht des Abts auf einen Ehrenplatz zu gewinnen” (106) (all in all, no clear picture emerges of any special right of the abbot’s to a position of honor). In the book’s concluding remarks, TH makes a more profound observation about this: “Es ist freilich sehr wahrscheinlich, daß ein solches Gewohnheitsrecht in Wahrheit nicht existierte, sondern nur in den Vorstellungen der Fuldaer Mönche bestand” (187) (It is entirely possible that such a customary right never really existed except in the imagination of the Fulda monks). In asking the fundamentally positivist question of who was right and who was wrong, the real issue upon which the whole process was contingent, the *Vorstellung* (imagination) of both parties with regards to their legal rights, is simply not on the radar screen. The error of taking Fulda’s claims at face value has been duly avoided, yet the opportunity for acquiring more knowledge passed by.

The picture that TH himself paints so clearly with copious examples, but does not see himself, is that seating arrangements, particularly among churchmen, functioned as an expression of power and honor that was constantly challenged, negotiated, and transformed both in action and written form through canons, privileges, and other literary sources.³⁵ It seems evident, even as TH presents it, that the “Ehrenplatz” and the notion of primacy were situational constructs within a dynamic discourse of social and institutional order. Unfortunately, the author’s only critical frame of reference in all of this is the old tradition of German legal history which tended to elide legal norms or instruments with actual practice, and conceived the authority of public institutions as more coherent than it actually was.³⁶ Thus TH posits that the *Rangstreit* in this

³⁵He mentions in a footnote (65 n. 295), but does not compare, for instance, another important seating dispute between the bishops of Reims and Trier at a Gallic synod in 1049. Two subsequent seating disputes involving the abbot of Fulda and the archbishops of Magdeburg and Cologne in 1133 and 1184 respectively receive brief mention, but no substantive comparative analysis (25ff.).

³⁶A major critique of this trend in German historiography was made by Otto Brunner in his pathbreaking—and now infamous—study of lordship in late medieval Austria, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter*, 5th rev. ed. (Vienna 1965). Brunner argued that the Middle Ages lacked any centralized, legally coherent authority we would think of as a “state” and as a result, disputes and conflicts were settled at all levels through feuds which adhered to norms of custom and perceived “rights” (*Recht*) rather than a prescriptive legal framework imagined by modern constitutional scholars. It is interesting that in the two later *Rangstreite* in Cologne and Magdeburg (cf. above, n. 33), a settlement recognizing the primacy of Fulda’s abbot was imposed by the king. Might the results of the Goslar dispute have been different if the king had been in his full authority and rendered a top-down decision? Or did the feud as it unfolded adhere to standard norms, ritual and legal, of dispute

case was caused by the fact that “Ungewißheit darüber bestand, wem der Vorrang tatsächlich gebührte” (65) (there was uncertainty as to whom the primacy actually applied), and proceeds on the assumption that a positive legal answer can be found if we look at the sources carefully enough. Yet Lampert himself says the primacy of the Fulda abbot amounted to a *consuetudo observata*,³⁷ underscoring the need here for a more nuanced understanding of the very complex ways in which custom, legal norms, and literary representations of the same operated alongside each other in medieval culture. TH’s concluding remarks, mentioned above, suggest he indeed has a sense of this, but relegates it to a small corner of the *Zusammenfassung* rather than the core of his treatment.

The overall approach here has the effect of turning texts into mere databanks from which one gathers credible bits of information while disregarding others as biased or not credible. However, these “facts” are contingent both upon what we can know about an event in the past, as well as their use and context alongside more supposedly spurious material. Which event are we, or ought we be, interested in? The one we can flesh out as modern historians, or the one understood by the medievals themselves?³⁸ Pursuing only the former has its drawbacks. TH briefly discusses the body of sources, besides Lampert of Hersfeld and the *Liber de unitate*, which transmit details of the *Rangstreit* (22–24). The story is picked up in William of Malmesbury’s mid-twelfth-century *Gesta regum Anglorum*,³⁹ two late thirteenth-century chronicles in Latin and Lower German composed in Goslar,⁴⁰ and the early thirteenth-century chronicle of the monk Heliandus.⁴¹ These are summarily dismissed as *unglaublich*, particularly since they transmit an incorrect chronology—the events taking place during the reign of Henry III, for example—and clearly fantastical details, such as the devil breaking into a sequence being sung by the choir (in Goslar) about how he was responsible for the violence that day.⁴² It is obvious that the story of the Goslar *Rangstreit* had uses and a textual life that extended far beyond Goslar and far beyond the eleventh century. Is this not relevant? The assumption is

resolution at the time?

³⁷*Annales*, ed. Holder-Egger (n. 33 above) 81. “Consuetudo erat in regno per multos retro maiores observata, ut semper in conventu episcoporum abbas Fuldensis archiepiscopo Mogontino proximus assideret.”

³⁸A similar problem is raised in the process of editing ancient and medieval texts. Ought the object of a critical edition be to work backwards, through recension and emendation of the manuscripts, towards the recreation of the author’s “original” work, or rather present a single manuscript witness, or a collated group of closely-related witnesses, that represent the way a text was used in a particular place at a particular time, regardless of how it conforms to, or departs from, the author’s original version?

³⁹William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 2.192, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SS 10 (Hannover 1852) 449–485, here 467 ff.

⁴⁰*Chronicon S. Simonis et Iudae Goslariense*, MGH Deutsche Chroniken 2 (Hannover, 1877) 604–606.

⁴¹*Heliandi Frigidi Montis monachi chronicon*, PL 212.771–1082.

⁴²The *Gesta regum Anglorum*, the Goslar Chronicles, the chronicle of Heliandus, as well as a late medieval Belgian history based on Heliandus, all transmit, virtually word-for-word, the fact that as the choir was singing the sequences and came to the line “hunc diem gloriosum fecisti,” a demonic voice from the air responded “Hunc diem bellicosum ego feci!” Cf. 23 n. 54.

that an account, namely Lampert's, which is closer chronologically to the events and gives more detail, has more credibility. Yet the "fact," revealed in later accounts, that the devil himself caused the disturbance, is just as important if one wishes to grasp how medieval people came to terms with what transpired. Which is the more valid explanation? That Widerad was not observing correct legal protocol, or that the devil wanted to sow discord among the bishops? Perhaps such sentiments ought to be viewed as a sort of mental *lectio difficilior* that need to be given more weight in the critical process. The shape and meaning of the events in Goslar are not to be discerned by simply rescinding the various versions until one arrives at some point declared to be "wie es eigentlich gewesen." Each of the accounts transmits a specific version of the dispute that represented the needs and aims of the author and his audience.

In the end, it is clear that TH embarked on this project with much learning and a clear sense that the topic was an important one, which it is. Unfortunately, he evidences no critical self-awareness about the *way* he pursues it. This reviewer did not intend to have to set himself up as some kind of Lamprecht to Heikkilä's von Below, taking the author to task for an overly "political" treatment of the subject. The lesson to be learned here is not that positivism is bad and cultural history is good. No method or critical tool is an end in itself. A book intent on reading the Goslarer *Rangstreit* as though it were just another Balinese cockfight, at the expense of the real political contexts and effects, would be making the same mistake. In focusing on the political dimensions of the *Rangstreit*, and depicting the conflict in the context of Salian court politics, TH acquits himself well and this makes the book worth reading. But in decisively neglecting to consider key issues of textuality and representation of ideology and conflict about which the *Goslarer Rangstreit* could inform us, TH limits the book's potential as a significant contribution to the history of political culture in the Salian period.⁴³ What is still needed is a study that understands that questions of political history cannot be divorced from either the texts nor the mentalities of the people involved.

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⁴³Part of the author's problem lies in his limited reading of available secondary material on these issues. It seems not to have occurred to him that well-known recent works such as those by Geoffrey Koziol on ideologies of ritual and reconciliation, Gerd Althoff on concepts of order and dispute processing, and Hannah Vollrath on the literary construction of human motivation and the causes underlying conflict, could have anything to contribute to his subject. See Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca 1992); Gerd Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter—Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt 1997); Hanna Vollrath, "Konfliktwahrnehmung und Konfliktdarstellung in erzählenden Quellen des 11. Jahrhunderts," in *Die Salier und das Reich*, 3.279–296. Along these lines, readers should look forward to a forthcoming study by Philippe Buc on the literary representation of ritual in medieval texts which will offer a critique of some dominant models of social anthropology as applied to medieval history.