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Mittelalter – Moyen Âge (500–1500)

**Jörg Sonntag, Coralie Zermatten (ed.), *Loyalty in the Middle Ages. Ideal and Practice of a Cross-Social Value. Essays in Honour of Gert Melville, Turnhout (Brepols) 2015, XXII–467 p., 5 fig. (Brepols Collected Essays in European Culture, 5), ISBN 978-2-503-55103-6, EUR 110,00.***

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**Micol Long, Gent**

This volume collects essays in honour of Gert Melville, offered by friends and colleagues on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday; another *Festschrift* had already been put together for his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday<sup>1</sup>. This abundance is not surprising, considering Melville's impact on a number of fields, most notably the history of medieval religious orders and medieval historiography – and it is no coincidence that these two domains hold a prominent position in this volume.

This is a particularly rich miscellany: 20 articles for 467 pages, written by scholars from seven different countries. Roughly half of the contributions are in English, and the other half in German (with abstracts in English). Contrary to most collections of this type, the volume is presented as revolving around a specific topic, namely the notion of loyalty in the middle ages, approached as »a basic element of interaction« (p. XIII), between individuals as well as between individuals and groups. The search for a common topic is a commendable endeavour on the part of the editors, and it is true this theme had not previously been addressed in a comprehensive volume. However, the final result is not homogenous: while some articles reflect on the vocabulary, significance and implications of loyalty, and other investigate practices connected to it, in some contributions the link to the common theme is rather feeble.

In the first group falls Klaus Oschema's essay, which analyses the use of the term »loyalty« and of its derivatives in French vernacular texts produced in the late middle ages and the early modern period. His aim is to determine whether loyalty is perceived, according to these texts, as related mainly to asymmetrical relationships or, instead, to symmetrical ones. Although he finds instances of both uses, loyalty emerges as a crucial concept in defining and representing friendship bonds; this result is in agreement with other findings in the collection. Jean-Claude Schmitt provides information about the appearance of the term »loyalty« in Old French (first and foremost in the »Chanson de Roland«) and its long-lasting connection to the notion of legality. He then analyses examples where loyalty does not take place between living individuals, but between the living and the dead, based on a remarkable variety of sources, including iconographical ones, which emerge as an important tool to remind the living of their duties toward the deceased.

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<sup>1</sup> Franz J. Felten, Annette Kehnel, Stefan Weinfurter (ed.), *Institution und Charisma. Festschrift für Gert Melville zum 65. Geburtstag*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 2009.

Karl-Heinz Spieß analyses the problem of conflicting loyalties of late medieval vassals who were subject to multiple lords (in addition to the duties towards their relatives). This allows him to observe that loyalty was not always absolute: it could have reservations, be restricted, relocated or even cancelled, and the actors involved were aware of it. Spieß proposes to define this phenomenon as »business-like duty of *Treue* or loyalty«. The German notion of *Treue* is also at the heart of Patrick Geary's essay, which analyses a 1875 play set in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (»Deutsche Treue«) in the light of the cultural climate of pre-unification Germany. Subsequently, he also tracks the debate over the notion of *Treue* in nineteenth-century Germany.

Brian Patrick McGuire's essay, although focusing on one specific author, Bernard of Clairvaux, significantly contributes to the reconstruction of medieval notions of loyalty, since he sketches their roots in the Vulgate and refers to their role in the »Rule of saint Benedict« and in the »Carta Caritatis«. References to loyalty, or – even more so – to disloyalty, are frequent in Bernard's letters, since they often serve the purpose of creating, strengthening or attempting to mend relationships and alliances.

Some terms related to the notion of loyalty are also examined by Maria Pia Alberzoni, who focuses on the rhetoric used in documents and letters relating to the clash between emperor Frederick II and the Lombard cities. The analysis of the use of words such as *fedus* and *fides* allows her to track the deployment of propaganda on both sides, and the notion of friendship is revealed to play a very important role. David L. D'Avrey adopts a very different approach to study the rhetoric of loyalty, using Max Weber's distinction between *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität* to approach *arengae* relating to the relations between the French monarch Philip IV and pope Boniface VIII. The findings corroborate the idea that references to personal affection were widely used even when a more legalistic approach could be expected.

The use of notions taken from the social sciences is not an isolated case in this volume: Steven Vanderputten not only refers to the sociologist James Connor's notion of loyalty in his reflection on the challenges posed by the theme of the volume, but also uses the notion of »community of practice« (coined in the early 1990s by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger) to interpret how monastic leadership was transmitted from one generation to the next. His analysis of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>s century abbot's biographies uncovers the authors' goal to vouch for the reliability of the transmission, which is represented as taking place through friendly relationships and an increasing participation in the sharing of power and responsibilities. Considering the volume's penchant for the social sciences, it should not come as a surprise that the conclusions are entrusted to sociologist Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, who, while reviewing the extant literature on the subject, summarises and ties together the articles of the volume by referring to the transformations undergone by the concept of loyalty in various historical contexts. From the importance of personal bonds in the feudal society to the creation of rituals of courtly love and the celebration of different kinds of *fides* (towards God, toward the brothers ...) in

religious communities, Rehberg traces a path to modern forms of constitutional patriotism and neoliberal corporate loyalty. In addition, he summarises the means used to secure loyalty, such as rituals (especially oaths), commitments to consultation (for lords, to discuss important decisions and to look for advice), familiarity (whether based on kinship or not) and friendship.

It is impossible to mention each and every one of the twenty essays, which are very diverse, ranging from Rosamund McKitterick's compelling reflection on the implications of the oaths of Strasbourg to Nikolas Jaspert's fascinating depiction of the paths of Christian soldiers and diplomats serving Muslim sultans, and to Michel F. Cusato's detailed study of the significance of the style of clothing chosen by early fourteenth century Franciscan friars. The interest and overall quality of the contributions is remarkable, and the only one that doesn't fit well with the rest is Bernard Ardura's essay, which seems more aimed at presenting its source than at analysing it with a critical approach.

All in all, this is a very rich volume, which constitutes an appropriate tribute to Gert Melville's scholarship. If this collection doesn't solve the fundamental problem of the lack of clear definition of what modern historians perceive as »loyalty«, it will certainly call attention to the matter and, while proposing several interesting approaches to it, sparkle some curiosity about the theme.