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REVIEW ARTICLE

Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire

Ergebene Diener ihrer Herren? Herrschaftsvermittlung im alten Europa. Edited by Stefan Brakensiek and Heide Wunder. Köln / Weimar / Wien: Böhlau Verlag. 2005. 321 pp. EUR 44,90 (hardback).

Interaktion und Herrschaft. Die Politik der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt. Edited by Rudolf Schlögl. 'Historische Kulturwissenschaft', 5. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft. 2004. 584 pp. EUR 44.00 (paperback).

Internationale Beziehungen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Ansätze und Perspektiven. Edited by Heidrun Kugeler, Christian Sepp and Georg Wolf. 'Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung in der Frühen Neuzeit', 3. Münster / Hamburg / Berlin / London: LIT. 2006. 280 pp. EUR 19.90 (hardback).

Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe. By Peter Burke. 'The Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen's University, Belfast'. Cambridge / New York / Port Melbourne / Madrid / Cape Town: Cambridge University Press. 2004. 210 pp. £45 (hardback), £17.99 (paperback).

Die Macht des Königs. Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit. Edited by Bernhard Jussen. München: C. H. Beck Verlag. 2005. 478 pp. EUR 38,00 (hardback).

Der Reichstag 1486-1613. Kommunikation – Wahrnehmung – Öffentlichkeiten. Edited by Maximilian Lanzinner and Arno Strohmeier. 'Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften', 73. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 2006. 540 pp. EUR 69.60 (paperback).

Staatsbildung als kultureller Prozess. Strukturwandel und Legitimation von Herrschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit. Edited by Ronald G. Asch and Dagmar Freist. Köln / Weimar / Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2005. 442 pp. EUR 54.90 (hardback).

The current surge of publications on political culture is astounding. Mindful of the difficulty to construct a representative sample, this article uses an illustrative selection to highlight prominent themes and features relating to the German-speaking lands of the Holy Roman Empire in the late medieval and early modern period. Concentration on this framework does not imply, of course, that scholarly interest in the political culture of other periods and regions is lacking.¹ Even so, the fragmented and multi-layered character of the Empire with its hundreds of units, diversity of regimes, confessional divisions and territorial extent from the North Sea right across the Alps, forms a particularly challenging context for research in this field. The debate on whether it was a failed nation state, a confederation, a ‘complementary Empire-state’ (Georg Schmidt), an early form of the ‘Europe of regions’ or something entirely different shows no sign of abating.² The pre-industrial age, furthermore, offers a chance to examine the various stages of state formation as well as the impact of new communication media (especially print) in the context of expanding geographical horizons. The books under consideration here testify to the fact that this scenario informs a steady stream of highly stimulating work.³ Following a clarification of definitions, an outline of major historiographical trends and a survey of the principal features of the titles reviewed, the article will attempt a sketch of political culture in the Holy Roman Empire and a preliminary assessment of the ‘new’ political history.

Scholars now work with similarly broad, if not necessarily identical definitions. The ‘political’ usually encompasses all communications relating to collective decision-making, with the exact borderlines to the non-political – as Ute Frevert has recently argued – negotiated by each society in a complex conflict of interests.⁴ ‘Culture’ in turn comprises the creation of meaning in a very general sense, including – to adapt a formulation by Peter Burke – all shared attitudes, values and ‘the symbolic forms ... in which they are expressed and embodied’.⁵ ‘Political culture’ can thus be seen to

encompass all human values, interactions and perceptions relating to the establishment of binding rules.

The ‘old’ political history, to embark on a short historiographical journey, focused on governing elites, centres of decision-making, diplomacy and the waging of war. Within the orbit of the Holy Roman Empire, the rise of Brandenburg-Prussia provided a model of increasing centralization, bureaucratization, fiscalization and militarization, highlighting the significance of (enlightened) ‘absolutism’ under monarchs like Frederick the Great and modernization processes initiated by reformers like Freiherr vom Stein, a trajectory which destined the territory to take the lead in the forging of the German nation.⁶ It would be wrong to claim that no other approaches existed at the time, but the bulk of scholarly attention was dedicated to ‘great men’ and affairs of the state.⁷ In the latter half of the twentieth century, social and economic history challenged – and temporarily marginalized, but ultimately enriched – the study of political life. Agency was now discovered much further down the hierarchy and outside the confines of central institutions. This was the great period of work on representative assemblies, the practice (rather than theory) of government – even in towns and local communities dominated by the common man – and resistance movements like the German Peasants’ War of 1525.⁸ Engagement with quantitative methods and historical computing, furthermore, allowed the conception of ambitious comparative projects such as the ‘European State Finance’ database.⁹

The recent cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences revitalized political history further. In many ways, participants build on the achievements of the previous generation. They share the desire to survey the entire breadth of the social spectrum – ranging here from Christine Pflüger’s imperial commissaries of the 1550s in *Reichstag* via several ‘Diplomaten aus der 2. Reihe’ in *Internationale Beziehungen* to countless petty officials in *Herrschaftsvermittlung* – and to give due attention to political conditions in the localities (e.g. Uwe Goppold on seventeenth-century Münster in *Politik der Stadt* or Karin Gottschalk on the Hessian town of Grebenstein in *Herrschaftsvermittlung*).¹⁰ The emphasis on the *practical* process of government continues in recent research on ‘Gute Polickey’, i.e. the intricate regulation of all spheres of public life to promote the common weal, as well as numerous contributions to *Herrschaftsvermittlung, Politik der Stadt* und *Staatsbildung*.¹¹ Quantitative methods

remain useful for the analysis of large groups of people, even though their personal details are collected more for insights into interpersonal networks rather than to obtain exhaustive listings of offices and honours for their own sake.¹² The politics of protest also continue to attract interest, e.g. in Wim Blockman's close study of revolts in Flemish cities in *Macht des Königs*, in Burke's discussion of opposition against standardization and purification of vernacular tongues (*Languages*, 109, 167) and Wolfgang Reinhard's emphasis on the 'Habitus der Widerständigkeit' as a principal building block of European civilization.¹³

The lines of continuity stretch even further back to some of the classic themes of the 'old' political history, with military studies perhaps the most startling example.¹⁴ There is renewed demand for biographical works, albeit with a culturally enhanced agenda, as in numerous recent publications on Charles V.¹⁵ Foreign relations and peace congresses, too, attract considerable interest,¹⁶ this time with particular sensitivity to channels outside official diplomacy and methodical instruments featuring transnational networks and the study of cultural transfers (editorial introduction to *Internationale Beziehungen*, 15-18). State formation is another time-honoured topic high on the list of priorities, but very much in the sense of an interactive process between centre and periphery with substantial input, if not impetus, from below.¹⁷ A similar emphasis on the balancing of different interests characterizes recent studies on central institutions like the princely court and the Imperial Diet. Their reading of protagonists and representation suggests highly dynamic and volatile power relations rather than unilateral subjection to the will of the monarch (*Reichstag*; Asch on the culture of courtiers and Gérard Sabatier on iconographic programmes of seventeenth-century French kings, both in *Staatsbildung*; Matthias Müller on eighteenth-century palace architecture in *Macht des Königs*). Finally, political theory holds its own with renewed vigour and stronger emphases on the themes of consensus and resistance, on gender dimensions (Claudia Opitz on misogynist elements of Bodin's *Six Livres* in *Staatsbildung*), comparative perspectives and theoretical models like those of the Cambridge School.¹⁸

Apart from elaborations and revivals, however, the cultural turn brought a series of dramatic shifts and reorientations. In terms of political *agents*, the focus has moved from members of bodies like parliaments and councils towards informal bonds forged

by friendship (Václav Bůžek on the early modern Bohemian nobility in *Herrschaftsvermittlung*), patronage (Josef Hrdlička's study of the combination of formal communication structures and personal ties among local officials in the same volume) and the Humanist republic of learning (Christian Sepp and Ruth Kohlendorfer-Fries on the scholarly networks of sixteenth-century diplomats Christopher Mont and Wolfgang Zündelin in *Internationale Beziehungen*).¹⁹ Regarding political *constellations*, recent work eschews traditional polarities like *Obrigkeit/Untertanen* in favour of more differentiated topographies of power, where a plurality of interest groups and intermediaries allow the formation of ever-changing coalitions within a 'System organisierter Auseinandersetzung' (Christopher R. Friedrichs). Due to the complexity of socio-political conditions in early modern towns, for example, 'kann die politische Ordnung ... nur unzureichend auf der Grundlage dualistischer oder gar antagonistischer Deutungsmuster im Sinne von Rat vs. Bürgerschaft erfasst werden' (Philip R. Hoffmann in *Politik der Stadt*, 317). When dealing with political *institutions*, cultural approaches emphasize not their fixed and stable nature, but ambivalent perceptions and permanent re-constitution (Patrick Oelze on the many different meanings of the urban commune of Constance in *Politik der Stadt*). Where political *practices* come under scrutiny, interest no longer centres on the mere enforcement of orders by the authorities, but on the protracted procedures associated with all aspects of government (Stefan Brakensiek on the various modes of recruitment of local officials in *Herrschaftsvermittlung*; Franz-Josef Arlinghaus on the importance of procedures for the acceptance of late medieval court verdicts and Andreas Würzler on the complexities of decision-making in Bern, both in *Politik der Stadt*).²⁰ The early modern polity – as argued by numerous contributors to *Staatsbildung* – rested on notions of reciprocity and mutual obligation (Steve Hindle) and conducted affairs of the common weal through processes of interaction (e.g. between Emperor and estates in the mediation of territorial conflicts examined by Siegrid Westphal), integration (a principal function of princely courts according to Ronald Asch), persuasion (used, in André Holenstein's view, in preference to coercion by the early modern police state) and, again and again, negotiation (Freist's introduction characterizing political rule as a process 'in dem die Bedingungen der Ausübung von Autorität stets neu zwischen Herrscher und Untertanen ... ausgehandelt wurden'; 13). The negotiated quality of government is undoubtedly the

most persistent and significant insight of the new political history, a finding which owes much to Niklas Luhmann's seminal concept of society as a complex system of communication.²¹ Such interaction, furthermore, should not be seen as a weakness, but a source of strength for early modern states: 'Was Kurfürsten, Fürsten und andere Stände auf den Reichstagen mit dem Reichsoberhaupt ausgehandelt und wozu sie sich vertragsmäßig verpflichtet hatten, wurde normalerweise ausgeführt. Bei reinen kaiserlichen Machtgeboten ... galt diese Selbstbindung natürlich nicht' (Georg Schmidt in *Reichstag*, 116).

In studies of political *communication*, to highlight further shifts, historians are now more interested in networks²² and issues of genre, rhetoric and discourse rather than 'mere' content and keen to move from the traditional fixation on script and print towards a holistic view of the relationship between different types of information transmission (*Languages*; Dietmar Heil on 'Verschriftlichung' in *Reichstag*).²³ While classic texts like chronicles (Thomas Fuchs in *Politik der Stadt*) remain indispensable, and previously neglected genres like communal inscriptions (Regula Schmid *ibid.*) or petitions (Franz-Josef Arlinghaus and Philip R. Hoffmann *ibid.*; Helmut Neuhaus in *Reichstag*) are being added,²⁴ the canon now often extends to visual sources (Rosemarie Aulinger's survey of book / fly-sheet illustrations, drawings and paintings of the Imperial Diet in *Reichstag*), material records (Matthias Müller's study of historical references in the palaces of Vienna, Dresden, Berlin and Paris in *Macht des Königs*), plays (Katrin Kröll on processions and performances by carpenters' apprentices in *Politik der Stadt*), postal networks (Wolfgang Behringer with regard to the *Reichstag*) and especially evidence of symbolic communication. 'Ceremonies', understood as 'highly formalized and standardized sequences of action' symbolically referring to a larger concept or entity, and 'rituals', defined as 'formalized chains of symbolic actions' effecting transformations in the social world, form a prominent feature of the works under review (quotes adapted from Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger in *Reichstag*, 80; further discussions in Andreas Würzler, Jörg Rogge and Uwe Dörk in *Politik der Stadt*; Georg Wolf and Ulrike Hillemann in *Internationale Beziehungen*; Andreas Pečar in *Staatsbildung*).²⁵ Institutionalized frameworks for investigations in this area exist in several *Sonderforschungsbereiche* or 'special research areas' at German universities, notably 'Das Politische als Kommunikationsraum in der Geschichte' (SFB 584 at

Bielefeld); ‘Norm und Symbol’ (SFB 485 at Constance); and ‘Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme’ (SFB 496 at Münster), all with innovative methodologies, interdisciplinary orientation and extensive dissemination programmes.²⁶ Pointing to the significance of yet further communication channels, Rudolf Schlögl asserts that body and space remained the most important media ‘für die performative Figuration der politischen Ordnung und der sozialen Strukturen’ until the end of the early modern period (*Politik der Stadt*, 50).

How have these re-orientations affected our historical understanding more generally? In many ways – the discovery of new types of evidence, the broadening of thematic concerns, enhanced sensitivity for socio-cultural interaction – very positively, but it is equally clear that the diversification of the field renders reliable master narratives ever more evasive and the teaching of political history ever more demanding. The erstwhile concentration on facts, dates and causation has given way to a preoccupation with appearances, representations, performances and external perceptions (contributions by Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Robert von Friedeburg, Alfred Kohler, Guido Braun and Friedrich Beiderbeck to the section ‘Die Wahrnehmung von Reich und Reichstag in Europa’ in *Reichstag*).²⁷ ‘Politische Geschichte in dieser Weise neu zu bestimmen bedeutet im Kern, daß Kommunikationssituationen nicht durch ihren Gegenstand als politisch gedeutet werden, sondern durch ihre Form.’ (Bernhard Jussen in *Macht des Königs*, xv). Linear narratives – the decline of the Empire; the growth of Absolutism – have become very unfashionable (if not futile), while emphasis on the constructed nature of historical writing is now near-universal. Rather than jigsaw pieces for a cumulative recovery of ‘how it was’, scholars now offer idiosyncratic facets informed by heterogeneous evidence, diverging methodologies and distinct theoretical orientations (Janet L. Nelson’s ‘Warum es so viele Versionen von der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen gibt’ in *Macht des Königs*).

Given these general parameters, what are the principal features and objectives of the books under review? Significantly, with the sole exception of *Languages* (based on the 2002 Wiles Lectures), they are all collections of essays, highlighting the leading role this format takes for the exploration of new fields and the fostering of intra- and interdisciplinary collaborations. It seems imperative that scholars defend it against

mounting pressures to concentrate output on journal articles and independent monographs. Equally striking is the broad chronological and regional range (particularly in *Macht des Königs*, which starts its coverage in the 4th Century AD), including select comparative perspectives beyond the imperial boundaries. From a purely pragmatic point of view, some volumes are also rather large (over 400 and 500 pages in the cases of *Staatsbildung* and *Reichstag*), challenging even specialists to keep abreast of developments in the field. All provide different perspectives on specific themes and institutions rather than general introductions to the new political history.²⁸ Considering their programmatic breadth, the scarcity of visual elements in all but a handful of contributions (and – with the laudable exceptions of *Politik der Stadt* and *Languages* – the lack of subject indexes) is a little surprising.

Yet all books in this sample deserve to be recommended. *Languages*, to start with the only monograph, impresses with the author's extensive command of different idioms and literatures.²⁹ Burke aims for a 'social history' and 'ecology' of languages, i.e. their contextualization in specific environments, and demonstrates the richness of Europe's linguistic heritage (the appendix features 71 different entries from Albanian to Yiddish). Particular concerns are the significance of language in identity formation ('language is one of the principal markers of community'; 156), the constant conflict between the unity and diversity of languages (with the early modern period seeing – frequently contested – scholarly pressures towards standardization and later purification) and the phenomenon of 'diglossia' (the use of different linguistic varieties depending on audience and context), but there is also plenty of 'political' information: languages had the potential to provide political capital (hence Cosimo de Medici's attempt to enhance his legitimacy by founding a Tuscan academy) and prompted a steady flow of ad-hoc mandates (calling e.g. for the replacement of Latin by French at the royal court in 1539) rather than a consistent policy. Nevertheless, 'the success of some European vernaculars in this period was as much the consequence of the rise of centralizing states – and the new state churches that emerged from the Reformation – as of the campaigns waged by poets and scholars' (75). The book also includes a chronology of significant dates, including publications of first printed books (ranging from German in 1461 to Turkish in 1729). Some of the perceived developments appear a little impressionist (e.g. 15, 40, 112, 169), the boundaries between 'languages' and

‘dialects’ are not very clearly defined and the study of orality presents the author with near-insurmountable methodical difficulties, but overall this is a remarkable achievement.

Proceeding henceforth from ‘high’ to ‘low’ politics, we can start with *Internationale Beziehungen*, a volume of nine essays by emerging scholars inspired in one way or another by Winfried Schulze. Publisher and mentor deserve credit for supporting their initiative and the results prove them right. Mirroring recent trends in this sector (and with frequent reference to the works of Heinz Duchhardt and Lucien Bely), the authors examine foreign relations from the perspective of communication structures, cultural transfer studies and transnational – not least scholarly – networks. Contributors succeed in illuminating manifold links and interdependences between the European state system, ceremonial customs (including Ulrike Hillemann on an extra-European case study), diplomatic tracts (Heidrun Kugeler with special emphasis on the time after Westphalia), administrative procedures and intelligence gathering (Volker Laube with reference to Bavarian espionage in Vienna). Like many of their fellow contributors, Conrad Zwierlein (who examines the evolution of the concept of neutrality through the twin perspective of advisory *discorsi* and decision-making in concrete situations) and Eric-Oliver Mader (who draws on the concept of *prudenza* to explain a princely conversion to Catholicism) throw new light on the relationship between political theory and diplomatic practice, although the latter’s emphasis on reason of state for Wolfgang Wilhelm of Pfalz-Neuburg’s decision to change confession – which created numerous new complications – raises as many questions as it answers.

A refreshingly original concept underlies *Die Macht des Königs*. Abandoning both conventional chronologies and integrated narratives, contributors enter different time-windows to elucidate a total of twenty-six themes through reflections on a congenial primary source. Early modernists will be puzzled by the odd decision to marginalize the period between 1500 and 1800 (especially given the volume’s stated intention to reach into the *Neuzeit*), making this effectively a survey of the powers, problems and problem-solving of medieval kings. As such, however, it is fascinating and illuminating in equal measure, with renowned specialists from different backgrounds engaging with the editor’s unusual brief and ‘cultural’ issues in the widest sense. Readers will find numerous gems on intriguing topics (‘Um 900 – Warum es das

Reich der Franken nicht gegeben hat' by Johannes Fries; 'Um 1399 – Wie man einen König absetzte' by Frank Rexroth), as well as some more traditional discussions (Martin van Gelderen on the development of the concept of popular sovereignty) and come away with the firm impression that kingship was not a given and unchanging institution, but a permanently reconstituted phenomenon. There is room for conceptual critique, too, as in Gerhard Oexle's use of recent neurological findings to ask 'in welchem Maße die überaus deutliche Fixierung von Historikern auf das hierarchische Modell des Königtums gewissermaßen unausgesprochene Annahmen über das Funktionieren des menschlichen Gehirns, über Informationsverarbeitung und Entscheidungsfähigkeit, in die Geschichte hineinprojiziert und dabei anders geartete, aber nicht weniger wichtige Elemente historischer, also politischer und sozialer Prozesse außer acht ließ' ('Um 1070 – Wie die Kommunen das Königtum herausforderten'; 149). An aggregate bibliography stretching over 58 pages allows plenty of scope for further investigations.

Der Reichstag presents twenty-one conference papers in three sections, dedicated in turn to communication structures, *Öffentliche Sphären* and perceptions of the Imperial Diet in other parts of Europe. With reference to Esther-Beate Körber, the volume defines one its key concerns, namely 'Öffentlichkeit' 'als Ansammlung von Räumen oder Sphären ..., die sich durch die Verbreitung von Information und Wissen konstituierten' (21) and invites contributors to address how the Empire's principal representative assembly appeared from the outside, i.e. in various discourses and among specific social segments. The essays thus deal e.g. with perceptions of evangelical and Catholic theologians (Jörg Haustein; Rolf Decot), territorial estates (Albrecht P. Luttenberger), *reichsfernen* areas (Michael North), but also depictions in political propaganda (Reinhard Seyboth) and assessments from a comparative perspective (Horst Carl with reference to *Schwäbische Bundestage*). As Maximilian Lanzinner explains in his introduction, the Diet evolved out of regional *Hoftage* from the fourteenth century and underwent processes of institutionalization from the late fifteenth, leading to an ever more eminent position of the electors, enormous logistical challenges to host cities and increasing recourse to script and print.³⁰ Among foreign powers, only Polish kings appear to have pursued a coherent policy towards the Diet (Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg). Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger's bold thesis that gatherings of the Diet 'stellten ... "das

Reich” als handlungsfähiges politisches Ganzes nicht nur dar, sie stellten es zugleich auch als solches her’ (83) apparently met with mixed reactions at the conference which informed this collection (18) and may encounter similar reservations in the scholarly community at large.

The fifteen contributions in *Staatsbildung* shed new light on the experience of political transformations at the beginning of the modern period. Structured into five parts dedicated to local practices of rule, the mediation of power between centre and localities, lordship and legislation, legitimization of government and the relationship of state formation and social elites, the collection emphasizes the negotiated quality of political change and the authorities’ struggle to secure acceptance for their regimes. Dagmar Freist offers two wide-ranging surveys, an opening problematization of processes like juridification, bureaucratization and de-personalization of rule and a review of recent scholarship on the emergence of the political public sphere, the latter calling for firmer periodization criteria and identifying the key transition moments as the early seventeenth century for England and the early 1700s for Germany. Focusing on attitudes towards religious minorities, Mark Häberlein finds little active support for multi-confessional polities, but a gradual institutionalization of plurality through pragmatic arrangements and religious treaties. Several contributions address territories outside the Empire, notably François-Joseph Ruggiu’s intriguing attempt to gauge motivations for office-holding among French and English town elites (highlighting honour, but increasingly also the quest for personal fulfilment as key incentives) or the study of contrasting political cultures in the two Italian cities of Ferrara and Bologna (Birgit Emich). The volume concludes with a postscript by Wolfgang Reinhard, one of the leading specialists in this field and a leading exponent of the confessionalization paradigm.³¹ While acknowledging benefits of the volume’s approach, he sees certain limits as well – an evaluation we will have to come back to below.

State, manorial and communal officials take centre stage in *Herrschaftsvermittlung*, a collection associated with a collaborative research project of historians from Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic.³² Introducing a combination of conceptual pieces (Heiko Droste and Mark Hengerer on patronage), case studies from Eastern Central Europe and comparative perspectives from England, France, Spain and Sweden, Brakensiek emphasizes the significance of personal

loyalties, trust and routinized procedures at a time of relatively weak links between rulers and subjects. Local society pursued its own interests, but appreciated the emerging state as a resource in specific situations. Separately, he also provides a telling illustration of diverging recruitment systems, qualification requirements and remuneration for officials in sample communities of Bohemia, Hungary and Hessen-Kassel (121-2). The gradual erosion of ties between Andalucian nobles and their clients through the intervention of royal courts is a principal theme of Christian Windler's contribution, while problems like corruption (Judit Pál) and practical obstacles to bureaucratization (András Vári) are highlighted elsewhere. In a model combination of structural approaches (the respective powers of communal, manorial and central institutions) and analysis of change over time in the French Dauphiné, Laurence Fontaine detects declining seigneurial influence over the course of the seventeenth century and the crucial role of local officeholder-dynasties for the growth of – predominantly fiscal – royal demands. Here again negotiation appears as a fundamental principle of European political culture, especially in Pavel Hirml's essay on Bohemian peasant officials, in Josef Hrdlička's view of local administrators as 'brokers' (162) and Karin Gottschalk's account of entrenched conflicts about brewing rights in a German territorial town.

Having reached the level of local communities, *Interaktion und Herrschaft* – a product of the SFB 'Norm und Symbol' based at Constance – presents us with a major reinterpretation of political life in preindustrial towns. Questioning common assumptions of their relative modernity, Rudolf Schlögl stresses fundamental differences and continuities from the medieval period (11). Power depended on the socio-economic clout of magisterial elites rather than abstract notions of legitimacy and urban rule should thus be characterized as *Herrschaft* rather than *Politik* (23). Writing and print, furthermore, were used (sparingly) for mainly archival purposes,³³ with face-to-face interaction – stabilized through rituals and ceremonies – playing far more important roles in public life. Here, Schlögl's view of symbolic communication tallies with that of Stollberg-Rilinger in *Reichstag*: 'Die wie auch immer vollzogene Darstellung der Ordnung und der Strukturen blieb diesen nicht äußerlich, sondern sie gewannen im geformten Vollzug erst soziale Realität' (46-7). Until at least the seventeenth century, therefore, towns effectively remained *Anwesenheitsgesellschaften*.

Seventeen highly interesting contributions then elaborate on related aspects in three sections dedicated to communication processes, urban conflicts and media of identity formation. Few, however, look beyond the confines of the Empire, and their evidence does not always conform to the alleged ‘backwardness’ of early modern towns, e.g. when Gerd Schwerhoff highlights the circulation of printed political satires in Cologne (‘das Medium der Schrift sicherte der Kritik an der Obrigkeit ... weite Verbreitung’; 132) or Andreas Würigler discusses the use of an official newspaper to justify the City of Bern’s policy to the European public (90).³⁴ Given the proliferation of rebellions, protests, petitions, tensions, mediations and negotiations, furthermore, is it really adequate to talk about the ‘sehr eingeschränkte Konfliktfähigkeit der städtischen Politik’ (42) – should we not rather see conflicts as institutionalized opportunities to renegotiate shared principles like equity, custom and the common good? Does the proliferation of mandates on all aspects of public life from the fifteenth century really tally with the claim that urban government primarily served the family interests of ruling elites? Would comparative looks at Florence, Amsterdam and London not undermine the thesis of urban polities geared towards the taming of market forces? Such questions, however, simply testify to the stimulating nature of this coherent and important collection.

On balance, then, what characterized political culture in the Holy Roman Empire according to recent research? A continued predominance of face-to-face communication in the form of oral and ritual exchange, albeit with increasing recourse to script and print for specific administrative, archival and diplomatic purposes. In certain contexts, written media started to (re-)structure (rather than merely record) communication.³⁵ While pre-industrial society remained highly localized, processes like juridification, fiscalization and confessionalization led to increased interaction between communal, regional and territorial institutions, sometimes even imperial courts. The social order was hierarchical and government increasingly oligarchic, but rulers usually sought consensus for their policies, recognized the indispensable role of the nobility, shared fundamental values like subsistence, equity and the common good with their subjects and acknowledged customary rights of participation through local councils, supplications and – at least in some territories – representative assemblies.³⁶ Division of

powers was at best incomplete, with legislative, executive and juridical functions often vested in the same bodies. In the absence of party organization along ideological lines, political opponents struggled to detach diverging opinions from attacks on personal honour, corporate privileges and confessional orthodoxy.³⁷ Public debates at times involved large sections of the population as well as ‘modern’ media like fly-sheets and periodicals, but before the 1700s the public sphere remained temporary, thematic and fragmented rather than institutionalized.³⁸ At the highest level of international relations, personal networks involved agents well beyond the narrow diplomatic elite. Following the Peace of Westphalia, Europe’s emerging state system offered major estates like Austria and Brandenburg-Prussia a chance to establish themselves among the leading players. Further dynamic elements included the growing – if by no means universal – professionalization of administration³⁹ and decreasing reliance on personal attributes or Imperial privileges for political legitimization, both in territorial monarchies and republics.⁴⁰

This, of course, can only be a momentary snapshot of a rapidly evolving field, with wider European (not to speak of global) comparison still very much a task for future investigations. Ongoing debates, as we have seen, relate e.g. to the roots and chronology of the emerging public sphere (Freist in *Staatsbildung*; Part 2 of *Reichstag*), the significance of symbolic forms of communication like rituals for the constitution of polities (asserted, among others, by Schlögl and Stollberg-Rilinger), the relative modernity of pre-industrial towns (*Politik der Stadt*) and the respective significance of the monarchs’ quest for power, fiscal-military pressures and input ‘from below’ for European state formation (see esp. Reinhard’s postscript to *Staatsbildung*). At the same time, fresh approaches keep being added to the ‘new’ political history, some connected to the ongoing ‘spatial turn’ in the historical and social sciences. Closer attention to ‘political space’ as a relational construct rather than a mere container or framework, created through interaction between agents, locations, physical objects and processes of mental synthesis, offers a flexible tool to address exchange on different levels, from microspaces like debating chambers through territorial units right up to global dimensions.⁴¹ It also allows scholars to detect varying horizons among specific individuals and social groups, to identify multiple spatial constellations at identical locations (exemplified by Stefan Rohdewald’s contrast between a contentious

‘religious’ and a more co-operative ‘communal-financial’ sphere in the Lithuanian town of Polock in *Politik der Stadt*) and to further refine their understanding of the complexity of political life in pre-industrial Europe.⁴²

It is too early to pass firm judgements on the field. A ‘new political’ synthesis – if this is not a contradiction in terms – of the early modern period has yet to emerge. Whereas Gerd Schwerhoff emphasizes the ‘konzeptuelle wie empirische Fruchtbarkeit einer Kulturgeschichte des Politischen’,⁴³ Andreas Rödder points to weaknesses like terminological imprecision and eclectic theoretical orientations, Wolfgang Reinhard to the missing link between microhistorical developments and macrohistorical change and Thomas Nicklas to the continuing relevance of ‘hard’ questions about the organization and exercise of power.⁴⁴ On balance, the reinvigoration and expansion of political history – through greater sensitivity to forms and media of political exchange – must be welcomed, as long as practitioners find ways to relate discourse, representations and perceptions to the norms, structures and socio-economic conditions with which they interacted. This reviewer, at least, has reservations about privileging some aspects above others. Communication involved specific ‘forms’ and ‘interpretations’, but surely also points of ‘substance’.⁴⁵ Fundamental values like the right to subsistence, the principle of equity or the dignity of custom could be relevant without being ‘performed’. The Holy Roman Empire manifested itself as much in its ‘concrete’ taxes, boundaries, monarchs and armies as its ‘symbolic’ representations in ceremonies and rituals.⁴⁶ Even the most imaginative reconstructions of, say, popular resistance cultures cannot abstract themselves from basic parameters like tenurial geographies, the size of feudal extractions and the number of rebels under arms and no meaningful engagement with political discourse can occur without recourse to (and indeed critical editions) of purely normative laws and treaties.⁴⁷ For the pre-industrial period, in particular, sophisticated theoretical reflections (e.g. on the significance of oral, visual and symbolic communication) need to be attuned to the limitations of source material. Once again, the way forward seems conceptual debate and methodical diversification rather than the marginalization of one ‘school’ by another.⁴⁸ The outcome is likely to be a differentiated picture of early modern politics, where ‘traditional’ elements like face-to-face communication, military conflict and oligarchical forms of government appear

alongside ‘radical’ visions like the peasants’ Federal Ordinance and the gradual transformation of the Holy Roman Empire into a ‘modern’ multi-confessional polity.

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¹ See e.g. G. Schramm, 'Polen – Böhmen – Ungarn. Übernationale Gemeinsamkeiten in der politischen Kultur des späten Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit', *Przegląd Historyczny*, 76 (1985), pp. 417-37; M. Bellabarba and R. Stauber, *Identità Territoriali e Cultura Politica nella Prima Età Moderna / Territoriale Identität und Politische Kultur in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Bologna / Berlin, 1999); L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds.), *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain* (Woodbridge, 2004).

² See most recently Peter H. Wilson, 'Still a Monstrosity? Some Reflections on Early Modern German Statehood', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), pp. 565-576; B. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation vom Ende des Mittelalters bis 1806* (Munich, 2006).

³ In the sequence listed above, they are henceforth cited as *Herrschaftsvermittlung – Politik der Stadt – Internationale Beziehungen – Languages – Macht des Königs – Reichstag – Staatsbildung*. Short titles and page numbers relating to these works appear in round brackets in the main text.

⁴ Varieties of definitions are discussed in A. Rödder, 'Klios Neue Kleider: Theoriedebatten um eine Kulturgeschichte der Politik in der Moderne', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 283 (2006), pp. 657-88, esp. 675-6; U. Frevert, 'Neue Politikgeschichte – Konzepte und Herausforderungen', in: idem and H.-G. Haupt (eds.), *Neue Politikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung* (Frankfurt a. M., 2005) pp. 7-26, esp. 14-15; a warning against stretching the 'political' too far: *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵ *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (revised edn, Aldershot, 1994), p. xi.

⁶ O. Hintze, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, ed. G. Oestreich (3 vols, 2nd edn, Göttingen, 1964-70); for the current state of research on Prussia see P. G. Dwyer (ed.), *The Rise of Prussia 1700-1830* (Harlow, 2000) and C. M. Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (London, 2006); on national identity e.g. O. Dann, M. Hoch and J. Koll (eds.), *Patriotismus und Nationsbildung am Ende des Heiligen Römischen Reiches* (Cologne, 2003); C. Hirschi, *Wettkampf der Nationen: Konstruktionen einer deutschen Ehrgemeinschaft an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2005).

⁷ A differentiated account of the historiography in L. Schorn-Schütte, *Historische Politikforschung: Eine Einführung* (Munich, 2006). For a spirited critique of sweeping dismissals of the 'old' political history see Thomas Nicklas, 'Macht – Politik – Diskurs. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Politischen Kulturgeschichte', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 86 (2004), pp. 1-26, esp. 4.

⁸ Illustrative examples include the periodical *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*; W. Schulze (ed.), *Aufstände, Revolten, Prozesse: Beiträge zu bäuerlichen Widerstandsbewegungen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa* (Stuttgart, 1982); P. Blickle, *Kommunalismus: Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform* (2 vols, Munich, 2000); W. Te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics 1500-1700* (Berkeley, 1998).

⁹ Funded 1989-1993 and documented at: <http://www.le.ac.uk/hi/bon/ESFDB/> (consulted 22/10/2007).

¹⁰ Cf. J. C. Wolfart, *Religion, Government and Political Culture in Early Modern Germany: Lindau 1520-1628* (Basingstoke, 2002).

¹¹ A. Landwehr, *Die Policey im Alltag: Die Implementation frühneuzeitlicher Policeyordnungen in Leonberg* (Frankfurt, 2000); A. Holenstein, 'Gute Policey' und lokale Gesellschaft im Staat des Ancien Régime: Das Fallbeispiel der Markgrafschaft Baden(-Durlach) (2 vols, Epfendorf, 2003); P. Blickle (ed.), *Gute Policey als Politik im 16. Jahrhundert: Die Entstehung des öffentlichen Raumes in Oberdeutschland* (Frankfurt, 2003).

¹² S. Schüpbach-Guggenbühl, *Schlüssel zur Macht. Verflechtungen und informelles Verhalten im Kleinen Rat zu Basel, 1570-1600* (2 vols, Basel, 2002).

¹³ W. Reinhard, 'Was ist europäische politische Kultur? Versuch zur Begründung einer politischen Historischen Anthropologie', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27 (2001), pp. 593-616, esp. 595 (with reference to Wolfgang Schmale).

¹⁴ P. H. Wilson, 'War in Early Modern German History', *German History*, 19 (2001), pp. 419-38. One driving force is the 'Arbeitskreis Militärgeschichte' founded in 1995: <http://akmilitaergeschichte.de/> (30/10/2007).

¹⁵ W. Blockmans, *Emperor Charles V: 1500-1558* (London, 2002); C. Scott Dixon and Martin Fuchs (eds.), *The Histories of Emperor Charles V: Nationale Perspektiven von Persönlichkeit und Herrschaft* (Münster, 2006).

¹⁶ M. Hochedlinger, 'Die Frühneuzeitforschung und die "Geschichte der Internationalen Beziehungen"; oder: Was ist aus dem "Primat der Aussenpolitik" geworden?', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 106 (1998), pp. 167-79; R. Babel (ed.), *Le Diplomate au travail: Entscheidungsprozesse, Information und Kommunikation im Umkreis des Westfälischen Friedenskongresses* (Munich, 2005).

¹⁷ P. Blickle (ed.), *Gemeinde und Staat im Alten Europa* (Munich, 1998); W. Blockmans and J.-P. Genet (eds.), *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe: 13th to 18th Centuries* (7 vols, Oxford, 1995-2000); see also the 'Tagungsbericht: Staatsbildung von unten: Europa 1300-1900' by Franz Mauelshagen (<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=1072>; accessed 3/12/2007) and *Staatsbildung*.

¹⁸ L. Schorn-Schütte (ed.), *Aspekte der politischen Kommunikation im Europa des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts. Politische Theologie – Res Publica-Verständnis – konsensgestützte Herrschaft* (Munich, 2004); Idem and Sven Tode (eds.), *Debatten über die Legitimation von Herrschaft. Politische Sprachen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2006); R. Von Friedeburg, *Self-Defence and Religious Strife in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002).

¹⁹ K. Oschema, *Freundschaft und Nähe im spätmittelalterlichen Burgund: Studien zum Spannungsfeld von Emotion und Institution* (Cologne, 2006).

²⁰ Cf. B. Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Vormoderne politische Verfahren* (Berlin, 2001).

²¹ Niklas Luhmann, *Einführung in die Systemtheorie*, ed. Dirk Baecker (2nd edn, Heidelberg, 2004). See also Reinhard, 'Kultur', p. 606, and M. Meumann and Ralf Prüve (eds.), *Herrschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit. Umriss eines dynamisch-kommunikativen Prozesses* (Münster, 2004).

²² J. L. Schipmann, *Politische Kommunikation in der Hanse (1550-1621). Hansetage und westfälische Städte* (Cologne, 2004); A. Meußner, *Für Kaiser und Reich. Politische Kommunikation in der frühen Neuzeit: Johann Ulrich Zasius (1521-1570) als Rat und Gesandter der Kaiser Ferdinand I. und Maximilian II.* (Husum, 2005); C. Pflüger, *Kommissare und Korrespondenzen. Politische Kommunikation im Alten Reich (1552 - 1558)* (Cologne, 2005).

²³ J. M. Smith, 'No more language games: Words, beliefs and the political culture of early modern France', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), pp. 1413-40; Schorn-Schütte and Tode (eds.), *Politische Sprachen*; Jörg Feuchter and Johannes Helmuth

(eds.), *Politische Redekultur in der Vormoderne. Die Oratorik europäischer Parlamente in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 2008).

²⁴ For the functions and significance of early modern petitions (and related sources like supplications and *gravamina*) cf. the series of essay collections edited by Cecilia Nubola and Andreas Würgler, e.g. *Bittschriften und Gravamina: Politik, Verwaltung und Justiz in Europa (14.-18. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin, 2005).

²⁵ V. Gröbner, *Gefährliche Geschenke. Ritual, Politik und die Sprache der Korruption in der Eidgenossenschaft im späten Mittelalter und am Beginn der Neuzeit* (Konstanz, 2000); D. W. Poeck, *Rituale der Ratswahl. Zeichen und Zeremoniell der Ratssetzung in Europa (12.-18. Jahrhundert)* (Cologne, 2003); G. Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2003); B. Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne. Begriffe – Thesen – Forschungsperspektiven', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 31 (2004), pp. 489-527.

²⁶ See the respective websites and e.g. Frevert and Haupt (eds.), *Politikgeschichte*; R. Schlögl and B. Giesen et al. (eds.), *Die Wirklichkeit der Symbole. Grundlagen der Kommunikation in historischen und gegenwärtigen Gesellschaften* (Constance, 2004); B. Stollberg-Rilinger and Th. Weller (eds.), *Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte* (Münster, 2007).

²⁷ J. Andres, A. Geisthövel and M. Schwengelbeck (eds.), *Die Sinnlichkeit der Macht: Herrschaft und Repräsentation seit der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M., 2005); Björn K. U. Weiler and Simon MacLean (eds.), *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany 800-1500* (Turnhout, 2006).

²⁸ For the latter see Reinhard, 'Kultur'; T. Mergel, 'Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Politik', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28 (2002), pp. 574-606; Frevert and Haupt (eds.), *Politikgeschichte*; B. Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?* (Berlin, 2005); Schorn-Schütte, *Politikforschung*; Rödder, 'Theoriedebatten'. See also Gerd Schwerhoff's review article for H-Soz-u-Kult: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2006-4-021> (accessed 6/12/2007).

²⁹ One of the few notable gaps from a Germanic perspective is N. Furrer, *Die vierzigsprachige Schweiz* (Zurich, 2002).

³⁰ See also G. Annas, *Hoftag – Gemeiner Tag – Reichstag: Studien zur strukturellen Entwicklung deutscher Reichsversammlungen des späten Mittelalters (1349-1471)* (2 vols, Göttingen, 2004).

³¹ The concept, shaped by Reinhard and Heinz Schilling in particular, is assessed in S. Ehrenpreis and U. Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Darmstadt, 2002) and J. M. Headley and H. J. Hillerbrand (eds.), *Confessionalization in Europe 1555-1700: Essays in Honor of Bodo Nischan* (Aldershot, 2004).

³² For new approaches to administrative history see also F. Kramer, 'Verwaltung und politische Kultur im Herzogtum und Kurfürstentum Bayern in der frühen Neuzeit: Aspekte der Forschung', *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte*, 61 (1998), pp. 33-43; A. Jendorff, *Verwandte, Teilhaber und Dienstleute. Herrschaftliche Funktionsträger im Erzstift Mainz 1514 bis 1647. Untersuchungen und Materialien zur Verfassungs- und Landesgeschichte* (Neustadt an der Aisch, 2003); C. Hesse, *Amtsträger der Fürsten im spätmittelalterlichen Reich. Die Funktionsebenen der lokalen Verwaltung in Bayern-Landshut, Hessen, Sachsen und Württemberg 1350-1515* (Göttingen, 2005).

³³ R. Head, 'Knowing like a state: The transformation of political knowledge in Swiss Archives 1450-1770', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), pp. 745-82.

³⁴ The example of the Swiss Diet, made up of representatives of urban and rural republics, demonstrates the intricate combination of face-to-face encounters (at meetings) and manifold types of written communication (recesses, missives, instructions) in a comparable socio-economic context: D. Hacke, 'Church, Space and Conflict: Religious Co-Existence and Political Communication in Seventeenth-Century Switzerland', *German History*, 25 (2007), pp. 285-312, esp. 292. For a differentiated assessment of orality and textuality in this environment see M. Jucker, *Gesandte, Schreiber, Akten: Politische Kommunikation auf eidgenössischen Tagsatzungen im Spätmittelalter* (Zurich, 2004).

³⁵ S. Teuscher, *Erzähltes Recht. Lokale Herrschaft, Verschriftlichung und Traditionsbildung im Spätmittelalter* (Frankfurt, 2007).

³⁶ Emphasis on the search for consensus in different contexts e.g. in Eibach in *Politik der Stadt*; Reinhard in *Staatsbildung* and Oexle in *Macht des Königs*.

³⁷ H.G. Haupt, 'Historische Politikforschung – Praxis und Probleme', in: Frevert and Haupt (eds.), *Politikgeschichte*, pp. 304-13, esp. 313; Schwerhoff in *Politik der Stadt*, p. 136.

³⁸ Lanzinner's introduction to *Reichstag*, 20-1; Freist in *Staatsbildung*, pp. 350-1.

³⁹ For the progress and limits of professionalization see esp. the contributions of Kugeler in *Internationale Beziehungen*, Windler in *Staatsbildung* and Vári in *Herrschaftsvermittlung*.

⁴⁰ On the increasingly 'abstract' notion of monarchy: Sabatier in *Staatsbildung*, p. 288; the emergence of a republican discourse and self-perception in the course of the early modern period is discussed in T. Maissen, *Die Geburt der Republic: Staatsverständnis und Repräsentation in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft* (Göttingen, 2006).

⁴¹ One intriguing application moves the focus of the 'public sphere' debate from abstract and discursive aspects towards a closer examination of the role of 'public spaces' like town halls and public houses: S. Rau and G. Schwerhoff, 'Öffentliche Räume in der Frühen Neuzeit. Überlegungen zu Leitbegriffen und Themen eines Forschungsfeldes', in: idem (eds.), *Zwischen Gotteshaus und Taverne* (Cologne, 2004), pp. 11-52; see also C. Dartmann, M. Füssel and S. Rüter (eds.), *Raum und Konflikt: Zur symbolischen Konstituierung gesellschaftlicher Ordnung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Münster, 2004). A theoretical account of the constitution of space in M. Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt, 2001), esp. pp. 271-3; an anthology of recent approaches in B. Kümin (ed.), *Political Space in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Aldershot, c. 2009).

⁴² In the works reviewed here, explicit spatial approaches also inform the contributions of Rudolf Schlögl and Marcus Sandl in *Politik der Stadt*, esp. pp. 51 ('Politische Macht manifestierte sich auch als Definitionshoheit über den Raum der Stadt') and 367 (engaging with Reinhardt Knodt's thesis of the 'Zustandekommen eines menschlichen Raumes durch symbolische Belebung').

⁴³ Article reviewing *Herrschaftsvermittlung*, *Staatsbildung* and Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Kulturgeschichte*: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2006-4-021> (accessed 6/12/2007).

⁴⁴ Rödder, 'Theoriedebatten', p. 680; Reinhard's postscript to *Staatsbildung* (and cf. his scepticism towards the concept of 'state formation from below': Mauelshagen, 'Tagungsbericht'); Nicklas, 'Möglichkeiten', p. 11.

⁴⁵ Striking examples are ‘real’ urban conflicts about the form and legitimacy of specific forms of political communication: Hoffmann in *Politik der Stadt*, p. 311.

⁴⁶ ‘In der politischen Kultur scheinen reale und symbolische Bedeutung häufig Hand in Hand zu gehen’: Reinhard, ‘Kultur’, p. 610.

⁴⁷ See e.g. ongoing editorial projects like *Deutsche Reichstagsakten* (<http://www.historischekommission-muenchen.de/>; consulted 19/11/2007) or *Acta Pacis Westphalicae* (<http://www.pax-westphalica.de/>; consulted 19/11/2007); the continued importance of ‘hard facts’ is also stressed in Rödder, ‘Theoriendebatten’, p. 663.

⁴⁸ ‘Eine politische Kulturgeschichte auf solidem praxeologischem Standbein kann ... Aufhellungen bringen, die eine idealistische Geistesgeschichte traditioneller Prägung häufig schuldig geblieben war.’ Nicklas, ‘Möglichkeiten’, p. 25.