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Power and Authority in Theory and Practice. English and German Towns, 1000-1650. A conference of the German Historical Institute, held on 5-8 February 1998 at the GHIL.

In her introductory remarks, Bärbel Brodt (GHIL) emphasized that the study of power and authority in relation to late medieval and early modern towns is of special interest because of the varying ways in which, and degrees to which, towns were both subjected to the power and authority of rulers, and themselves also exercised power and authority, sometimes to a very substantial extent. By comparing the English and the German evidence, the conference sought to address the constitutional framework of the two quite different realms and their towns. Furthermore, while towns provided the basic administrative unit of power and authority, the exercise of power was also closely linked to individuals, in particular, the municipal officers. It was one of the major aims of the conference to outline the means and the varied use of power in everyday urban life. However, there was another equally complex picture to be considered. Another main focus of the conference was on the experience of those subjected to power, authority, and, indeed, control by municipal officers, namely the majority of the urban population.

The opening session was chaired by Heinz Schilling (Berlin). Christopher Friedrichs (Vancouver) spoke on 'Some Reflections on the Continuity of Urban Political Culture'. Focusing on the political rhetoric in the Cologne uprisings in the 1680s, Friedrichs conceptually differentiated between 'power' and 'authority'. Dealing with the role of town councils in general, Friedrichs concentrated on the rise of oligarchic rule in particular. He tackled the question of urban autonomy by examining the fiscal position of towns and their individual status within nation-wide taxation. Friedrichs argued convincingly that despite important political and social-economic changes, there was a continuity of urban political culture from the later Middle Ages to the end of the *ancien régime*. David Palliser (Leeds) then spoke on 'Towns and the Crown in England: the Counties and the County Towns'. He stressed the tradition and longevity of the administrative unit of the English shire and the importance of the county town as seat of the regional administration. Referring to the Midland shires as

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'artificial creations', Palliser emphasized that the Normans had taken over and strengthened the Anglo-Saxon shire system. He also demonstrated that there were only a handful of effective shifts of shire towns between 1066 and 1700. These were almost always the result of the geographical position of the town in question and its proximity to London.

The first session on Friday was entitled 'Idea and Image – the Town in Theory and Literature' and chaired by Peter Clark (Leicester). Peter Johanek (Münster) dealt with 'Urban Historiography and Historical Tradition in Germany during the Middle Ages'. He pointed out that urban historiography was not restricted to annals and chronicles. Because of the high proportion of the population of medieval towns who were illiterate or semi-literate, pictures and murals, statutes and especially pageants, often depicting the foundation myths, played a vital role as well. Urban historiography and historical tradition were central points of the municipality's strategies to legitimize their authority. However, they also served to integrate individual groups of inhabitants who took an active part in their dramatization. Michael Reed (Leicester) quite literally added to the picture. His paper, 'Visual Representations of English Towns', focused on another form of urban historiography, namely, town maps and plans, as well as panoramas. His impressive examples outlined the development of urban pictorial self-presentation from the relatively simple maps of the fifteenth century to the elaborate and highly skilled coloured panoramas of the late eighteenth century.

The following session, 'Urban Constitutions', chaired by Bärbel Brodt (GHIL), outlined the constitutional frameworks of urban power and authority. In his paper 'The English Urban Constitutions, c. 1200-1400' Geoffrey Martin (London) first demonstrated the overall importance of fiscal and judicial privileges in the earlier urban charters, more than one hundred of which antedate the thirteenth century. He also outlined the general development of urban corporations, while stressing that merchant guilds were not necessarily always prominent in this. The German evidence was presented by Eberhard Isenmann (Bochum). In his paper on 'Basic Features of German Urban Constitutions in the Later Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period' he focused on the urban charters, and, in particular, the *Ratsverfassung* as their nucleus, which he referred to as a normative model with a centuries-long life. The institutional model with its typological constitutional components has to be interpreted historically. Often, the majority of a town's

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population had only a limited knowledge of the town's constitutions, yet they still claimed rights of participation, and indeed control, most often by organizing themselves in committees and syndicates. The session was concluded by Penny Tucker (London). In her paper, 'The Nature of London's Constitution in the Later Fifteenth Century', she presented an illustrative case study focusing on the degree of 'openness' in the participation of London's municipal government, while providing a general account of the complicated mechanisms of power and authority in the capital of the realm.

Saturday's session, 'Means of Power', chaired by Paul Slack (Oxford) and Christopher Friedrichs (Vancouver), was opened by Robert Tittler (Montreal/Yale) who spoke on 'Civic Building and Urban Identity in England and Central Europe, c. 1540-1640'. By focusing mainly on 'civic halls' he was able to present contrasting evidence from Germany and England. In German towns, often privileged by emperor or seigniorial lords as 'local bulwarks', the civic halls to a larger extent reflected municipal self-understanding and pride as well as their assumed – and often real – political importance. He also stressed the greater degree of urbanization and the larger urban populations on the Continent. Furthermore, according to Tittler, other factors to consider were the different historical traditions and the relative geographical isolation of England with regard to the Continent, and thus the lesser Italian influence on urban architecture. But in England as well as on the Continent civic halls and their interior and exterior decorations reflected not only the pride of the municipal officers but also their claim to authority.

An altogether different means of exercising power and authority was presented by Neithard Bulst (Bielefeld) who spoke on 'Dress as Means of Power'. Drawing numerous examples from territorial and urban dress legislation, he illustrated municipal attempts to regulate and indeed to control. Moving on from sumptuary legislation, he illustrated factual absurdities (in sixteenth-century Strasburg, for example, there were more than two hundred differentiations with regard to dress and thus to those who wore them), and characterized the dress legislation as integral part of everyday urban life. He also pointed out that the numerous confirmations and reinforcements of these laws present valuable evidence of disobedience and the difficulty of enforcing them. Robert Jütte (Stuttgart) then discussed 'Memorials and Political Power'. One of his main themes centred on the 'Stadt als

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Erinnerungsgemeinschaft', which he illustrated by giving accounts of the urban uprising in Frankfurt in 1614-16 under the leadership of Vinzenz Fettmilch and the *Gülich* uprising in Cologne in 1683-85. Moving on from there, Jütte analysed the 'official' remembrance of conflicts between urban councils and the inhabitants. According to Jütte, the urban 'memorial culture' used the media of oral tradition, rites, signs and drawings, literary forms, and, finally, memorial sites.

Jan Gerchow (Essen) then led over to the guilds and companies of towns. In his paper, 'Guilds, Fraternities and "Companies" in late Medieval Towns: England and Germany in Comparison', he referred to the different research approaches in both countries, the different emphases placed on the role of authorities, and variations in concentration on urban constitutional questions, all of which he highlighted by a comparative analysis of journeymen guilds. Ian Archer (Oxford) followed with a paper on 'Internal Dissension in London Guilds in the Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries'. Portraying the administrative structure of a number of London guilds, he stressed that despite major differences they were all still subject to the town's administration. Although the internal discourses on legitimating and apportioning authority and leadership were of great importance, they failed to deny the 'fundamental conversationism of London artisans'.

The session was concluded by Arnd Reitemeier (Kiel) giving a paper on 'Churchwardens in England and Germany: Laical Power in the Community'. Churchwardens, to whom we have references since the turn of the thirteenth century, and their duties can best be traced through an analysis of their account books. In Germany churchwardens were mostly appointed by the town's lord or the municipal council; in England, however, in nearly all cases the appointment was made by the parish council. In both cases, churchwardens administered the life and substance of the parish in a figurative sense.

The final session of the conference, 'Use of Power', was held on Sunday and chaired by Neithard Bulst (Bielefeld). Ann Saunders (London) in her paper 'The Royal Exchange' presented a rare case of unity and co-operation. Although the London Royal Exchange, built on the initiative of Sir Thomas Gresham, was modelled on the *Burse* at Bruges, it was actively supported by both the London municipal authorities and the Crown. Karl Härter (Frankfurt) chose a more general approach. In his paper on '*Policey-Ordnungen* in German Towns 1450-1650' he analysed *Policey-Ordnungen* from the dual point

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of view of urban self-government and the integration of urban communities into the developing territorial state. His principal line of argument was that the territorial state mainly used *Policey-Ordnungen* severely to restrict urban autonomy. The session was concluded by Bärbel Brodt (GHIL) whose paper on 'What Sort of Social Control was there in Towns' was largely a plea for the term 'social control' to be extended to cover care and provision as well as the internal discipline of municipal authorities. While comparing German imperial cities and *Autonomiestädte* and English provincial capitals, she emphasized the function of towns as role models in the field of poor law and social care and provision. In both countries, the Reformation strengthened, but did not initiate this development. The basis and unit of the urban parish remained intact. She also stressed that German urban councils were much more numerous than their English counterparts, and thus questioned their political effectiveness. Another marked difference was the degree to which guilds were involved in these councils; at the level of substantial provincial capitals, York provides the sole equivalent to German towns. It also seems that the English sample towns were more reluctant to amend their constitutions in writing.

The conference was concluded by James Campbell (Oxford) whose paper on 'Integration' was chaired by Peter Wende (GHIL). Starting with Jan Gerchow's observations on the distinctions between the English and the German urban guilds, he expanded this into a more general picture, arguing that these distinctions mainly originated at a different level of *Staatlichkeit*, that is, the centrality of power and authority. In so doing, he picked up the main threads of David Palliser's concept. Referring to Peter Johanek and Robert Jütte, Campbell illustrated the importance of urban *Memoria*, which are found more often and in more variations in Germany than in England. One striking example here was the London mayor Thietmar, a native of Germany; another factor was the outstanding dominance of London in English urban historiography. Campbell also spoke of English urban foundation myths with reference to Grimsby and Norwich, aptly illustrated by the dazzling account of the visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1576 and the *pageants* the city staged on that occasion. He summed up the similarities and differences between German and English towns by speaking about the development of the royal fiscal system. The Institute intends to publish the proceedings of the conference in its English series.

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