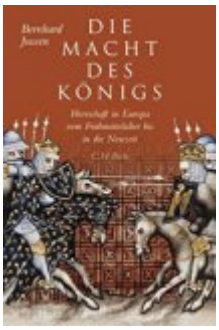
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Bernhard Jussen. *Die Macht des Königs: Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit.* Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2005. 478 pp. EUR 38.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-406-53230-6.



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Published on H-German (July, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

As Bernhard Jussen correctly stresses in his introduction to this essay collection, we do not need to rediscover kingship. Kings and queens have always been favorite subjects for historians--at least, one might add, as far as medieval and early modern history are concerned. But even for the premodern period, kingship has rarely been studied in long-term perspective. This lacuna is all the more striking as kingship, existent in one form or another since ancient times, seems ideally suited to such a study. A history of kingship--prescinding from specific rulers--would bring to light the very characteristics of this form of rule. Moreover, as kingship was a highly visible and politically relevant phenomenon, and thus comparatively well represented in the sources, such an approach would also allow insights into general social, political, and cultural developments. Jussen's essay collection, in filling the gap, strives for both goals. It does so in a form that, at least in the German context, is innovative. The book combines the characteristics of a single-author volume and essay collection in the sense that each chapter follows clear rules and--with some exceptions--the same structure, though written by different authors. In addition, the strict chronological order, with each of the twenty-six chapters focusing on one particular date and source, and the respective headlines in the form of general questions (for example, "How to Depose a King"), point beyond the scope of the chapter and at the same time make the process of historical analysis visible to the reader.

In his introduction, Jussen explains this concept not only as an attempt to achieve greater coherence than the usual collection. Rather, he strives for a new form of synthesis that reflects the multiplicity of narrative and takes into account different perspectives and interpretations. Ideally, as Jussen claims, the volume will offer small sketches of a history of the institution. Such an approach can draw on methods and results developed by cultural history over the last decades and in particular on the new political history, with its stress on rituals and communication. This approach permits a focus on single individuals

without necessarily embracing a personalistic perspective.

The essays more or less strictly follow the program Jussen sets up, some along more conventional lines, some in more innovative ways, while the overall quality of the contributions is high. Egon Flaig and Jussen set out to explain how concepts of rule changed from the late Roman Empire to Merovingian forms of kingship. Jussen, like many authors of later essays, meticulously analyzes attempts by chroniclers to find expressions for the perceived changes. The issue of communicating monarchical rule dominates most of the following articles. Using different examples, which are often compared in synchronogical and chronological perspective, some authors (Philippe Buc, Janet L. Nelson) describe how political ritual was shaped by later interpretations and the manifold ways in which different groups interpreted the same rituals. Other articles analyze the pitfalls of communication between different ethnicities, like the Franks and the Nordic tribes, and problems resulting from the fact that one's own political concepts were often projected onto the other. In the relationship between western and Byzantine kingship, the limits of communication are particularly evident, and it is striking to see how little political transfer occurred between these concepts of kingship. On the other hand, images of the other were used to clarify one's own reality or to achieve one's own political goals (as seen in the contributions by Paul Magdalino and Marie Theres Fögen).

Another question that looms large in many essays is how effectively kingshipcould work in medieval times. Perhaps not as surprisingly as some authors (Johannes Fried, Caspar Ehlers, Otto Gerhard Oexle) claim, the general line of argumentation stresses the limits of rule and the inadequacy of the term "state." Essays by Michael McCormick and Wim Blockmans also remind us that the success of monarchical rule depended more often than not on quotidian issues like the robustness of the economy or the effectiveness of military organization.

Kingship does not always stand in the center of the articles, a problem that somewhat dilutes the volume's overall focus. The recurring theme of the ambivalence of the reception of ritual, for example, was not a problem unique to kingship. Moreover, there is a constant--and to some extent necessary--tension in the collection between the specificity of the examples and the volume's universalist claims. The title of the chapter on the governmental type of the *Seniorat* in Poland and other eastern European areas suggests that we are looking at just one example of a general phenomenon, while the chapter itself, by Zbigniew Dalewski, stresses instead the specific conditions in the Slavonic parts of medieval Europe. What holds true for geographic specifics applies in the same way to chronological developments. As every chapter is associated with a particular date in an ascending order, it is clear that some form of development is assumed, while, on the other hand, many articles suggest that they are delivering universal results.

The institutionalization of kingship and the development from kingship to monarchy as individual rule were the two most important developments for understanding the concept. However, as Thomas Zoltz shows, the establishment of only one successor can by no means be understood as a linear process towards absolutist rule. The succession of the oldest son was first and foremost the result of a weak king who was no longer able to spare territories for his younger sons. Weak or strong kings had other social effects, too. In a compelling essay, David Nirenberg describes the ambivalent relationship between kingship and Jews. While the ever more potent rulers of western Europe pursued politics of expulsion, the weaker kings of eastern Europe practiced more tolerant politics towards Jews until the early modern period. On the other hand, seminal developments like the rise of an administration located in

one fixed place, and new political ways of thinking that no longer focused on the concrete ruler but rather on the institution he represented, shaped the preconditions for what is still known as absolutist rule in the early modern period. Malcolm Vale describes how, as early as the thirteenth century, concepts of sovereignty and ***lèse-majesté*** had evolved; Stefan Weinfurter stresses the importance of the perception of the Holy Roman Empire as holy for the development of kingship as an institution separated from the church; and Martin van Gelderen looks at the decline of the notion of a universal monarchy.

The volume concludes with three essays on the development of monarchy during early modern times. Albert Cremer questions once again the accuracy of the term "absolutism." While Matthias Müller, using the example of the architecture of royal palaces, demonstrates how important it remained for dynasties to refer to their ancestors and thus to tradition in their building programs, Martin Kirsch focuses on Napoleon I and the establishment of constitutional monarchy as a type of government that radically rejected traditional patterns of kingship and which acquired immense importance in almost all European states prior to the twentieth century.

In sum, this is an unusual--in the positive sense--collection of essays. The great majority of the articles demonstrates the impressive methodological achievements of medievalist historiography in analyzing premodern forms of rule as phenomena in their own right. Almost necessarily, this analytical focus means that the volume is not always as coherent in terms of periodization as its title suggests. The limits of the approach become particularly evident in the sections on the early modern and modern periods. Nonetheless, this volume outlines a fascinating topic for further, extendedresearch and invites additional bold attempts at a synthesis, though one that will ultimately remain partial.

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Citation: Martin Kohlrausch. Review of Jussen, Bernhard. *Die Macht des Königs: Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. July, 2009.

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