Project Group C1

Between Princely Service and Noble Self-Assertion: Heroism as Noble Culture and Collective Mentality in the German and French Late Middle Ages

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The point of departure for this project group was the conflict between the consolidation of princely power and the attempts of lower ranks of nobility to assert themselves in the late Middle Ages. The resulting opposing heroic models were studied in terms of their resonance within different groups of nobility as well as their ability to mobilize these groups.

The assistant's dissertation project focused on the perspective of the lower ranks of nobility. He compared two discourses – the literary presentation of the knightly imaginarium,[1] and the socio-historical situation of the lower nobility[2] – and how these related to the cultural paradigm of knights and the royal court.[3] The goal was to analyze how models of hero-knights are constructed, while studying their function for a "nobility undergoing change."[4] This was done by investigating the "heroisms" (heroically shaped habitus patterns by which communities acculturate heroic models) that make up a heroic habitus that determines heroic practice. His initial goal was to focus on these types of heroism as well as the literary construction of hero-knights by analyzing the practices (tournaments, martial arts games, and war campaigns) described in historical documents and texts[5] and by investigating literary models in a corpus of panegyric, historically documented "biographies of knights"[6] in the lower ranks of nobility in the late Middle Ages. By comparing German and French cases (the latter of which are particularly numerous), the project group strove to avoid limiting the focus to one of the two countries, as has been the case in the most previous research, thereby expanding the range of possible types of heroizations and heroisms as cultural patterns for European nobility, using these two "landscapes of nobility" as examples.

The heroic discourse in the court of Burgundy and the negotiation of values in the political communication between the prince and the nobles of the court was also studied. Emphasis was placed on how certain individual and/or groups were able to acquire heroic patterns of self-definition. This additional aspect of the study concentrated on competing heroisms in the royal court and non-royal aristocracy with the goal of establishing their distinctions.

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[1] Kerth, S. 2002: Die letzten taflrunder? Krieg in adligen Autobiographien des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts, in: Brunner, Horst [et al.], Dulce bellum inexpertis. Bilder des Krieges in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts, Wiesbaden, pp. 175–245; Gaucher, E. 1994: La biographie chevaleresque. Typologie d'un genre (XIIIe–XVe siècle), Paris.

[2] Rabeler, S. 2006: Niederadlige Lebensformen im späten Mittelalter. Wilwolt von Schaumberg (um 1450–1510) und Ludwig von Eyb d. J. (1450–1521), Neustadt a. d. Aisch; Schneider, J. 2003: Spätmittelalterlicher deutscher Niederadel: ein landschaftlicher Vergleich, Stuttgart; Contamine, P. 1997: La noblesse au royaume de France de Philippe le Bel à Louis XII. Essai de synthèse, Paris; Lalande, D. 1988: Jean II le Meingre, dit Boucicaut (1366–1421). Étude d'une biographie héroïque, Geneva.

[3] Paravicini, W. 2011: Die ritterlich-höfische Kultur des Mittelalters, 3rd expanded ed., Munich.

[4] Sablonier, R. 2000: Adel im Wandel. Eine Untersuchung zur sozialen Situation des ostschweizerischen Adels um 1300, Zurich (first published 1979).

[5] Lalande, D. 1988: Jean II le Meingre, dit Boucicaut (1366–1421). Étude d'une biographie héroïque, Genf. See also Rabeler, S. 2006: Niederadlige Lebensformen im späten Mittelalter. Wilwolt von Schaumberg (um 1450–1510) und Ludwig von Eyb d. J. (1450–1521), Neustadt a. d. Aisch.

[6] Gaucher, E. 1994: La biographie chevaleresque. Typologie d'un genre (XIIIe–XVe siècle), Paris.

The dissertation project demonstrated that the construction of heroes in the lower ranks of nobility was based on a chivalric, heroic tradition that was negotiated between various interest groups in the late Middle Ages, after which it remained a guiding principle for how nobles presented themselves in early modern times. While subordinating their heroic behavior to the general wellbeing of society on behalf of the prince, the lower ranks of nobility nevertheless confidently attempted to combine heroic tradition with service to the prince. In the case of the court of Burgundy, the negotiation of heroic values was dominated by the royal court, where the prince was held up as the ideal embodiment of the timeless values of chivalry and nobility. Compared to the assumed tension between the royal court and the aristocracy, these negotiations also played a role in the image politics of the Duke of Burgundy in Flemish cities.[7] Unlike the many different modes of presentation and medialization[8] emphasized in art historical literature, the repertoire of heroic role models oriented toward fulfilling the prince's political objectives was also strongly differentiated. Early results of this research were presented as a talk by the project leader for the SFB's lecture series and were later published in the anthology *Vom Weihegefäß zur Drohne – Objekte des Heroischen* (From Sacred Vessel to Drone: Heroic Objects) and expanded into a talk held in December 2014 at the German Historical Institute (DHI) in London. The focus here was on the gradual shift from heroism as a noble culture – a culture represented in the visual politics of the Order of the Golden Fleece and its mythology – to the heroization of sovereigns (according to ancient patterns); the different forms, levels and scopes of the medialization of this heroization; and the negotiation of its performance in Flemish cities, all of which occurred via an imaginary dialogue between the ruler and urban elites.

Chivalric and aristocratic heroism found resonance in noble families in the long term because the memory of heroes served to hold these families together and to establish traditions. This identity-forming practice was maintained for a long period and survived many social and political upheavals. These families also sometimes overlapped with political interest groups – as was the case with the German aristocracy of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, who either enjoyed imperial freedom or were striving for it. These were also analyzed, along with short-lived social groupings (such as the *société militaire*[9] in France at the end of the fourteenth century).

Determining heroic habitus patterns proved more difficult than expected, because the biographical documentation only revealed constructs and model representations, and not actual behavior. A close reading of treatises, written history, and biographies thus allowed the history of the discourse of chivalric heroism to be teased out, while identifying the central paradigms of the rhetoric of chivalric heroes in the lower ranks of nobility. Using exemplary detailed studies on performative heroizations and the origins of selected biographies as a basis, it was possible to determine the social reach of each actor with greater precision. The genesis of Adam Reißner's "Historia Herrn Georg und Herrn Casparn von Frundsberg," for example, was not only illuminated using printed sources as a basis; it was also put into the social context of the heroization of the Frundsbergs. The theme of knighthood's need to find a balance between heroic tradition and reformatory discourse, which can also be found in the

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[7] Lecuppre-Desjardin, E. 2004: La ville des cérémonies: essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons, Turnhout.

[8] Z. B.: Franke, B. / Welzel, B. 1997: Die Kunst der burgundischen Niederlande: eine Einführung, Berlin.

[9] Contamine, P. 1972: Guerre, état et société à la fin du moyen âge. Etudes sur les armées des rois de France, 1337–1494, Paris.

biography of Jean le Meingre (aka Boucicaut), was also discussed in the context of other sources.

An early version of the PhD thesis was presented at a post-graduate conference hosted by the Department of History of the University of Mannheim called "Helden über Grenzen? Transnationale(s) Mythen und Heldentum von der Antike bis zur Moderne" (Heroes Beyond Borders? Transnational Myths and Heroism, from Antiquity to Modernity) in September 2013. Thanks to input from this conference, which covered a wide range of projects, the hypothesis of the project was reformulated to accommodate ideas from the SFB 644 (Transformations of Antiquity) at the Humboldt University in Berlin and research there into the main cultural, agonistic patterns in the late Middle Ages (see the research colloquium of Prof. Dr. Johannes Helmrath in the summer semester 2014). Research conducted by the present project group was also relevant for the research group "Games and Tournaments as Medieval Sociability," led by Dr. Vanina Kopp in Paris. The project group also presented and discussed its research at a workshop in March 2015 and the summer school "Games and Power Games in Pre-Modern Times" in June 2015 at the German Historical Institute in Paris, which is an important location for research in this field. At these events, the paradigms of group cultures, agonism, the symbolic negotiation of male role models, and political messages were identified as important intersections.

Publications by the Project Group

Schreier, G. 2017: Georg von Ehingen (1428–1508). Fahrender Ritter und Fürstenrat, in: Momente. Beiträge zur Landeskunde von Baden-Württemberg 2.

Schreier, G. [forthcoming 2018]: Ritterhelden. Konstruktionen adliger Exzellenz und ihre Kontexte im deutschen und französischen Spätmittelalter, Mittelalter-Forschungen, Ostfildern.

Schreier, G. 2016: Chivalric Heroism, Gender, and Politics: Some Observations on Chivalric Culture in the Late Middle Ages, in: helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen 4.2, pp. 33–40, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2016/02/04.

Schreier, G. 2015: Mittelalter, in: R. von den Hoff / R. G. Asch / A. Aurnhammer [et al.] (eds.), Das Heroische in der neueren kulturhistorischen Forschung: Ein kritischer Bericht, H-Soz-Kult, 28.07.2015, pp. 28–36, http://www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/forschungsberichte-2216.

Studt, B. 2016: Die Ambiguität des Helden im adligen Tugend- und Wertediskurs, in: C. Witthöft / O. Auge (eds.), Ambiguität im Mittelalter. Formen zeitgenössischer Reflexion und wissenschaftlicher Rezeption, (Tagung Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg, Greifswald, 11.–13. April 2013), pp. 305–314.

Studt, B. 2015: Lorbeer, Vlies und Feuerstrahl. Antikenrezeption als Herrscherheroisierung – Die Bildpolitik der Herzöge von Burgund, in: A. Aurnhammer / U. Bröckling (eds.), Vom Weihegefäß zur Drohne. Kulturen des Heroischen und ihre Objekte (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 4), Würzburg, pp. 85–104.

Studt, B. 2015: Gründungsheroen, Ahnenreihen und historische Topographien. Genealogische Narrative und konkurrierende Formen politischer Raumbildung in den Geschichten von den Fürsten in Bayern, in: C. Andenna / G. Melville (eds.), Idoneität – Genealogie – Legitimation: Begründung und Akzeptanz von dynastischer Herrschaft im Mittelalter, Köln, pp. 387–406.