

Project Group C2

Competing Models of Heroism and the Hero in England and France, ca. 1580–1630, in a Comparative Perspective: Monarch, Soldier, Martyr, Religious Warrior

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The point of departure for this project group was the lack of comprehensive descriptions of heroic life plans of aristocrats in England and France from the late 16th to mid-17th century, a period characterized by fundamental changes. This lack is especially apparent regarding comparative studies. The aim of this project group was therefore to remedy this oversight by analyzing the dominant, aristocratic heroic models in this period, while also looking at the ever-changing forms of the self-portrayal of monarchs, how these were transformed under the influence of different religious norms, and what role these played in the monarchy's intensified political and social efforts to bring peace. The main focus of this project group was thus the changes in the political culture of an elite. The exchange of ideas between the two countries and the unintended effects thereof were also studied.

The chosen timeframe proved ideal for researching the heroic, because the discourse of heroic life plans and heroic models began to gain more and more currency around the 1580s. Instead of complying to a narrative in which the heroic role models for the aristocracy became gradually relative, the epoch leading up to the middle of the 17th century was distinguished by the fact that war was clearly becoming the main stage where nobility could show its merit – that is, until military heroism fell under increasing criticism in the second half of the century, especially in England. This remilitarization was accompanied, especially for nobles of the sword, by the rise in status of other fields of heroic action, such as religion, and in some special cases scholarship during late humanism. The project group's analysis was thus based on three ideal heroic types: the warrior, the martyr, and the thinker, or scholar. These coincide with three heroic languages that are prominent in the main sources and are distinguished according to genre: that of the knight, the religious believer, and the philosopher – all of which are often portrayed in the agonistic-combative mode.

The distinction between these different models often becomes blurred in the heroization of aesthetics and rhetoric. This especially becomes clear in the portrayal of physical suffering and emotions, such as melancholy, which is often stylized as a typical ailment for extraordinary people. The heroic models also integrated modes of behavior that were connoted as female in other contexts (for example, a contemplative and acquiescent nature). Ideas of honor that were associated with heroic ideals also underwent a transformation from inclusion to exclusion with regard to other social estates. This development, which went hand in hand with a distinct cultural transfer (primarily from France to England), could be determined through a close reading of relevant source texts and images. The assistant Andreas Schlüter conducted an innovative study of the general development in both countries in which he also continually reflected on the main questions posed in the overall project. He also demonstrated how this exemplary period, during which heroes were in currency and many competing types of heroes developed, could help to deepen the understanding of heroism in general.

While Andreas Schlüter's PhD thesis focused solely on the period from ca. 1580 to 1640, the monograph by the project leader Ronald Asch titled *Der Herbst des Helden* (The Autumn of

the Hero) also included the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Ultimately, this expansion proved fruitful – even necessary – for the continuation of the project group, and it laid the foundations for the second application phase under Asch's continued leadership. The second half of the seventeenth century is especially regarded as a time of crisis for aristocratic heroes. Despite this, Louis XIV's monarchy was still dependent on the plausible heroization of aristocrats to motivate aristocratic officers to take part in the war – although their heroism showed strong elements of transgression. This means that a general domestication of the aristocracy and disappearance of aristocratic heroes cannot be detected, even in Louis XIV's France.

In England, on the other hand, antithetic ideas about heroism were much more prevalent in the second half of the seventeenth century than in France. These could be found the so-called "restoration rakes," who rebelled against all conventions through heroic rebellion, as well as the martyrs who fought for freedom and religious tolerance who died in the 1680s, including Algernon Sidney, who was executed in 1683. In the eighteenth century, we can see a tendency for heroes to become more bourgeois and to serve the patriotic cause and a sense of national identity in France as well as England. This rightfully dubbed "autumn of heroes" included many figures, one of which was Grand Condé (who died in 1686), who was the victor of the Battle of Rocroi and whose scope of action was defined by his aristocratic pride and hunger for glory and honor. Condé was, after all, quite capable of coping on his own and did not feel inclined to follow the rules, which is how he fought for Spain as well as for his own country. While transgression would continue to remain a key trait of heroes after the mid-18th century – despite Enlightenment's efforts to domesticate heroes – it was demanded of heroes that they act as symbols for a cause or a movement. Only then could people forgive them for breaking the rules and showing unrestrained behavior and regard this not as the expressions of privilege of the aristocrats or professional soldiers, but as potential models of behavior for everyone – as models possessing a destabilizing power that did not exist before.

Publications by the Project Group

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