Erschienen in: German History ; 32 (2014), 2. - S. 296-297

***Princely Brothers and Sisters: The Sibling Bond in German Politics, 1100–1250*. By Jonathan R. Lyon. Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press. 2012. xiv + 394 pp. $65.00 (hardback).**

There are many books on the medieval nobility in general, and kinship in particular, but very little has been written on noble siblings. Overwhelmingly, scholarship has concentrated on intergenerational and, more recently, conjugal relations to understand noble kinship. This is at least partly due to a scholarly tradition with which Jonathan R. Lyon critically engages in his monograph on *Princely Brothers and Sisters*: Duby's version of the so-called Schmid/Duby thesis is still widely influential, if only because it keeps on being refuted. Famously, Duby argued for a relatively sudden change towards patrilineal kinship structures in the eleventh century. For medieval France, a large number of regional studies have critically engaged with this model (e.g. Barthélemy, Bouchard, Evergates, Livingstone, Thompson, White). In addition, Jack Goody inspired a number of studies taking a very different approach but on the whole coming to similar conclusions. Both traditions have provided ample evidence against the *mutation lignagère* in general and the supposed rise of primogeniture in particular.

Yet most of this has been argued for medieval France. Much less work has been done on the German nobility, or rather, recent scholarship on kinship in the German-speaking regions has concentrated on the early (Jussen, Lubich) or the late and indeed the very late middle ages (Morsel, Nolte, Rogge, Spieß, Teuscher). It is therefore particularly welcome that Lyon in his study of the German nobility focuses on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In some respects, Lyon's book is a very traditional study, clearly concentrating on political history, and mainly arguing from charter evidence and chronicles. At the same time, Lyon is very innovative in his focus on sibling relations to understand succession, inheritance and lordship. Rather than refuting (once more) the idea of primogeniture, Lyon takes the importance of joint succession and divided inheritance as his starting point to study nine lineages of the upper nobility in Germany. These lineages are the Staufen, Welfs, Wettins, Ascanians, Ludowings, Zähringen, Wittelsbach, Babenberg and Andechs, from their beginnings in the early twelfth century to the reign of Frederick II. Lyon modestly calls this a 'case study' (p. 4), but his sample is clearly large enough to reach reasonably general conclusions. Indeed, much more far-reaching claims have been made from much smaller samples.

In the Introduction, Lyon gives a brief but clear account of the historiography. His assessment of Schmid's studies in particular is much more nuanced than what one frequently reads in the literature. Already in these few pages it is evident that Lyon is widely read in the very varied scholarly traditions relevant for his subject. Indeed, his familiarity with the German, French and English secondary literature transpires on almost every page of the following chapters, and so is his knowledge of the primary sources.

The first chapter very briefly (pp. 16–32) introduces the nine lineages and their respective foundation in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Lyon has no problem calling them 'lineages', but from the outset he makes it clear that this does not mean primogeniture. Indeed, as he points out, the upper nobility east of the Rhine showed little if any concern to preserve the integrity of their territories.

Chapter 2 directly engages with the sibling bond in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Here, the cooperation between siblings (mainly between brothers) is made very clear. In addition to joint rulership and cooperation between siblings, Lyon also looks at the sibling bond as bridging the gap between secular and ecclesiastical spheres. As he demonstrates, noble men and women pursuing an ecclesiastical career normally retained close connections

with their lay siblings. Women who married into distant families, however, were less likely to remain closely tied to their siblings.

A third chapter on 'Baby Boomers' of the early twelfth century highlights the fact that the first generation of the nine families under consideration here was very fertile indeed. This was the pre-condition for the practice of joint lordship, sibling cooperation and division of inheritance that Lyon analyses, but he also makes it clear how much depended on chance.

The following chapters explore the rise, and also the decline, of the sibling bond in German politics against this background. Family strategies and individual choice, but also pure chance, played an important role, and Lyon is rightly sceptical about the idea that any comprehensive model can be found that would explain the different modes of inheritance and succession in the period. Fortunately, Lyon's careful and balanced argumentation does not stop him from making a convincing point that the 1180s were a time when sibling groups played a decisive role in German politics (pp. 118–119). As he makes clear for the Andechs lineage in particular, the declining importance of cooperation between siblings may well be linked to the lower number of surviving sons in the following generation. At the same time, and perhaps because of this, joint lordship and close sibling cooperation after 1200 became less frequent than they normally had been in the twelfth century. This all gives weight to Lyon's argument that the absence of strong sibling groups in the upper nobility in the mid-1230s made a crucial difference in German politics, and that this at least partly helps to understand the success of Frederick II (pp. 226–228).

The results of Lyon's study are impressive, and they are clear. Partible inheritance was the rule, and for this reason alone, sibling cooperation was of paramount importance both for individual families and for German politics. The rarity of serious fraternal dispute is striking, and clearly contradicts what Duby and others have asserted concerning conflicts between brothers. Thanks to the large scope of Lyon's study, this negative finding has considerable weight and cannot be dismissed as exceptional. Lyon's *Princely Brothers and Sisters* is an important and interesting book that offers a refreshing view of both medieval politics and medieval kinship.

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