

REVIEW ARTICLES

STRUCTURING AND INTERPRETING THE EXPERIENCE OF EARLY MODERN EUROPEANS

Archives of the scientific revolution: the formation and exchange of ideas in seventeenth-century Europe. Edited by Michael Hunter. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998. Pp. xii + 216. ISBN 0-8511-553-7. £45.00.

The peasantries of Europe from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Edited by Tom Scott. London: Longman, 1998. Pp. xi + 416. ISBN 0-582-10131-X. £19.99.

Civil society and fanaticism: conjoined histories. By Dominique Colas. Translated by Amy Jacobs. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Pp. xxx + 480. ISBN 0-8047-2736-8. £14.95.

The quest for compromise: peacemakers in Counter-Reformation Vienna. By Howard Louthan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xvi + 185. ISBN 0-531-58082-X. £35.00.

Each of the four volumes at hand examines a different yet vital aspect of European society between the late middle ages and the beginnings of industrialization. The field is far too diverse and the approaches too complex to expect a commonality among these works, excepting a shared temporal and geographic concentration. Still, the themes and subjects reveal some of the issues that have captured recent attention and show how scholars propose to go about exploring them. They suggest the interests of historians of early modern Europe, their distinctive perspectives, and varying methodologies. The collective reach extends from deciphering the papers and manuscripts left by participants in the scientific revolution to an exploration of the immense yet largely reticent peasant world, an attempt to establish the origins and trace the development of today's ongoing discussion over civil society and fanaticism, and finally a study of four peacemakers who urged religious moderation at the imperial court of Counter-Reformation Vienna. Put slightly differently, these studies raise fundamental questions about the sources upon which scholars depend, the nature and utility of historical models, and the relationship between contemporary concerns and our collective past, whether they be issues of civil society or irenic accommodation.

Historians are taught to approach the sources with a healthy scepticism. Documents are to be 'interrogated' like witnesses in the box. Few doubt, for example, that political figures, their admirers, and detractors have attempted to manipulate the record with an eye to future recognition. More startling is the manner whereby 'dispassionate' scientists and the subsequent custodians of their papers have actively sought to shape historical reputation. Accordingly, the *Archives of the scientific revolution* is a cautionary tale.

The editor, Michael Hunter, has assembled eleven papers, the bulk of which were originally presented during a conference held at the Royal Society in 1996. The

scientific revolution of the seventeenth century was unquestionably critical for the way in which we conceptualize and investigate the natural world. Thus a close study of the manuscript sources seems obvious. The procedures for undertaking further research are less evident. This 'archeology' of archives poses a series of crucial queries. Where are the surviving collections to be found? What were the dynamics of their creation? To what extent have the materials been disseminated? What were the conscious and unconscious forces that shaped the collections? Finally, how have these archival assemblages and the manner of their construction influenced historical interpretations?

The papers, letters, and other materials roughly divide into four major categories. To begin, there are manuscript collections associated with intellectual giants such as Galileo or Newton. Close behind these luminaries is an array of lesser known but important figures. Apart from these intellectuals, a number of 'intelligencers' developed and maintained vital communication networks for the exchange of ideas and information. Finally, the editor has included reports on the archival collections of two eminent public institutions, the Royal Society and the Académie des Sciences. Taken together, the contributors survey a wide range of key sources.

The discussion of these archival collections is enormously helpful on several levels. To be sure, the reader discovers useful things about the papers of eminent scientists, less perhaps about the more representative intellectuals, and scientific associations. More important, the contributions will prompt historians who have worked with manuscript sources to reflect on the structure of these collections. Scholars make an effort to assess carefully the documents and to remain neutral in assigning value and meaning. It is infinitely more difficult to imagine what might have existed and how lost materials could alter interpretation.

The contributors' approaches naturally vary. Robert Hatch makes a concerted effort to gauge the original extent of the Collection Boulliau at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris) in connection with the larger goal of establishing the dimensions and importance of Boulliau's correspondence network. Michael Hunter and Mark Greengrass turn the reader's attention to the form and arrangement of personal archives. Hunter readily acknowledges that the Boyle papers have been rearranged on several occasions. In addition, some materials have been lost. Still, he makes a strong case that it is vital to recapture Boyle's original arrangement. Boyle had explicit organizing principles in mind as he set about classifying his papers. The more we understand his system, the better we understand his ideas. Greengrass takes a similar approach to the Hartlib papers. The concern is less what has survived and what has been lost than the structure of the archive. In Hartlib's case, close examination of the marginal citations in his unedited diary reveals much about the way in which he ordered knowledge. This more intimate awareness of Hartlib's mental archive offers the scholar a rare perspective into a person's material archive.

Another issue central to this exploration of scientific archives is their arrangement and subsequent rearrangement by the scientist himself or later editors. Domenico Bertoloni Meli notes that Marcello Malpighi painstakingly managed the preservation of his papers in hopes of fashioning his own legacy. He wished to be remembered for his anatomical work rather than as a physician. He sought to mould an image with a decided preference for theory rather than (medical) practice. Inevitably, what he endeavoured to include or exclude has influenced our reading. On the other hand, Huygens's attempt to bequeath us the legacy of his life's endeavour has proven a frustrating affair. According to Joella Yoder, he willed his workbooks and manuscript

papers to a public institution – the University of Leiden – rather than follow the usual procedure of leaving them to one's family. Because Huygens had published little during his lifetime, his earliest editors made an effort to place his work in print. Unfortunately, they proceeded to write on his papers, leaving the modern historian with the difficult task of distinguishing between the scientist's views and those of the editors. The results can be frustrating. Whose voice(s) do we hear in his papers and published works?

Perhaps the most stunning example of archival reorganization centres on Newton. His papers were, according to Rob Iliffe, separated in an artificial distinction between the scientific and non-scientific parts. The scientific papers were not deposited at the University of Cambridge until 1872, nearly a century and a half after his death. There, a committee of scholars examined and classified the collection on the basis of nineteenth-century notions of science. They returned the non-scientific portion to Hampshire, where it remained generally unavailable until the 1930s. These developments undoubtedly affected scholarly assessments of Newton. Editorial distinctions between theology and alchemy, on the one hand, and mathematics and optics, on the other, have proven misleading. Newton emphasized the connections between religious faith and natural philosophy. To comprehend him, scholars must treat his archives as an integrated whole.

Altogether, this collection poses important questions and offers thought-provoking, if occasionally tentative, responses. It reinforces a basic principle of historical research. Manuscript collections are not haphazard or random. They have been created by individuals and institutions for particular purposes. Considerable refashioning and editing are likely to have taken place. Whether conscious or unconscious, the process of moulding and structuring deeply affects subsequent perceptions.

A second anthology, *The peasantries of Europe from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries*, edited by Tom Scott, moves us away from the detail of archival resources toward the realm of overarching interpretation. The peasantry is an immense subject and the result is a macro-history with heavy emphasis on the methodologies of the social sciences. Though hardly devoid of complex details, the chapters focus less on peasants themselves than on theoretical frameworks. This is the peasantry as an abstraction and, as such, highlights economic models, social structures, and agrarian systems. While cultural elements are not entirely absent from the discussion, peasant mentalities and the particulars of daily existence receive considerably less consideration.

Any discussion of the peasantry immediately finds itself immersed in long-standing historical debate, considerable myth-making, and a great deal of romantic idealization regarding peasants, their place in historical development, and their relationships with other economic and social groups. They figure prominently in our rendering of major events such as the German Reformation, French Revolution, or the emergence of the modern state. Yet, to pose the obvious query, who are these peasants and how do they relate to the rest of society? *The peasantries of Europe* suggests that there are no facile answers.

In his introduction, Scott stresses the difficulty of defining European peasantries, given the broad spatial context, disjointed development, and variety of current theories. This collection necessarily adopts a comparative approach and, in the process, argues that the differences between the peasantries of Europe are as significant as the similarities. At the very least, the contributions canvass the immense peasant landscape from England to Russia, from Scandinavia to Italy.

Each chapter is a survey of the peasantry within a particular geographical region or

political entity. Scott set out guidelines for treatment of common themes. Here, one wishes he had exercised firmer editorial control. The recurrent categories are entirely reasonable: patterns of lordship, the place of peasants in the social and economic environment, standards of living, and the role of the peasantry in politics. Individual emphasis and interest, however, can move an essay away from the shared agenda. If the peasantry itself was diverse, the discussion can also lack unity.

Among the more successful of these overviews is David Gaunt's chapter on Scandinavia. He begins by establishing the grand rhythm of agricultural life from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Within this outline, he can then situate economic associations and trends, regional agricultural systems, household and family forms, political and fiscal relationships, and the ubiquitous issue of peasant unrest. Although Gaunt reaches no grand conclusion, the essay is well written and informative.

Jonathan Dewald and Liana Vardi cast their observations on the French peasantry within the framework of a time-honoured question. Were the peasants of France as backward as previous generations of historians claimed? The response is solidly negative. Although there was a wide range of differences in the French rural world, peasants were more energetic, wealthier, and less tradition-bound than was once thought. Teófilo Ruiz's evaluation of the situation of the Iberian peasantry is less sanguine. Following an admirably organized and engaging survey, he concludes that peasants had a bleak and impoverished existence. Yet they endured because of their attachment to the land and its profound capacity to sustain life.

Thomas Robisheaux poses an analogous query concerning the western German peasantry. Why has it traditionally appeared stronger than its eastern counterpart? He underscores the strong communal character of peasant society and politics and, much to his credit, includes consideration of peasant culture. The western German world possessed vigorous, socially disciplined, and commercially oriented peasantries. William Hagen's companion piece on eastern Germany and Poland takes a revisionist approach. Historians have long presented developments there as a tale of coercion and injustice, emphasizing the harsh and oppressive regime of Junker landlords. Hagen argues that scholarship must refocus on the village, with less attention to the landed gentry.

Examination of the Russian peasantries offers, in Edgar Melton's view, a similar challenge. Rural Russia was a large and varied world. Marxist and older liberal interpretations, which turned on ruling-class exploitation of the agricultural population masses, are insufficient. Historians must account for the geographic and social diversity of Russian rural life and its evolution over the centuries. This is no small task and Melton offers some preliminary ideas. His essay is also one of the volume's better analyses of the collective forms of peasant resistance. At the other end of what might be loosely termed the economic development spectrum is the peasantry in England. There, agrarian capitalism and the demise of feudalism occurred early and energetically. Richard Smith's explanation for these changes centres on legal history. He argues that shifts in the character of peasant land tenure allowed for a society in which owner-occupancy was common by the first decades of the seventeenth century. The presentation is fascinating, if now and again heavily technical.

Placing these diverse essays in a unified, synthetic context is critical to the book's value and impact. John Langton begins with the obvious: the European peasantry varied widely over time and space. Is this the only shared element among the ten essays? Not all the authors even acknowledge that 'peasant' is the best term to describe their subject. Disagreements also exist over peasant modes of economic operation, social

organization, and cultural expression. If the peasantry varied, the situation reflects, according to Langton, disparate physical capacity. Differences in natural resources led to distinct farming systems, variations in family and household structure, and a diversity of form and function among communal organizations. Langton proposes a tripartite explanation for the diversity. The first component is what he awkwardly labels 'photosynthetic constraint'. Difference in climate and fertility lead to widely dissimilar harvests and, in turn, enormous variations in the energy surplus. Secondly, disparate distances from farm to commercial market tyrannized some peasants and favoured others. People consumed energy moving the harvest to market, thereby dramatically affecting their economic gain. Finally, and less persuasively, Langton suggests that the post-Reformation splintering of western Christianity meant divergent systems of religious belief, which had different social and economic consequences. The observation glides over Eastern Orthodoxy and ignores Islam altogether. In addition, his assertion that the Catholic world was 'non-material' begs explanation.

The peasants and their fiery iconoclasm during the early stages of the Reformation is a central feature in Dominique Colas's interpretative essay, *Civil society and fanaticism: conjoined histories*. The author is professor of modern political theory at the Institute d'Etudes Politiques (Paris) and a specialist on Lenin and the Soviet system. In the present study, he means to reconstruct the protracted history of civil society in Western thought. At the same time, this is a tensely dualist tale in which fanaticism enjoys a powerful opposing role. According to Colas, civil society and fanaticism have mutually defined one another since the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The author initiates the discussion by taking explicit note of the lively contemporary discussion surrounding concepts of civil society, fanaticism, and the disparate values attached therein. This is not an unimportant subject in light of the demise of the communist system and Western attempts to promote civil society based on democracy and the rule of law. Anxiety over Islamic fundamentalism has also figured prominently in recent years. Throughout the book Colas makes reference to these and related events. He is a political theorist interested in the contemporary world. The perspective is accordingly distinctive. Historians tend to be uneasy with analyses that take their cue from highly defined, typically contentious modern debates and then proceed to an examination of previous developments with focused attention to these concerns. The approach seems too teleological. We prefer to approach previous cultures on their own terms. This is not to say that the past has no bearing on the present, but issues of distance and purpose remain vital. The author clearly raises key questions. The fear is that the autonomy of prior human experience may be sacrificed to the interpretative model. None the less, Colas's determined effort to probe the intellectual discourse over civil society elucidates a long tradition in Western thought regarding freedom, equality, and independence.

This 'genealogy' of civil society and fanaticism deploys a wide range of sources and methods to achieve its goal. The analysis is plainly interdisciplinary and the results can be refreshing. The exploration of the term 'fanatic', for instance, is a wonderful lexicographical history. Even more stimulating is Colas's chapter on Albrecht Dürer, the Lutheran painter of the sixteenth century. By his own reckoning, it stands at the heart of his interpretation. Here, he raises substantial questions about the place and role of images or, more accurately, the many conflicting ways in which representation has been understood. Art, for Dürer, made visible the spiritual tie between civil society and the City of God. His *Adoration of the Holy Trinity* created a new geometry of the universe

– a circle in which the two cities are distinct but not cleaved from one another. Later, his *Four Apostles* effectively announced that while political authority was to be supported by religion, the two were now separate. The artist employed figuration to express the redistribution of political and religious power achieved by the Reformation.

Colas carries these themes forward in an examination of Spinoza and Bossuet, the French Protestant Camisards, Leibniz and Locke, Rousseau and Kant. He juxtaposes the gradual emergence of tolerance with outbreaks of fanaticism. Again, the perspective is imaginative and innovative. He argues, for instance, that the religious plurality of the seventeenth-century Netherlands was not an indication of tolerance but corresponded to a ‘multiplication of intolerances and fanaticisms’. Under the circumstances, Spinoza worked to find a means for the protection of civil society. Society must be guided by reason rather than the passions of superstition and religious prejudice. A tolerant political order ought to guarantee freedom to the diversity of beliefs and sects; it must also give people access to reason.

The final chapters of the book plunge into the world of Hegel and Marx, Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The author is on more familiar ground and, consequently, the remarks tend to be less surprising. Hegel carefully distinguished between civil society and the state, all the while asserting that citizenship meant participation in civil society. None the less, Hegel’s state could tolerate those within civil society who claimed distinctive rank and knowledge. Marx subsequently overturned this view; the state became the opiate of civil society. Finally, in Lenin’s fanaticism, civil society is an altogether missing concept.

In all of this, Colas’s dialogue of opposites extends beyond the duality of civil society and fanaticism. The discussion incorporates the ‘notional pairs’ of the City of God and the earthly city as well as that of civil society and the state. These are hardly trivial aspects of the overall argument. Yet the crucial distinctions between the various dualism are occasionally blurred in the grand sweep of the study. The analysis operates within a range and scope that can leave the reader breathless and occasionally frustrated. Historians might prefer greater focus. Colas’s primary interest is the evolution of civil society. The specific historical circumstances that may have given rise to a particular understanding of civil society at any given moment in the past are decidedly secondary.

If not quite the issue of civil society and fanaticism, the tension between confrontation and conciliation at the highest levels of the Counter-Reformation is the subject of Howard Louthan’s highly readable study, *The quest for compromise*. Although Vienna was an important centre for the Catholic Reformation, scholars have not given adequate attention to the imperial court and its immediate environment. The discussion encompasses the reigns of Ferdinand I (1556–64), Maximilian II (1564–76), and Rudolf II (1576–1612), roughly from the end of the Council of Trent to the eve of the Thirty Years War. When viewed from the imperial perspective, the confessional rigidity and religious antipathy among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists acquire more subtle tones.

Louthan organizes this analysis of religious compromise and moderation around four individuals closely associated with Habsburg court life: the German Catholic soldier Lazarus von Schwendi, an Italian Catholic artist Jacopo Strada, the Dutch Calvinist librarian and humanist Hugo Blotius, and finally a Silesian Lutheran physician Johannes Crato. These men knew one another well and formed part of a successful circle of imperial patronage. As such, they constitute a microcosm of the cultural and intellectual currents swirling about the court.

Louthan deliberately opts for the term 'irenicism' to describe the group and its aims. Crato, for instance, was close to Luther's conciliatory lieutenant, the humanist Philip Melanchthon, and Schwendi had studied with Oecolompadius, a colleague of Erasmus. Blotius was likely influenced by Erasmus as well. Under the circumstances, toleration is far too broad an appellation and *politique* possesses a much stronger political connotation. From the author's perspective, 'irenic' best describes the religiously oriented, conciliatory world of Christian humanism to which the four courtiers were attached.

As a soldier, Schwendi gradually came to the realization that Charles V's demand for religious uniformity threatened to shatter the German world. He and others began to explore a middle way that allowed political loyalty to the Empire without the requirement of religious conformity. Schwendi eventually rejected coercion for the resolution of confessional differences. He also concluded that a strong centralized monarchy was essential for the well-being of society. Toleration was merely the means to an objective, in this case, the establishment of imperial authority. The fundamental issue was sovereignty and the orderly, pacific preservation of the public weal. Louthan contends that in this regard Schwendi anticipated the arguments of Jean Bodin.

While Schwendi constructed the rhetoric and vocabulary of irenicism, Strada deployed artistic imagery, which situated the Habsburg family in a reconciliatory posture above the destructive confessional conflict. Here, Louthan emphasizes the early modern court as more than a bureaucratic centre. It was a forum where politicians, intellectuals, and artists gathered and conducted a dialogue. Appointed architect of the imperial court in 1560, Strada became an important member of the team supervising construction of a new garden palace outside Vienna. The palace evoked a restrained yet unmistakable spirit of conciliation and compromise. It celebrated the ideals of irenicism and announced the transformation of the Habsburg Viennese court into a leading artistic centre.

The irenic spirit likely reached its apex during the reign of Maximilian II. He had had close contact with Lutheranism from an early age and, despite a later attestation of Catholicism, was regarded with suspicion by guardians of orthodoxy. The youthful experience may have also inclined him toward a more conciliatory disposition. His appointment of the Dutch Calvinist Blotius as imperial librarian in 1575 secured the intellectual foundations of the irenic movement. Blotius avoided confessional rigidity, stressing instead an Erasmian understanding of Christ's message of peace and harmony. On a practical level, his reorganization of the imperial library was remarkable. Earlier librarians had enlarged the collection; Blotius altered its very character. He transformed it into an imperial and cosmopolitan collection, possessed of a harmonious intellectual vision. The library came to include works of every hue and stripe in order to serve the diverse requirements of a complex society.

The fourth figure in Louthan's array of peacemakers is Maximilian II's personal physician Crato. Having studied with both Luther and Melanchthon, this resolute Protestant seems at first an odd figure for the Viennese court. On the other hand, his humanist training and restrained Melanchthonian approach served him well. His conciliatory blend of piety and erudition as well as his medical expertise made him an imperial favourite. Ultimately, he served as a bridge to the emperor's Protestant subjects, above all the Bohemian Brethren.

The eventual failure of irenicism was, in Louthan's view, the result of committed opposition at the highest levels. The Jesuits, in particular, mounted a strong counter-

offensive against Protestantism. At the same time, the advocates of moderation and compromise never constituted a well-organized movement. Theirs was essentially a defensive posture and opponents were neither powerless nor indecisive. Despite substantial effort, the members of the irenic faction found themselves displaced at court by Catholics of more strident persuasion. Momentum in this culture war had swung to the Jesuits and an emerging baroque age. The Habsburg court found the hierarchy and obedience associated with Counter-Reformation Catholicism increasingly attractive. Its austere structure and rigid authority seemed to offer a surer approach to the restoration of public order and imperial power than did the older humanist traditions. Ultimately, the failure of irenicism was spectacular, for what followed was nothing short of three decades of unrelenting violence and chaos.

Louthan delineates and describes with wonderful precision the irenic, almost ecumenical mix of intellectuals, artists, and advisors who populated the Habsburg court during the second half of the sixteenth century. Although his subjects are few in number, he makes a convincing case that they are representative. The study also gathers strength from the considerable range of sources and perspectives drawn from art and architecture, literature and pedagogy, diplomacy and politics. Altogether, Louthan meticulously and sympathetically discloses the many threads in the dense fabric of a cultural and religious milieu that was at once restrained in its judgement of contrary views and resolute in its opposition to extremist confessional positions.

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