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Hans-Werner Goetz (Hg.), Kontroversen in der jüngeren Mediävistik, Köln (Böhlau) 2023, 472 S., 3 Abb., ISBN 978-3-412-52828-7, DOI 10.7788/9783412528300, EUR 80,00.

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The value of a well-executed historiographical essay lies both in the illumination of the scholarly engagement with a topic over time and in the suggestion of potential paths forward, whether through the identification of new sources, the reframing or reinterpretation of those long-known, the formulation of new questions, or in the reinvigoration of those previously posed but since forgotten. In the volume under consideration here, Hans-Werner Goetz, emeritus professor of medieval history from the University of Hamburg, has brought together thirteen essays by scholars in numerous fields of medieval history to address »controversies« in their historiographical context as these have developed »in recent times«.

The volume is divided into two main parts: »Kontroversen in der Mediävistik« and »Kontroverse: Themen und Fachgebiete«. These are proceeded by a lengthy introductory essay by Goetz, which provides a broad overview of a vast number of debates among medievalists regarding numerous questions of methodology and interpretation. He addresses the plurality and complexity of the themes and interests of current scholars, the regular innovations in methodology in numerous fields over the past half century, the great advances that have been made through the internationalization of medieval studies and as a result of the adoption of comparative approaches to studying the past. Goetz also illuminates the numerous »turns« in historical investigations of the medieval period, including such recent phenomena as the »global turn« and »digital turn«, and offers some cautionary words regarding the politicization of medieval topics. He suggests, for example, that some approaches, such as post-colonial studies and critical race theory, whose proponents present them as offering a scientific alternative to traditional forms of inquiry, may impose models on the European Middle Ages, which obscure more than they illuminate.

The first article in part one, »Streit ums Globale. Die Grenzen der mittelalterlichen Geschichte« by Thomas Ertl, addresses the development of global history in modern and early modern history, and the increasing attention to questions of global import in the medieval period. Ertl, however, points to the challenges in addressing global history before the modern era, observing that if a scholar wants to find globalization, in the sense of the movement of people, ideas, and goods, it is possible to do so. He emphasizes that historians of the European Middle Ages, and indeed those working in ancient history as well, frequently have

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addressed questions that are understood by modernist scholars as pertaining to global history. However, the problems of identifying and measuring the intensity of these interconnections remain as a result of the absence of truly quantifiable data. Addressing another aspect of global historiography, namely the seeking for the origins of the current political and economic world systems, Ertl suggests that rather than ranking continents or regions of the world according to one or another criterion, or making broad generalizations about civilizations as a whole, the comparative treatments of specific phenomena likely will provide greater insights about the ways in which human beings addressed similar challenges.

In the second study of the section, »Mediävistische Geschlechtergeschichte – immer noch ein Reizthema?«, Amalie Fößel offers a tour of the horizon regarding the concomitant development of interest in women's history in German academia and the increasing access of women to academic positions in German universities. Fößel makes clear that the initial phases of both developments were highly political and politicized, but that now there is no longer a question about the importance of women's history within the broader scope of medieval studies, and that an increasing number of German historians have adopted the model of gender history. The answer to the question posed by Fößel in her title, therefore, cannot be answered precisely. Gender history is not exactly a »hot topic« in German scholarship, but precisely because both women and gender are now fully integrated into numerous areas of historical inquiry, and because women play leading roles in German academic life.

Martin Gravel raises a rather different issue in his essay »Que reste-t-il de l'›esprit des Annales‹ dans l'histoire du Moyen Âge pratiquée en France?«. In the course of answering this question, Gravel argues that the »Annales« tradition rests on two contradictory influences, namely those of Marc Bloch and Michel Foucault. Gravel argues that the former believed that it was possible to gain an understanding of reality through the development of rigorous methodologies as well as research questions that treated the people of medieval Europe on their own terms. The latter, whom Gravel characterizes as an »enchanteur« (p. 142), is presented as seeking a useful past rather than being concerned with the lived reality of medieval people. Gravel goes further in arguing that Fernand Braudel is responsible for the adoption of »structuralist ramblings« (p. 141) which brought about a decisive rupture between the »Annales« of his day and the initial program of Bloch, ultimately paving the way for a scholar such as Foucault. Gravel concludes with an impassioned plea for a return to a model of historical inquiry that is not preoccupied with the problems of the present, but rather seeks to understand how medieval people conceptualized and addressed the issues of their world.

Gravel's argument regarding the proper approach to the investigation of the past, and particularly his emphasis on treating the past in its own terms, is addressed in a more focused manner

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by Wolfgang Hasberg in his essay »Ansichtssache Mittelalter – oder: Zur Metaphorik der Alterität einer Epoche«. Hasberg surveys the conflicts among both specialists in medieval history and in other periods regarding the supposed alterity of the Middle Ages, noting that many scholars have insisted this era, however defined, was markedly different from both the antique and modern worlds, while others have minimized or even rejected such categorical comparisons. Hasberg, himself, is largely critical of the use of sweeping generalizations by proponents of the supposed alterity of the medieval period, as well as the search for distinctive features that are thought to be unique to Europe in this period. Rather than employing generalizing metaphors, Hasberg suggests that scholars should sharpen the terminology they use along with the concomitant underlying models for understanding the past in ways that will be more heuristically fruitful in examining phenomena across periods.

In contrast to the earlier essays in this section, which focus on the types of questions and analytical frameworks that scholars have posed and used in the past – and perhaps should take up in the future –, Walter Pohl discusses an important new type of source that is available for the study of medieval history in »Frühmittelalterliche Migrationen und Identitäten im Spiegel naturwissenschaftlicher DNA-Analysen«. Pohl points to the increasing popular awareness of genetics in the context of the »Human Genome Project« (1990–2003) but criticizes the more extravagant claims made on behalf of this comparatively new branch of science and particularly the conceit that DNA research can replace rather than complement the research of scholars in the humanities. Pohl points to the problem of specialists in one field drawing upon either outdated or non-contextualized information, produced by specialists in other fields, and consequently drawing erroneous conclusions. Pohl addresses the ways in which DNA material has been used to illuminate the movement of humanity across the globe tens of thousands of years ago, and the difficulties in using these same methodologies for the movement of populations in historical times. Pohl concludes with a discussion of the new interdisciplinary project led by himself and Patrick Geary that seeks to integrate genetic, archaeological, and historical perspectives on the movement of populations in Eastern Central Europe in the period c. 400–c. 900, with an initial case study examining the movement of the Lombards from Pannonia into Northern Italy.

The final essay in part one, »Zur Anwendung hochmoderner Theorien auf das Mittelalter am Beispiel der ›Critical Race Theory‹. Ein Beitrag zum wissenschaftlichen Umgang mit einer kontroversen Forschungssitutation« by Juliane Schiel, specifically addresses the issue of the politicization of medieval historical research, which was raised as a point of concern by several other scholars in the volume. Schiel begins the essay with the widely understood point that historical inquiry has always reflected the current interests of the day. She then addresses in some detail the adoption of a race-based approach to the study of medieval

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Europe with a focus on the work of Geraldine Heng, particularly »The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages«[1]. Schiel cites Heng's chastising of a »white Englishman« for presuming to correct her post-colonial reading of a text, given her status as a female, nonwhite, postcolonial subject, because he thought she did not have a sufficient understanding of the nuances of a late medieval French work (p. 219). Ultimately, while accepting that the background of the investigator is important, Schiel rejects the essentialization of investigators on the basis of characteristics over which they have no control, e. g. the color of their skin and the places they were born. Rather, much like Gravel and Hasberg, Schiel emphasizes that it is necessary to grapple with the complexity of the medieval period within its own context rather than trying to squeeze medieval realities into modern categories.

The first essay in part two, »Watson's Green Revolution« by Wendy Davies, begins by laying out Andrew Watson's theory, first published in 1974, that the diffusion of agricultural goods throughout the medieval Islamic world led to a series of social and economic developments that generally raised the standard of living of people throughout the Caliphate. Watson contrasted the comparatively enlightened and prosperous Islamic world with the ostensibly backward cultures of Christian Europe. Davies then draws attention to the numerous criticisms raised against Watson's model, particularly by archaeologists and archaeobotanists, who have demonstrated both that Watson's chronology for the diffusion of particular agricultural goods is mistaken and that some of the plant species he identified as being introduced by Muslim conquerors had already existed in Spain, North Africa, and elsewhere for hundreds of years before the birth of Islam. Davies concludes with the observation that there remains an enormous divide among scholars between those who start from the premise that Watson described processes that did occur, however much his model needs to be modified in light of newer research, and those scholars who dismiss Watson's theory or regard it as too flawed even to have heuristic value.

The second essay in part two, »Klassenkampf im Mittelalter? Der Stellingaaufstand in der Mittelalterforschung der DDR« by Simon Groth, is something of an outlier in this volume. Whereas all of the other studies address issues that have broad methodological import, Groth offers a very narrowly conceived assessment of the way in which a rebellion by part of the Saxon population against Frankish rule during the period of civil war among Louis the German, Lothair I, and Charles the Bald, was conceptualized by scholars in Communist East Germany, and the ways in which government authorities assessed this debate with regard to the prevailing programs of ideological indoctrination. Thus, while certainly addressing a scholarly controversy, it is not clear

1 Geraldine Heng, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages, Cambridge 2018.

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how Groth's essay provides a path forward beyond that already provided by Eric Goldberg's essential work on this topic[2].

By contrast, Nikolas Jaspert's »Der Streit um die ›Reconquista‹« not only illuminates the scholarly debate about the propriety of using the term »Reconquista« and the ways in which the presentist political concerns of Spanish historians over the past century have affected their treatment of the struggles among Muslim and Christian polities in Iberia, but also offers recommendations about new conceptual approaches and questions that can advance the study of these multi-dimensional conflicts. Of particular importance is Jaspert's suggestion that Spanish scholars consider addressing the specifically military aspects of the conflicts in Iberia, which long have been a focus of Anglo-American scholarship, but which traditionally have been neglected in Spain and Portugal.

The two studies by Brigitte Kasten, »Zum Deutungsstreit über Lehnswesen im Frühmittelalter in der deutschen mediävistischen Forschung« and »Die Kontroverse über die ›mutation féodale‹ aus deutscher Perspektive« by Steffen Patzold address the topic of »feudalism« from two different perspectives. Kasten begins with a discussion of the impact of Susan Reynold's magisterial study »Fiefs and Vassals« on the understanding of the political order in medieval Europe, particularly in the period before the First Crusade, and then traces out the various manifestations of the »feudal« model in military, economic, social, political, and military history[3]. She concludes by emphasizing that »feudalism« largely has been abandoned as a useful heuristic tool, particularly for the early medieval period. However, she criticizes German historians for clinging to *Lehnswesen* as a *terminus* technicus even as the polyvalent nature of the terminology used by early medieval writers has become increasingly clear. She emphasizes that it is no longer possible to characterize early medieval society with respect to a specific model of either vassality or of the »fief holders«. Rather, it is necessary to understand that Latin terms such as *vassus* and *beneficium* were used in conjunction with people of all social and economic status.

For his part, Patzold, after discussing the basic contours of the debate about the *mutation féodale* in French as well as Anglo-American scholarship, offers a number of suggestions for how the lessons of this debate can be applied for the study of history beyond the rather parochial concerns of the *mutationistes* and anti-*mutationistes*. First, it is increasingly clear that nothing particularly special happened at the turn of the first millennium, and that it is necessary to examine political, social, and economic phenomena over a much longer period, e. g. from the 9th through

2 Eric J. Goldberg, Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics, and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon Stellinga Reconsidered, in: Speculum 70/3 (1995), p. 467–501.
3 Susan Reynolds, Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted, Oxford 1994.

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the 12th century. Moreover, within this timeframe, it is necessary to understand that change was not constant, but rather that there were lengthy periods of stability interspersed with bouts of rapid change. Secondly, Patzold encourages scholars from outside of Germany to address a topic that long has been a staple of German historiography, namely the formalization and legal regulation of the granting of land as well as the social relationships that went along with these property transactions. Finally, Patzold urges German historians to come to grips with the enduring legacy of the »New Constitutional History« on German historiography, and to address whether key elements of supposed German exceptionalism such as an autogenous nobility and the *Ministerialität* have any heuristic value or even a connection with an underlying historical reality.

Sandwiched between the essays by Kasten and Patzold, Régine Le Jan's »La parenté au premier Moyen Âge, un objet de débats« addresses the impact of the investigation of family structure in the social sciences, particularly sociology and anthropology, on current understanding of kinship relationships in Europe in the period before the First Crusade, as well as the limitations of such social-scientific models. In particular, Le Jan emphasizes that social science models of kinship tend to undervalue or ignore the importance of spiritual kinship in medieval Europe. However, they also have opened up avenues for considering the diversity of possible familial relationships and the malleability of human identities that permitted individuals to manipulate their presentations of themselves in competitive and cooperative interactions across a range of social structures.

The final essay in the volume, Ian Wood's »Recent Controversies about the Transformation of the Roman Empire« considers the ways in which the conception of the transition from imperial rule to early medieval successor states has evolved, particularly since the early 1970s. The older model of a clash of civilizations leading to a dark age largely has been abandoned in favor of a newer model of transformation. However, both the content of this transformation and the stimuli for the various aspects of change, or continuity, remain the subject of intense debate. Wood's recommendation to get beyond the now stale debate between continuity and change, drawn from his own central role in the »Transformation of the Roman World« project, is to bring together scholars from different fields and perspectives to illuminate areas of agreement and to fill in lacunae in our knowledge of the period.

This volume will be of exceptional interest and value to specialists in numerous areas of medieval history. As a group, these essays not only illuminate where the scholarly conversation has been but also offer important guidance about how to gain greater understanding of a number of important questions in the future. Of fundamental importance in this context is the openness to working collaboratively across disciplinary boundaries to gain additional sources of information as well as perspectives, without sacrificing the conceptual and methodological insights that

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traditionally have been part of historical inquiry. These essays also offer a timely warning about the dangers inherent in imposing modern concerns, particularly those connected to various political agendas, on the past, or of making a priori assertions about who has the »right« to ask certain kinds of questions or investigate particular types of people. Should Professor Goetz choose to bring forth a new volume of such »controversies« he may consider addressing aspects of medieval history that receive only limited attention here, including the nature(s) and structure(s) of the early medieval economy, the development of Christian practice(s) in late antiquity and the early medieval period, the organization of warfare, and the administrative and institutional structures of early medieval »states«.

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