

Claudius Sittig, Christian Wieland (Hg.), Die »Kunst des Adels« in der Frühen Neuzeit, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz Verlag) 2018, 364 p., 48 b/w ill. (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 144), ISBN 978-3-447-10486-9, EUR 88,00.

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The editors themselves acknowledge that the very title of this volume presents a conundrum, namely, what is meant by »Kunst des Adels«. Does it mean art in the narrow sense of creative art and therefore works that members of the nobility themselves produced? Or does it mean the art that the nobility collected or commissioned? Or simply the art of being noble? The editors begin with the latter, stating that »die performativen Dimensionen der adeligen Lebensführung im Mittelpunkt [stehen], zentriert um den Gedanken, dass ein Adliger in all seinen Gesten, seiner Sprache, seinem Benehmen, ja seiner Aufmachung [...] besonders unter Adligen ständig beweisen muss, dass er ein guter und richtiger Adliger ist« (p. 7). There is also the distinction between nobility as a class epithet and nobility as a moral quality. The fifteen chapters that make up this beautifully produced and illustrated volume were originally given as papers at a workshop held in Wolfenbüttel in 2012. They provide a range of examples from three centuries, a number of art forms, linguistic areas, scholarly disciplines and methodologies.

Jonathan Dewald analyses the two memoirs of Henri, duc de Rohan, composed in the early decades of the seventeenth century, in which the duke tries to come to terms with his political failure. Dewald concludes that the memoirs’ importance lies »in the relation that he [Rohan] saw between himself and his society«, a relationship that »is essentially conflictual« (p. 34). The nobility should exhibit »aristocratic greatness of soul« but the individual is on his own in an inimical world. Edoardo Costadura discusses the »Histoire amoureuse de Gaule« by Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, an aristocrat who fell out of favour with Louis XIV and who uses his writing to satirise the nobility, while at the same time the decoration of his château at Bussy-le-Grand presents a counter-model to that of Versailles. As Costadura observes of this decoration, it does not resolve the dilemma of the count’s oppositional attitude but rather embodies it in the »Monumentalisierung eines Widerspruchs«, something that is also exemplified in his literary works (p. 60).

Volkhard Wels continues this series of literary analyses with a chapter on Opitz’s »Buch von der deutschen Poeterey«. He argues that Opitz advocates an aristocratic courtly style as a counter both to the classical Latin models propagated by the Humanists and the unpolished German poetry of the Meistersinger. Wels goes from this perceived need for aristocratic polish and courtesy to the founding of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft, 90% of whose members belonged to the nobility.

Andreas Herz discusses the Gesellschaft in knowledgeable detail, dispelling the notion that it was either an academy in the formal sense, that is, a body of professional writers and scientists, or a courtly order of chivalry. He stresses how the motto of the society, »alles zu Nutzen«, indicated an ethical dimension to membership which covered political and social responsibility (p. 93–94) and was a substitute for formal



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statutes and rules. He analyses the society as a socio-cultural network which espoused peace and, though the members were mostly Protestant, confessional tolerance. He focuses not on the textual publications of the society so much as on their visual self-presentation in emblems, armorial volumes, medals, tapestries and even in a bookplate belonging to the artist and art critic Joachim von Sandrart.

Claudius Sittig wraps up this series on literature by showing how the nobility distanced themselves from conventional learned poetry, the province of the middle-class poet, and practised literature in separate noble communicative spaces.

Angelika Linke discusses the displacement of an aristocratic manner of speaking by a strictly-regulated educated middle-class written language by the last third of the eighteenth century. Gestures as part of speech practice, aristocratic self-fashioning, decorum, gracefulness (*Anmuth*) and many other aspects are discussed in her chapter. What she surprisingly does not explicitly discuss is the use of German versus French among the aristocracy.

Christian Wieland turns to the question of the aristocrat's relationship to knowledge, education and intellectual concerns. He examines so-called »Hofmeisterliteratur« and its promotion of a university education as essential for an aristocrat. He reaches two conclusions that are important for the theme of the book as a whole: On the one hand the term »noble« came to indicate excellence and to be applied to all aspects of life, art and learning. On the other hand it became accepted that the education of an aristocrat should be fundamentally different from the education of those who were not noble, an idea promulgated by the nobility themselves. »Adlige Differenz, die selbst die Texte charakterisierte, in denen eben diese Differenz negiert wurde, war die eigentliche »Kunst des Adels« (p. 202), he writes.

Martin Wrede discusses the festivities known as the »Triumphes de Binche« (1549), in which Philip II, King of Spain, took part as Duke of Burgundy, thereby fulfilling the political demands of his Netherlandish nobles. Wrede makes the point that physicality, physical mastery and physical presence are an essential part of the »art of being noble«, above all of the art of being a prince.

Ronald G. Asch takes a completely different tack, examining the libertine nobles of Restoration England in the period 1660 to 1688, »Adlige, die bewusst alle Regeln, sicherlich die Regeln sittlicher und moralischer Konventionen, aber doch auch die Regeln des normalen Anstands verletzen« (p. 219). There was no heroic role available to them any more, for the era of the cavaliers who had fought for the embattled king Charles I was over, so how could they distinguish themselves from the ordinary citizen? Asch shows how the excesses of the seventeenth century wits and fops were tamed by the new eighteenth-century aristocratic ideal of »politesse« and self-control.

Dietrich Helms examines English pedagogical literature from the late Middle Ages to around 1600 and comes to the conclusion that the authors see music through the lens of a »nüchternen Utilitarismus« (p. 256). Sir Thomas Elyot in 1531, for instance, advocates music as a pastime which can prevent someone from engaging in sinful thoughts and deeds. The social function of music is downgraded and Helms contrasts Elyot and other writers with Castiglione's insistence in the »Libro del Cortegiano« that musical competence is essential for an aristocrat.



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Klaus Pietschmann analyses a very different example, namely, the »Dialogo della musica« by the Florentine Vincenzo Galilei (1581), in which a group of nobles discuss music. His thesis is that the work provides nobles with a model for how to talk knowledgeably about music in the manner expected of an aristocrat. Ivana Rentsch shows how a noble spirit in a noble body was the definition of the aristocrat and demonstrates how the musical form of the music existed, »die tänzerischen Posen in der Zeit zu ordnen, als klingende Umsetzung der sozialen Norm« (p. 287).

A series of three chapters on the visual arts completes the book. Arne Karsten demonstrated how the Roman aristocracy of the seventeenth century employed art to demonstrate or establish their status. It was not those families who were at the top of the tree who used portraiture or burial chapels to bolster their status, but rather those whose status depended on a connection to a bishop or a cardinal somewhere in the family tree and who wished to rise further up the ladder.

Matthias Müller goes back to the beginning of the sixteenth century and takes the example of the Saxon court in order to investigate the complex relationship between works made to order for a prince and the autonomy of the artist. Marcus Becker's chapter then leaps forward to the end of the eighteenth century to analyse the influence that aristocratic patrons had on the production of copies of works of classical art. He takes as examples the stoves decorated with classical motifs and surmounted by life-size classical figures used in aristocratic interiors and the »Egyptian« lions erected as part of garden schemes, both produced by the iron foundry at Lauchhammer in the Lower Lausitz, to show how continuous was the nobility's use of the antique in its »community of practice« (p. 362).

As can be seen from the account given above, the chapters provide a range of varied and interesting examples, exemplifying what the editors call »die ästhetischen Qualitäten der adligen Selbststilisierung« (p. 8). This aristocratic self-fashioning is, it seems, the only universal noble art.



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