Grischa Vercamer, Hochmittelalterliche Herrschaftspraxis im Spiegel der Geschichtsschreibung. Vorstellungen von »guter« und »schlechter« Herrschaft in England, Polen und dem Reich im 12./13. Jahrhundert, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz Verlag) 2020, XII–792 S., 6 Diagr., 17 Tab. (Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau. Quellen und Studien, 37), ISBN 978-3-447-11354-0, EUR 98,00.

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This finely published, massive *Habilitationsschrift*[1] by Grisha Vercamer[2] offers a comparative study on chronicle depictions of good and bad rulership. The resulting analysis seeks to fashion a confluence of previous studies on »national stereotypes in the Middle Ages«, rituals of rulership, and chronicles from the medieval »nations« of the English kingdom, the German empire, and the Polish duchy. Such a unique combination of interests are rooted in Vercamer's heritage (German), employment (Poland), and youthful study abroad experiences (Edinburgh), though Scotland was abandoned for the more fulsome 12th-century chronicles of England. Finding not only linguistic challenges but also unintegrated historiographical traditions, Vercamer hoped to build »small bridges« between these European regions that would place them on equal terms. The traditional overshadowing of Poland by Germany in modern medieval studies as essentially *Mitteleuropa/Ostmitteleuropa* is recalibrated here, though the purpose of England's inclusion – other than its rich chronicle tradition and the author's linguistic skill set – remains unclear.

Six chronicles were selected for this comparative study (two from each region)[3], from which extracts were identified that contained either commentary or depictions of good or bad rulership in the following eight spheres of princely rule: (1) judge, (2) administrator, (3) politician/diplomat, (4) law-giver, (5) possessor of lordship power, (6) warrior/army leader, (7) pious ruler, and (8) habits/personal characteristics of various lords themselves. All these were

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[1] Completed in the Fakultät für Kulturwissenschaften der Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt an der Oder.
[2] Currently interim *Privatdozent Professor* at the Technische Universität Chemnitz.
[3] England: William of Malmesbury's »Historia Novella« and Roger of Howden's »Chronica«; Poland: Gallus Anonymous' »Cronica et gesta sive principum Polonorum« and Vincentius Kaltubek's »Chronica Polonorum«; Germany: Otto of Freising/Rahewin's »Gesta Frederici« and the anonymous »Historia Welforum«.

then entered into a database for cross-referencing purposes. The Appendix (Chapter 7) containing these 672 chronicle extracts, comprising 349 pages of this volume, an archive in itself that represents 44% of the volume itself (a full 792 pages).

Following typical *Habilitationsschrift* protocol, the volume's research evidence is then supposed to be put through the wringer of the latest historiographical theories and methodologies. This volume, however, employs a different theoretical orientation. The rulership practices of princes are instead set against social science and literary theories. Long chapters ensue reviewing sociological-historical and cultural studies theories; the former to develop a taxonomy (drawn from the standard sociological texts of Rousseau, Weber, Marx, Mann, Elias, and Foucault on power) and then to quantify the appendix excerpts into statistical values, while the latter to apply notions of descriptive perspective, descriptive modes, and »eventfulness« from the interpretive lens of narratology[4].

Sociology's preoccupation with modern social and political taxonomies and with quantitative measurement do shape this volume, often modernizing its medieval subject matter. Several historical anachronisms appear in the constant references to *mittelalterliche Nationen, typisch* English, Polish, and German traits expressed by the chroniclers, and comparative identification of *Strukturmerkmale* and application of a differential *Modernisierungsprozess* for each kingdom or principality. Anodyne statistical summations of the percentage each author's references to the various spheres of rulership provide a patina of quantitative analysis, but add little to understanding the texts themselves. The closest the theoretical excurses come to the historical methodology employed by historians appears in the three-page consideration of the rituals of rulership, which tend to consider the spheres of princely rule as the scenery of enacting *Herrschaft* according to Gerd Althoff's *Spielregeln*. All this theoretical and numerical methodology, however, results in the unsurprising conclusions that power and rulership were necessary and inseparable in medieval principalities, and that chroniclers (given the social context of the chroniclers as educated clerics) tended to rely on a *Schreibstrategie* that defined good rulership according to the four classical cardinal virtues and the three Christian theological virtues, most especially exhibited by ruler's openness to submit to the moral discipline of the clergy. Most rulers come off appearing quite »good«, in fact even capable of learning from and repenting of their errors of judgment, with the only really »bad« rulers being Stephen in England, and Boleslaw III and Miesko III in Poland. Given that all three rulers faced civil wars, and given the patronage networks of the chroniclers themselves, this finding makes good historical sense.

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4 In particular Wolf Schmid's categories of *Geschehen – Geschichte – Erzählung – Präsentation der Erzählung* are used extensively.
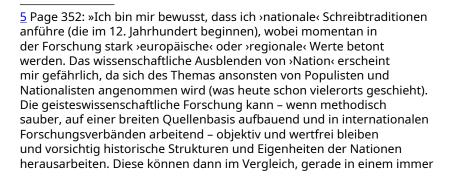
Chapter Six summarizes the volume's overall conclusions. In England, conflict was supposed to be settled by good administration and reasonable regulation of the aristocracy, not by battle; whereas in Poland the »good« ruler was first and foremost a conquering warrior whose *habitus* was evidence of *idoneitas* for divine blessing of his endeavors. And in Germany, because of the demands of continual Italian campaigns to project imperial authority into distant lands, sustaining the imperial *auctoritas* of the ruler during his physical absence was a sign of »good« rulership; indeed, in spite of the campaigns themselves, it was the ruler as politician who was foregrounded as the »good« ruler, not the warrior prince. Among the findings that surprised the author: (1) that the »good« ruler as pious ruler appeared in only 5–8% of the total corpus of chronicle excerpts; (2) that »good« rulership was not enacted primarily at public events (feasts, coronations, etc.) but rather in conflict resolution, which was the real test of the ruler's *honor* and *auctoritas*; (3) that »good« rulers were not depicted as individual warriors but rather as tacticians who left the fighting to others, though they never avoided open battle, fled the field, or allowed plundering churches; (4) that though the social and cultural differences between the three realms may explain how their chroniclers' variously staged rulers as moral *exempla*, yet all chroniclers relied on the cardinal and theological virtues rather than on leadership effectiveness in their descriptions of the »good« rulers.

In the methodological conclusions that follow, Vercamer is cognizant of important issues of representation: that clerical chroniclers could simply be presenting both a »good« ruler in a »bad« light as well as putting a »bad« ruler in a »good« light; and that the time lag between event and its representation is an important factor in our assessment of an author's representation of said event. Yet his closing plea for a return to *nationale Schreibtraditionen* (which he claims began in the 12th century) rather than a European approach not only contradicts his own comparative methodology in this volume but also will likely meet with worried German colleagues at least. Just as problematic is his assertion that *Geisteswissenschaften* are at their best when they remain »methodologically clean«, »objective and value-free«, and »carefully work out the historical structures and peculiarities of nations«[5]. This search for the origins of modern national identities

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[5] Page 352: »Ich bin mir bewusst, dass ich ›nationale‹ Schreibtraditionen anführe (die im 12. Jahrhundert beginnen), wobei momentan in der Forschung stark ›europäische‹ oder ›regionale‹ Werte betont werden. Das wissenschaftliche Ausblenden von ›Nation‹ erscheint mir gefährlich, da sich des Themas ansonsten von Populisten und Nationalisten angenommen wird (was heute schon vielerorts geschieht). Die geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung kann – wenn methodisch sauber, auf einer breiten Quellenbasis aufbauend und in internationalen Forschungsverbänden arbeitend – objektiv und wertfrei bleiben und vorsichtig historische Strukturen und Eigenheiten der Nationen herausarbeiten. Diese können dann im Vergleich, gerade in einem immer

and nation-states in the medieval past has a long and troubled history of its own, so why a volume – avowedly comparative in methodology across Europe – would be the venue for a call to »scientific« humanities research centered on medieval Europe yet focused on a teleology of peculiar distinctives (dare we say ethnic identities?) of modern nations seems a peculiar conclusion to reach on page 352.

There is much apparatus in the volume, but the conclusions about »good« rulership in the 12th and early 13th centuries are echoes found already in voluminous historiographical studies on medieval chronicles and their interpretive challenges: Antonia Gransden, Marjorie Chibnall, Michael Clanchy, John Gillingham, and Björn Weiler in England; Dieter Berg, Gerhard Dilcher, Joachim Ehlers, Hans-Werner Goetz, Peter Johanek, Birgit Studt, and Karl Ubl in Germany; and the great (and alas, late) János Bak in eastern Europe are authors who easily to mind and there are many more besides. Furthermore, the genre of *specula principum* (which enjoyed a revival in the 12th century) as an additional source group would seem a necessary addition to this study, as it could serve as a »control group« against which to measure the chronicle authors. John of Salisbury's »Policraticus« (1159), Godfrey of Viterbo's »Speculum regum« (ca. 1183), and Stephen I of Hungary's »Admonitions« (ca. 1010s) – even if the latter one were written by a cleric – would surely prove the source for the chroniclers' European-wide reliance on the canonical cardinal and theological virtues as the moral measure of a »good« ruler.

The volume also could use more clarity on the different *types* of rulership (*Herrschaft*) at work in the chosen chronicle groups, for they provide commentary on a *Fürstentum* (Poland), a *Königtum* (England), and a *Kaisertum* (Germany), yet they are all treated as essentially the same. Furthermore, *Herrschaft* as lordship remains well outside this study yet it is a worthy benchmark (at the manor and county level) if the aim of a study is rulership in general. Finally, a golden opportunity for an additional layer of comparative study was missed, since this database of rulership commentary surely contains the chroniclers' comments about rulership *by other rulers outside of their own principality*. William of Malmesbury was well informed and had a lot to say about the German emperors of his day, what might Otto of Freising or Rahewin have said about »good« and »bad« rulership in Poland, or given that English-Polish princely relations and information exchange had existed since Anglo-Saxon times, what might either Gallus Anonymous or Vincentius Kaltubek have to say about English monarchs[6]?

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wieder bekräftigten Europa der ›Einheit aus der Vielfältigkeit‹, äußerst interessante Einsichten erbringen.«

6 As examples, a daughter of Duke Miesko I of Poland married King Sweyn Forkbeard, first Danish king of England, in the late 10th century, and Edgar the Exile returned to England from his eastern European banishment with wife Agatha and their children (one of whom would be Saint Margaret of Scotland, rescuer of her endangered family at Edgar's death) in 1057.
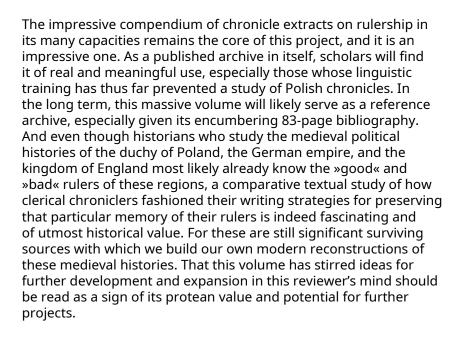
The impressive compendium of chronicle extracts on rulership in its many capacities remains the core of this project, and it is an impressive one. As a published archive in itself, scholars will find it of real and meaningful use, especially those whose linguistic training has thus far prevented a study of Polish chronicles. In the long term, this massive volume will likely serve as a reference archive, especially given its encumbering 83-page bibliography. And even though historians who study the medieval political histories of the duchy of Poland, the German empire, and the kingdom of England most likely already know the »good« and »bad« rulers of these regions, a comparative textual study of how clerical chroniclers fashioned their writing strategies for preserving that particular memory of their rulers is indeed fascinating and of utmost historical value. For these are still significant surviving sources with which we build our own modern reconstructions of these medieval histories. That this volume has stirred ideas for further development and expansion in this reviewer's mind should be read as a sign of its protean value and potential for further projects.