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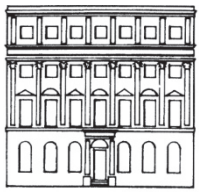

BULLETIN

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Shaping the Officer: Communities and Practices of Accountability in Premodern Europe
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Shaping the Officer: Communities and Practices of Accountability in Premodern Europe. Conference organized by the German Historical Institute London and supported by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung für Wissenschaftsförderung and the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich (DFG Project 'Natur in politischen Ordnungsentwürfen: Antike—Mittelalter—Frühe Neuzeit'), and held at the GHIL, 8–10 November 2017. Conveners: María Ángeles Martín Romera (LMU Munich) and Hannes Ziegler (GHIL).

The key concept of 'state-building' has dominated European historiography on premodern state authority since the 1980s. It stresses institutional evolution from the medieval to the modern period, often initiated by the administration of public finances. In this context, officers' accountability has drawn attention to interactions between subjects and rulers in a top-down view, providing new perspectives for the analysis of public authority. Yet while traditionally the emphasis has been on office-holders as key agents of central authority, recent research has attributed a bigger role to popular influence in procedures and practices of accountability. The conference 'Shaping the Officer: Communities and Practices of Accountability in Premodern Europe' followed this trend and moved the focus from the officers and the logic of the state to influences from below. It underlined the strategies of communities as watchers who exerted tangible influence over the officers' behaviour. The conference focused on the ways in which local populations actively engaged in the task of ruling their territories and shaping political institutions. Drawing on political, institutional, anthropological, and prosopographical history, the conference covered a wide geographical and temporal range.

After a programmatic introduction by María Ángeles Martín Romera (Munich) and Hannes Ziegler (London), the first session assessed the inner logic of interaction between office-holders and communities in medieval accountability procedures. Alexandra Beauchamp (Limoges) questioned the efficiency of communities' influence on office-holders in procedures of accountability in late medieval Aragon. While local communities played an active role in end-of-term surveys by submitting complaints and petitions, these proce-

The full conference programme can be found under 'Events and Conferences' on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

dures generally had a time limit and rarely ended in a trial. Moreover, popular influence did not seem to affect officers' careers. Rather than resulting in outright opposition, accountability provided a medium of co-operation between communities and central authority. Laure Verdon (Aix-Marseille) reflected on the use of public inquiries in shaping officers' behaviour, taking the example of Jean d'Arsis, knight and sénéchal of Alphonse de Poitiers in Rouergue and the Comtat Venaissin during the thirteenth century. D'Arsis was accused of private enrichment in office but Verdon argued that accusations like this were routinely instrumentalized for political aims. His office made D'Arsis an important intermediary between local communities and central authority, but it also exposed him to political charges.

The second session turned to informal practices of accountability. Attilio Stella (St Andrews) looked at the bureaucratization of justice in communal Italy in the thirteenth century. He showed that authority and territorial control beyond the city-state were still rather limited and largely a matter of negotiation. Office-holders needed to achieve compromises in negotiating with local elites and often depended on popular support and kinship networks. Stella thus openly challenged the 'myth' of the city-state and its territorial control in medieval Italy. Philippa Byrne (Oxford) shifted the focus from secular officers to the realm of the church. Ecclesiastical representatives in medieval England had a number of responsibilities associated with their office. Focusing on official discourse, she showed that being a good judge was always a question of personal virtues attached to Christian values. Here the two biblical examples of Moses and Samuel served as models for bishops in the thirteenth century. In following these examples, she argued, bishops were exercising a role as intercessor between the people and authority.

Thierry Pécout's (Saint-Étienne) evening lecture looked at the nature of the state and the exercise of power in the short-lived political construct of the Angevin state. His conceptual lecture suggested dismissing the category of the 'state' in the study of premodern state-building. Rather than focusing on a fixed set of political structures, Pécout proposed a re-thinking of the state as a set of historically grown institutions. More focus needed to be placed, he argued, on the means of exercising power, the reproduction of administrative know-how, and personal political relationships. As a result, the

monarchy of Anjou–Provence–Sicily appeared less as the realization of an ideological programme than as the meeting of interests of a 'société politique'. The bonds and interactions between rulers and subjects formed an important basis for this process as they established sovereign legitimacy and collective political networks.

The second day started with a panel on formal and informal mechanisms of accountability. Adelaide Costa (Lisbon) examined the crown's systematic appointment of 'juizes de fora' to the most important municipalities of the kingdom of Portugal. These outside judges involved the communities as witnesses in judicial procedures. Their collaboration was a formal method of including popular opinion on legal standards but the communities' influence remained limited: despite being paid by the community, outside judges were not chosen by the urban subjects and their jurisdiction was larger than the city's territorial responsibility. Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrer (Seville) looked at informal methods of exerting influence by showing how local elites in late medieval Castile affected political decisions by means of defamation, accusation, and rumour. He showed that complaints against officers were not necessarily based on a political charge, but could also relate to the officers' social reputation or moral actions (perjury, betrayal, adultery). Ultimately, these forms of resistance revealed collective expectations about legitimate government and, by extension, the definition of good office-holders.

But relations between rulers could also emphasize social harmony. Rebecca Springer (Oxford) explored the close interaction between local elites and episcopal power. In his pastoral care, the bishop of Exeter emphasized charity, Christian generosity, hospitality, and the necessity of intercession. Along with the citizens of Exeter he invested heavily in the foundation of a hospital, donations for lepers, and remembrances for the dead. The bishop and the community thus acted with a common purpose and Springer argued that the bishop, in fact, largely responded to the community's expectations. Jonathan Lyon (Chicago) came back to the problem of confrontation. He linked his reading of the Wilhelm Tell narrative to the creation of the Swiss confederacy and, more particularly, to the war of independence, led by local elites against the Habsburg's local representative, the territorial advocate. His behaviour towards families and their possessions was portrayed as a transgression of authority. In fact, Lyon argued that the legend of Wilhelm Tell was a powerful way of reminding

officers that extortion and violence defined the lines not to be crossed, thus establishing limits to the exercise of the officials' authority.

After a number of papers on medieval Europe, the conference moved to the early modern period. Marco Bellabarba (Trento) highlighted the influence of popular opinion in a number of Italian states and republics. Bellabarba stressed that while officers' accountability had a common origin in the 'sindacato' process, there were many different procedures in place on the peninsula in the following centuries. Generally, the limits on the exercise of authority by office-holders seem to have been increased. At the same time, office-holders often lost their affiliation with urban elites, resulting in a diminution of social status. Bellabarba argued that significant crises often occurred in the processes by which city-states were transformed into territorial states when office-holders acted as local mediators who relied on social bonds and clientelism. Johannes Kraus (Frankfurt/Main) explored a different context of resistance in the Upper Palatinate during the Thirty Years War. Presenting war as a social and economic threat, he argued that people developed different strategies of resistance to central demands. A refusal to co-operate and active opposition was preferred by local elites, but the common people found different ways. Bargaining with the tax collector for exemptions, filing supplications to the government, and co-operating with local officers are among these strategies. Federico Gálvez Gambero (Málaga) showed how increased public credit created a new theoretical basis for the fiscal practice of the Castilian Royal Treasury. By duplicating lines of command and flows of information, administrations were seeking new procedures for financial and fiscal control. This institutional evolution led to an increase in the power of middle and lower-ranking officers based on technical knowledge. Thus the Castilian administration was opened up to popular influence, employing new social groups.

The third day of the conference looked at corruption and languages of power in early modern Europe. Christoph Rosenmüller (Mexico City/Murfreesboro) examined the role of public authority and its normative standards in the empowerment of popular influence. He argued that the laws of office-holding provided standards of accountability which did not emanate only from above. Natives used *ius commune* precepts to challenge officers' qualifications and

behaviour. The law thus functioned as a weapon. In doing so, they relied on a common heritage of global regulations (customs, the Bible, royal orders) to protect themselves against bad officers. Spike Sweeting (London) also focused on corruption, in his case in the Port of London in the eighteenth century. His anthropological approach revealed close relations between corruption and biological life cycles among customs officers. He argued that life-cycle arguments were increasingly being used by customs officers in the late eighteenth century to justify certain forms of corruption. Especially with regard to the fundamental debate about remuneration by salary or fees, officers successfully exerted pressure on their superiors and on merchants in order to increase their profits.

The next session came back to formal accountability procedures. Sébastien Malaprade (Paris) looked at the Spanish 'Visita' as a judicial form of officers' accountability. It acted as a catharsis to purge social and political tensions by integrating popular opinion and socially exposing bad officers. In this context, Malaprade attributed an important role to public denunciation and social censorship. Collusion between subjects and rulers in holding officers' accountable in public or secret procedures was also highlighted by Martín Romera. The 'residencias' affected officers' behaviour by subjecting them to a trial and potential social humiliation. This legal system was regularly exploited, sanctioning the authority of communities and representing a consistent vehicle or forum for popular politics. The role of public performance in interactions was a political expression by communities, alternating between silent negotiation and public confrontation, and thus reflected the expectations of urban elites and popular demands.

The credibility of witnesses versus office-holders was discussed by Ziegler. He argued that informing by local populations was used as a deliberate tool by central governments to survey and reform local customs administrations. Interaction between representatives of central authority and local communities was based on a mutual understanding of what constituted a bad officer. By way of this mechanism, central authorities achieved a more thorough control of their office-holders in peripheral institutions. At the same time, informers were themselves exposed to social pressures in their communities, frequently affecting their social status. Niels Grüne (Innsbruck) also looked at communication from below. He analysed peti-

tions as a way in which early modern governments supervised local office-holders. Facing growing discontent among the territorial estates, the authorities in Hesse-Kassel and Württemberg in the eighteenth century temporarily expanded political participation to encourage complaints from below. These denounced the lack of governmental regulation of the fiscal system and external investigations against officers. Communities thus resorted to petitions as a source of legitimacy for the common good, making an impact on current political debates, legislation, and institutional procedures.

The closing lecture by Michael Braddick (Sheffield) examined narratives about officers' accountability during the English Revolution and Civil Wars. At this time, fiscal and military functions were essential to understanding the officers' social and political position within the communities of England. The self-presentation of officers responded to social expectations of legitimization and naturalization of power, defined as a natural hierarchy reflected in behaviour and social reputation. Within this framework, power was no longer a routine exercise of strength, but the internalizing of a legitimate way of life, discourse, and manners. Officers therefore feared public exposure and humiliation because charges against their behaviour or technical competence could result in long-term personal or familial damage, and also in criticisms of royal sovereignty. With a broad outlook on early modern England, Braddick showed to what extent the exercise of authority was a result of influences and pressures from below.

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