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Review of Isabella Chwalka, *Kein Interesse? Fremd- und Selbstwahrnehmung in der deutschen und englischen Historiographie des 12. Jahrhunderts*

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ISABELLA CHWALKA, *Kein Interesse? Fremd- und Selbstwahrnehmung in der deutschen und englischen Historiographie des 12. Jahrhunderts*, *Orbis mediaevalis*, 19 (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022), 446 pp. ISBN 978 3 847 11349 2. €65.00

This rich study of twelfth-century historical writing in England and Germany sets out with a very particular goal in mind: to find the image of the Other through which English and German authors conceptualized and judged one another. That no such stereotypes – more redolent of more recent periods of Anglo-German enmity – in fact emerge should not distract from the wealth of evidence and analysis accumulated in this book.

The book opens with Walter Map's twelfth-century comparison of the material foundations of royal power in the Latin West: English kings were rich, the French lacked everything except 'bread, wine, and joy!', while the German king had given everything away to the church except his military strength (p. 1). The remarkable anecdote is alas, for Chwalka, a red herring, 'at once the best and worst example' (p. 14) of evidence one could accumulate to assess perceptions of the Other. Eschewing such caricatured outliers, she seeks instead to 'compile as many testimonies as possible, especially the unspectacular ones' (p. 14). She draws upon a remarkable corpus of chronicles (sixty-four in total). The first section of the book (pp. 39–152) lists all mentions of England and Germany by authors writing in the opposing realm. Strict chronological limits attempt to standardize the material: only events from 1111–97 are included for the Holy Roman Empire and from 1100–99 for England (though these restrictions are occasionally relaxed). The second section (pp. 153–389), the richest part of the book, drills down into several case studies, selected because they proved to be the most frequently mentioned events in the statistical analysis. The conflict between Pope Alexander III and Frederick Barbarossa, and the imprisonment of Richard the Lionheart, are examined in the chronicles of both realms. The marriage alliances of Emperor Henry V and Henry the Lion, and Thomas Becket's martyrdom, form a further case study for the German authors; the Investiture Contest, especially Henry V's expedition to Rome in 1111, serves the same purpose for their English counterparts.

The book is interspersed with rich summaries of the pertinent scholarship regarding the events and chronicles examined (no mean feat given the sheer volume of the latter). There are intriguing historiographical asides. The classic volumes on medieval historical writing in each realm reflect different scholarly priorities: Wilhelm Wattenbach and Franz-Josef Schmale offer a survey divided by region (p. 39), Antonia Gransden by the reign of kings (pp. 86–90), a distant echo of the similarly regnal-focused approach of her English sources (though one should add that Gransden offered further subdivisions by genre and authorship). The summary of the German-language scholarship concerning twelfth-century English–German relations is particularly useful (pp. 27–31), highlighting how previous interpretations have been indebted to modern notions of international politics. English historians—in contrast to their medieval forebears—have paid far less attention to these relations than their German peers. Karl Leyser, Benjamin Arnold, and Joseph P. Huffmann are highlighted as the obvious exceptions, but their work could have been given more weight, and Timothy Reuter is strangely absent from this section. In an intriguing observation elsewhere, Chwalka does point out that Reuter and Björn Weiler appear to use different terminology for the empire depending on whether they are writing in English or German (p. 26, n. 58). The force of this potentially significant observation is undercut by the fact that only a minority of their publications have been consulted, a lapse with consequences to which I shall return.

The discussion of English and German identity is less convincing. The manifold difficulties entailed in disentangling the layers of regional, national, and imperial identity in twelfth-century Germany are correctly pointed out. But the discussion is surprisingly short (pp. 21–2) and the omission of work by Len Scales and Reuter is regrettable, not least because their arguments would have added nuance to Chwalka's claim that notions of English national identity were 'no less complicated and controversial' (p. 22).¹ The date of inception for English national identity has certainly been much debated, and the lands ruled by the English crown did fluctuate. But to suggest that, as

¹ Len Scales, *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis, 1245–1414* (Cambridge, 2012) and essays by Reuter cited below.

a result, a ‘unified *gens* did not exist for England’ (p. 24) goes too far. The attempt to balance out the two scholarly debates—‘while for the German Empire it is a question of the relationship between imperial and/or national consciousness . . . for the people of England the question of Norman or English identity is in the foreground’ (p. 23)—is not convincing. The lack of reference to any of the essays collected in Timothy Reuter’s magisterial *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities* is surprising and unfortunate.² In one particularly important contribution, Reuter argued that the unification of the English kingdom pre-1066 had produced a *Wirgefüh* (a feeling of unity in law, custom, and language). This was largely absent in Germany, where various *gentes* were bound together more by their link to a common ruler than by connections with one another.³ Such unity has consequences for how one considers Chwalka’s sources.

This corpus consists of, as she well recognizes, a heady mix of annals, monastic chronicles, royal biographies, and both national and universal histories. The inclusion of Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni, but not Gislebert of Mons (or, indeed, Godfrey of Viterbo) requires more justification. John of Salisbury’s *Historia Pontificalis* is another striking omission: an author familiar with the English royal court who had much to say on the empire (as Reuter’s highly pertinent essay on this subject—not cited—attests).⁴ At a more fundamental level, there are differences in the weighting of historiographical genres in the two realms which surely influenced the results of Chwalka’s statistical analysis and which would have been better addressed directly (reading relevant essays by Weiler, Reuter, and Nicholas Vincent would have helped).⁵ More attention should have been paid to the link

² Timothy Reuter, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. Janet Nelson (Cambridge, 2006).

³ Timothy Reuter, ‘The Making of England and Germany, 850–1050: Points of Comparison and Difference’, in Reuter, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, 284–99, at 298.

⁴ Timothy Reuter, ‘John of Salisbury and the Germans’, in Michael Wilks (ed.), *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford, 1984), 415–25.

⁵ See various comparisons made in Björn Weiler, ‘The King as Judge: Henry II and Frederick Barbarossa as Seen by their Contemporaries’, in Patricia Skinner (ed.), *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter* (Turnhout, 2009), 115–40, at 135–40; Björn Weiler, ‘How Unusual

Reuter highlighted between the remarkable English unity mentioned above and the fact that English writers, no doubt influenced by Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, were more inclined than their German counterparts to view the past through the prism of the royal court. References to Henry Bainton's comparison of such texts to a '[n]ativity story for the nation' and Robert Swanson's identification of kingship as the historiographical focus in England (as opposed to bishops in Germany and cities in Italy) hint in this direction (pp. 88–9).

In contrast to their modern successors, the statistics show a greater interest among twelfth-century English historians in the empire than vice versa. The conclusion holds true at the extremes and in the round. All the English chronicles bar one (the *Gesta Stephani*) included at least one reference, whereas a third of the German sources did not mention England. Eight German authors mentioned England just once, and only two German writers included more than ten references (the figure is twelve for England). The range, among English historians, is enormous: a single remark in the *Annales Plymptonienses* and Richard of Hexham's *De gestis regis Stephani* compares to a staggering eighty-nine in Roger of Howden's *Chronica*. Chwalka is commendably forthright about the methodological pitfalls which lie behind the raw statistics.⁶ A single reference in her survey could equate to a fleeting mention of the emperor in a sentence's subclause or a thematic, detailed, and reflective set piece. In the example she provides, Orderic Vitalis chronicled a sequence of events spanning twenty-seven years, linked together in the person of Henry V. Because the account is not interrupted by references to other topics, the five pages of discussion

was Matthew Paris? The Writing of Universal History in Angevin England', in Michele Campopiano and Henry Bainton (eds.), *Universal Chronicles in the High Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2017), 199–222; Nicholas Vincent, 'The Strange Case of the Missing Biographies: The Lives of the Plantagenet Kings of England 1154–1272', in David Bates, Julia Crick, and Sarah Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250* (Woodbridge, 2006), 237–58.

⁶ For another attempt to apply a statistical approach to twelfth-century historical writing which presents comparable methodological problems, see 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, 2020); see also my review of this title in *GHIL Bulletin*, 44/1 (2022), 80–7.

(in the modern edition) count as a single ‘unit of meaning’ (p. 142). A greater number of mentions thus often reflects an author’s narrative style, rather than necessarily their interest in the topic. William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta regum Anglorum* provides only two references, for example, but they prove to be among the most interesting.

How might one explain the greater interest displayed by English authors if we take the statistics at face value? While Chwalka is correct to point to more intense bonds forged between England and the Continent by the Norman Conquest and the Papacy, other hints offered in her conclusion take us back to the more intriguing differences between the historiographical cultures of the two realms. English authors often prove to be better known and their background and sources easier to trace, their duties at court granting them access to oral and written material included in the composition of what were often lengthier histories. Again, the contrast is not simple or absolute: visits to the royal court, and journeys to Italy, are recorded for Ekkehard of Aura, Burchard of Ursberg, Otto of Freising, Rahewin, and Arnold of Lübeck. A subtler suggestion offered is that we can detect a greater ‘or at least more verifiable mobility’ (p. 152) among English writers. Rachel Koopmans has indeed drawn attention to how many of the authors in Chwalka’s English corpus swapped information and inspiration in what was often a remarkably tight-knit social circle, one surely bound together more closely than in the far larger, more disparate regions of the German kingdom.⁷

Chwalka’s analysis bears much richer fruit once we proceed to her case studies, where the thorough exploration of the historical background, the chronicles, and their sources pays dividends. The account of English reactions to the Investiture Contest and to the Salian emperors is fascinating. Henry V’s campaign to Rome in 1111 and his scandalous imprisonment of Pope Paschal II received far greater attention than events at Canossa. William of Malmesbury offers a remarkable description of the latter: Henry IV is refused an audience by a pope disgusted by the emperor’s depraved debauchery with his sister. Malmesbury himself had more time for him: here

⁷ Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2011).

was a powerful, intelligent, well-read, and charitable ruler, comparable to the ancient Caesars, who had fought in sixty-two battles and nearly always triumphed against his enemies. On the endless *investiturae controversia* (Investiture Contest)—compared by Malmesbury to a hydra—the example of Orderic Vitalis in turn offers an abrupt reminder of the gap between the priorities of modern scholarship and those of our sources. For Orderic, like Malmesbury, incest triumphed over investiture. Investiture appears only once in a list of Henry IV's manifold offences, and the crime is not mentioned at all in relation to Henry V. Rudolf Schieffer was astonished that Orderic had appeared to mix up Henry IV and Philip I of France (the latter excommunicated for adultery).⁸ As Chwalka shows, Orderic knew his target: lewd details of Salian licentiousness had travelled beyond the seemingly limited circulation of polemical texts within the empire and reached as far afield as St Evroul and Malmesbury.

The discussion of Richard the Lionheart's captivity by English and German authors is equally impressive, adding nuance to previous conclusions reached by Knut Görich and John Gillingham. Görich suggested that the capture of the English crusader king by Leopold V, duke of Austria, had been justified by German authors with reference to Richard's dishonourable conduct at Acre when tearing down the duke's banner. In fact, only two sources mention this. Other chroniclers wrote of insulting behaviour by the king towards Leopold, the German contingent as a whole, and God, or they condemned his actions elsewhere. Rare references are made by the chroniclers here to broader national categories. Otto of St Blasien suggested that the German and Italian knights left Acre, decrying *Anglicam perfidiam* (English perfidy); the *Chronica regia Coloniensis* claimed Richard questioned the bravery of the Germans as a people; the Marbach Annals named him an enemy of the empire. An impatient reader might think we have finally stumbled upon the much looked-for construction of the Other. Ludwig Schmugge and Günther Blaicher guide us in this direction, arguing that the experience of crusading led to the formation of more precise and vicious national caricatures (see pp. 236–7).

⁸ Rudolf Schieffer, 'Worms, Rom und Canossa (1076/77) in zeitgenössischer Wahrnehmung', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 292 (2011), 593–612, at 609.

Have we found, with such remarks, the beginnings of a stereotype that would, far in the future, be wielded by the likes of Napoleon to cut perfidious Albion down to size? Not quite. Accusations of infidelity, Chwalka cautions, were applied to numerous targets. The febrile conditions of the crusader camps before Acre had not, in fact, incubated the seeds of later English-German enmity.

Where German authors passed over Richard's actual imprisonment with a discreet silence, their English contemporaries felt duty-bound to defend their king's conduct. Yes, Richard had insulted Leopold's honour, but quite right too! Richard may have cut down the duke's tent, but Leopold should not have placed it so close to the king's pavilion or refused Richard's request to move it a short distance. It was sheer folly for him to demand an equal share in the spoils; he was a duke, not a king. The justice of Richard's cause was all too apparent when Leopold died in 1194 following a tournament accident, a gruesome death reported with relish by English authors lapping up the gossip spread by hostages returning from Austria. According to William of Newburgh, they had milk and honey on their tongues when reporting the news. Henry VI received a variety of negative judgments: angry, envious, impressionable, and comparable to Pharaoh, and even Saladin, in his lack of Christian honour and imperial dignity. Negative generalizations feature again. Ralph of Diceto called the Austrians foul-smelling barbarians who spoke a horrible language and resembled wild beasts living in squalor. Such remarks were again atypical. The German princes campaigning for Richard's release received a positive press, as did Henry VI once he was thought to be planning a new crusade.

The care with which Chwalka has dissected these accounts will be readily apparent. An equally significant service rendered by her book is to shine a light on the rich exchange of information which underpinned these narratives, with chroniclers drawing upon an array of letters, chronicles, personal experience, and foreign contacts. The importance, for English authors, of the histories written by Marianus Scotus, Sigebert of Gembloux, Ekkehard of Aura, and David the Scot is clear (direct references by their German peers to English histories prove rarer). Eyewitness testimonies were also crucial: Eadmer described the encounter of Archbishop Ralph d'Escures with Henry V; Malmesbury

claimed to have heard stories about Gregory VII from a monk who had heard them from Abbot Hugh of Cluny (Henry IV's godfather and a witness to Canossa); the Cologne Chronicle described a delegation sent to Rouen to speak with Henry II of England in 1168; and Ralph of Coggeshall drew the details of Richard's imprisonment from the king's chaplain, Anselm. The evidence for such contact and exchange, even within the remit of Chwalka's analysis, is considerable. They surely represent 'the tip of the iceberg'⁹

Yet Chwalka's assessment of these contacts is surprisingly downbeat. The theoretical discussion of 'communication' is an unwelcome detour from an otherwise useful set of observations (pp. 77–8). Particularly influential for Chwalka is Andreas Bihrer's concept of *mittlere Entfernung* ('middle distance', p. 16): an intermediate zone where the Other could be constructed in a more dynamic and varied manner. Conflict and contact between England and Germany are judged not to have been as intense or immediate as between England and France, nor as remote—in a somewhat dramatic leap—as between the Latin West and the Mongols or China (p. 16). This model takes us to her conclusions which—like the book's hesitant title—often strike a surprisingly negative tone, given the wealth of evidence and insights which precede them. On the one hand, significant omissions are rightly pointed out. No suggestion is found of the imperial overlordship so fiercely debated by twentieth-century historians, nor a 'centre of perception' (p. 145) or particularly obvious geographical patterns. The overall conclusions, however, are often too starkly formulated; as per Bihrer's model, 'constant contact—as well as constant awareness' (p. 242) did not exist. France is the necessary foil here: unlike England's 'immediate neighbour, the empire was not the constant focus of the scribes' (p. 385). Personal contacts between England and the empire 'had no measurable influence on the acquisition of information about the Other in German sources' (p. 85). Among German authors, a 'consistent interest' in developments in the English polity could not be proven (p. 241). Although 'a large amount of information on England and a variance of opinions could be found' (p. 242), the triggers to

⁹ Quotation from Timothy Reuter, 'All Quiet Except on the Western Front? The Emergence of Pre-Modern Forms of Statehood in the Central Middle Ages', in Reuter, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, 432–58, at 445.

discuss English events were external (the crisis of the papal schism or Richard's imprisonment). More negative stereotypes stemmed from 'emotionality due to insecurity' or were 'persuasive stylistic devices' (p. 243) for self-reassurance. Authors oscillated between 'indifference and tense attention' (p. 244). Fundamental notions of the Other, comparable to the prejudicial stereotypes formed in relation to Slavs or Muslims, cannot be found, nor a fixed image of foreign rulers: chroniclers did not have 'firmly established ideas about the Other . . . [nor] thought deeply about the differences between the two nations' (p. 397). Walter Map's humorous anecdote, it seems, was indeed atypical.

Yet if readers flip back to the initial statistical analysis, they will find an array of fascinating examples: stragglers, whose voices have been drowned out in the book's quick march towards the selected case studies. Important themes emerge from this more diverse set of material. Many English authors, for example, recognized the (growing) significance of the princes in the governance of the empire (that Ralph of Diceto explicitly discussed the office of imperial chancellor and its applicability to Thomas Becket is relegated to a footnote: p. 319, n. 1,345). The English portrayal of princely opposition to Henry VI, which sought to protect the *honor imperii* against his arbitrary tyranny, fits neatly into this pattern. References to the imperial episcopate would also have made for an intriguing case study. Orderic Vitalis' observation that the archbishop of Mainz travelled with 500 knights could have led to a broader discussion of one of the most potent German stereotypes in the period, that of the bloodthirsty militant Teutonic bishop (studies of which, by Reuter and Scales, were not consulted).¹⁰ Comments by Walter Map and William of Malmesbury that German kings were weak because they had given too much away to the church will thrill any scholars still engaged in the *Reichskirchensystem* debates (Malmesbury claimed that they had done so specifically to escape the control of the lay nobility). It is really worth stressing here the sheer amount of material referred to by Chwalka,

¹⁰ Len Scales, 'Germen Militiae: War and German Identity in the Later Middle Ages', *Past and Present*, 180 (2003), 41–82; Timothy Reuter, 'Episcopi cum sua militia: The Prelate as Warrior in the Early Staufer Era', in Timothy Reuter (ed.), *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser* (London, 1992), 79–94.

but left untapped, ranging from discussions of Carolingian and Ottonian ancestry (for both English and German rulers) to attempts by German kings to introduce taxes based on English models. Ralph Niger – in his descriptions of the Magi at Cologne, campaigns in Italy, and the imperial episcopate – is indeed recognized as having shown a ‘marked interest in German history’ (p. 137). We miss out too on Walter Map’s incredible suggestion that Henry V, having slain his brother and quarrelled with the princes, faked his own death and retired to a monastery. Map even cites an expletive – *Tpwrut Aleman* – ‘reckoned to this day by all Germans as the worst of insults . . . a reproach which constantly causes many quarrels between them and foreigners.’¹¹ The material fits Reuter’s highly pertinent characterization of Walter Map’s initial anecdote as ‘seemingly unusable: imprecise, historically inaccurate, cliché ridden’ – but nonetheless illustrative of the capacity of these authors to compare and contrast.¹²

To only judge the extent of contact and awareness between England and Germany by either the final case studies, or by reference to models of the Other, would be to miss out on far too much of the rich bounty that Chwalka has unearthed from her sources (before one even begins to think, beyond her remit, of what could be gleaned from other genres of sources or areas of economic, religious, intellectual, and artistic life). The absence of any reference throughout the book to Robert Bartlett’s *Making of Europe* – in a study concerned with the Other in the Latin West – is inexplicable and perhaps also significant for the work’s framing and ultimate conclusions.¹³ As Bartlett argued, twelfth-century Europe bore witness to a high degree of integration and mobility of the kind Chwalka has observed between England and Germany. Hostile notions of the Other did exist, but were directed more often towards those beyond the edge of this increasingly homogenous core – by English authors looking north and west, and by their German counterparts towards the east. Chwalka’s search for such an Other in two polities at the centre of this zone might always

¹¹ Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers’ Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, C. N. L. Brooke, and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), 458.

¹² Reuter, ‘All Quiet Except on the Western Front?’, 452.

¹³ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London, 1993).

have proved elusive. Yet, paradoxically, one should not take her conclusion—nor the book's title—at its word. What she has uncovered instead is more nuanced and arguably more interesting: a pair of vibrant historical cultures enriching one another through fleeting, but nonetheless significant exchanges of information, documents, and personal experiences, whose authors displayed a breadth of vision when writing about their European neighbours that compares favourably with that of their modern successors. *Kein Interesse* is not without its faults: the lack of reference to works by not only Bartlett and Reuter, but also Weiler, Scales, and Thomas Förster is regrettable and significant.¹⁴ But it remains a valiant comparative study whose approach, interpretations, and conclusions reward close reading and prolonged reflection.

¹⁴ In addition to the works cited above, particularly relevant are Timothy Reuter, 'The Medieval German *Sonderweg*? The Empire and its Rulers in the High Middle Ages', in Reuter, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, 388–412; Timothy Reuter, 'Modern Mentalities and Medieval Politics', *ibid.* 3–18; Timothy Reuter, 'Past, Present and No Future in the Twelfth-Century *Regnum Teutonicum*', in Paul Magdalino (ed.), *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, (London, 1992), 15–36; and Thomas Förster, *Vergleich und Identität: Selbst- und Fremddeutung im Norden des hochmittelalterlichen Europa* (Berlin, 2009).

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