L'Éthique du pouvoir au Moyen Age. L'office dans la culture politique

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In discussing the choice of officials Frédérique Lachaud cites the metaphor of the prince as gardener, who should cultivate his subjects with care (p. 443). She shows great skills of cultivation in this very substantial and important book. Hers is a formal garden, structured around two themes, one the views and roles of intellectuals encapsulated in the notion of 'office', the other the practice of control and reform, be it royal or oppositional. Unity is ensured by a carefully constructed bridge within part three, and entitled 'Réforme et contrôle des officiers dans la théorie politique'. The overall argument emphasizes the development of the normative and the hierarchic, the separation of the official and the personal. At the same time royal officers might have multiple allegiances, because of the social and patronage networks in which they were enmeshed (see especially pp. 585–8).

The substantial introduction provides a lengthy overview of royal administration, in particular local administration, in the period. The author also provides a working definition of office, drawing both on medieval and present-day notions (pp. 29–39). There are also helpful summaries of the overall argument: 'L'hypothèse qui sera développée dans ces pages est que, au-delà d'une instruction simplement destinée à moraliser le prince, l'ensemble de ces normes permit l'élaboration d'une "éthique du pouvoir", et que cette entreprise trouva une expression partiulièrement forte dans l'idée de office … Non seulement il existait des "offices publics", mais, de manière générale, l'idée même d'office finit par connoter une place reconnue et délimitée dans la *res publica*: on exigeait, de ceux qui remplissaient un office, responsabilité et légitimité' (p. 27).

The introduction is followed by part one, entitled 'Éthique et office: les vertus et la civilité, normes du pouvoir'. Here the Latin writers dominate, in particular their education and their discussions of the virtues needed for the proper fulfilment of office. The discussion is usefully related to, but not dominated by, the ideas of Norbert Elias (see especially pp. 86–7). Placed at the forefront is the notion that good governance of the self is the necessary precondition of good governance of others: 'Tous les auteurs insistent sur le fait que le gouvernement de soi, la bonne "gouvernance" de soi, pour reprendre un terme qui apparaît dans les traits de civilité, est le prélude indispensable au gouvernement des autres. Les exigences morales, le contrôle de soi, l'encouragement à suivre une certaine ascèse placent en effet l'individu, au cœur de la réflexion sur les rapport entre vertu et office' (pp. 93–126, quotation at p. 93). Following extensive discussion of this theme, part one concludes with an interesting discussion of possible peculiarities of the English model of civility.

Part two is entitled '*Ordo* et *officium*.' Starting with John of Salisbury and his *Policraticus*, Lachaud considers the integration of the notion of office in the wider workings of the community or *res publica*. Particular attention is paid to the place of clerics in administration, an issue prominent, for example, at the very start of the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*. Again there are helpful summaries of the argument: 'dépassant l'idée d'*ordo*, qui exprimait la vocation dans la société chrétienne, la construction politique élaborée par Jean de Salisbury dans le *Policraticus* développa l'idée que chacun pouvait participer, selon son ordre, mais aussi, selon son "office", à la vie publique, en vue de l'utilité commune. Cette construction n'était pas gratuite: elle fut élaborée face à un pouvoir – celui des rois de l'Angleterre depuis la Conquête – perçu comme s'exerçant de manière presque tyrannique; elle fut aussi le fruit d'un idéal de réforme spirituelle, morale et politique, qui pénétrait les milieux cléricaux comme ceux des laïcs' (pp. 175–6).

Part three, on 'Le contrôle des officiers, entre réforme et réaction: les débats et la théorie politiques', provides an extensive narrative on reform during the period covered by the book. The pulling together of material often treated separately is very useful, although further interpretation might have been attempted, for example on periodisation. On this issue suggestions appear at various points of the book, for example at pp. 387, 394, and 401, on the diminishing role of the enquiry as a reforming tool, and at pp. 551–2 on change arising from the professionalization of administrators. However, it might have been made clearer whether the 1170 Inquest of Sheriffs, or perhaps the 1166 Assize of Clarendon, is seen as the start of a particular type of reform measure that would characterize much of the period. Part four, on 'Autorité, responsabilité, délégation de pouvoir et rémunération des officiers: vers un droit d'office', again brings together much material rarely treated in unified fashion. Oaths, patterns of hierarchy and delegation, practices of remuneration, all suggest an increasing normative basis for the holding of administrative office.

The book is written with great clarity. The four parts are broken down into chapters, and these into sections. As we have seen, summaries ensure that the overall thread of the argument is never lost. There are stimulating comparative discussions, with ecclesiastical and with French royal government (see especially p. 408 on different attitudes to local ties). Although vernacular French works, for example by Walter of Henley and Robert Grosseteste, do feature, the concentration is on Latin writers, most notably John of Salisbury, Peter of Blois, Gerald of Wales, Walter Map, and Daniel of Beccles (a writer who is suddenly enjoying much popularity among historians of 12th-century England). The influence of classical works, most particularly Cicero's *De officiis* is the subject of very interesting discussion. (pp. 127–34) What may be considered missing is aconsideration of the vernacular courtly literature of the period, with its unpopular stewards and its skilled advisers: what problems arose for the literary King Arthurs from the disruptive activities of Kay, and how could you ensure that your adviser was a Governal, not a Ganelon? The vernacular literature may also in this period have provoked more general thinking and discussion about politics, for example about the relative importance of honourable behaviour and successful outcome. Readers or listeners may have asked whether deceit by opponents in turn required deceitful action. The stories in epics and romances provide examples requiring assessment of risk, itself a vital skill for advisers as well as rulers. Such texts must, therefore, have had a vital educative role, even if not a primary educative intention, for rulers and for office holders. For the historian, they might also provide further insight into lay rather than clerical views; the interaction of possibly conflicting political cultures may have been a further stimulus to thought on good rulership and good governance.

It is a sign of the stimulating nature of the book that there are further areas where extensive discussion would have been welcome. How far did ideas of service to the king differ from those of service to other great men, and can this relate to the issue of reform of baronial as well as royal government? (see for example p. 350) What was the impact of the Becket dispute on thinking about office and royal service? Can counter-readings of the Latin literature be used to try to uncover another culture of service, which the writers were seeking to control or suppress? How far were particular administrative fields the preserve of particular families, at least at certain times – the Treasury and Exchequer that of later members of the family of Roger of Salisbury, justice that of the relatives of Ranulf de Glanvill, the Forest that of the extended Neville family? Such family ties could operate even without formal inheritance of office. Prosopography might add to the discussion of how selection of officials worked in practice.

Other issues of debate may arise. The issue of a hierarchy of courts emerges in a discussion of 'Autorité et légitimité du juge' (pp. 525–9). *Glanvill*'s reference to non-royal courts as 'lesser courts' surely merited a mention, as it seems to mark a new and significant classification. On the other hand, there remained notable limitations to formal hierarchisation, for example in the relationship of hundred and county, and between different forms of the king's court. The relationship of local reform to national receives much more attention with regard to Henry III's reign than with regard to Magna Carta. Yet issues very relevant to this book are apparent both in urban charters and London legal writings in London, and in grants to tenants, most notably by the northern lord Peter de Brus. As with vernacular literature, such texts suggest another source for thinking on good government. Nevertheless, the addition of further discussion would have reduced the impressive clarity of an already long book, which so successfully combines a survey of a vast amount of material with the proposal of a highly persuasive thesis. For those interested in political thinking or in English politics and government of the period, and for those more broadly concerned with issues of bureaucratisation and accountability and of the relationship of society and state, this book is essential and pleasurable reading.

The author is happy to accept this review and does not wish to comment further.

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