

Family, Commerce and Religion in London and Cologne: Anglo-German Immigrants, c.1000–c.1300

Review Number:

95

Publish date:

Tuesday, 1 February, 2000

Author:

Joseph Huffman

Date of Publication:

1998

Publisher:

Cambridge University Press

Place of Publication:

Cambridge

Reviewer:

Bjorn Weiler

Joseph P. Huffmans *Family, Commerce and Religion in London and Cologne: Anglo-German Immigrants, c.1000-c.1300*: (Cambridge 1998) is the most recent contribution to a burgeoning field of historical scholarship, i.e. the study of Anglo-German relations in the Middle Ages. Over the last fifteen years a number of studies have appeared on the subject. Amongst the most important are Natalie Fryde, *Ein mittelalterlicher deutscher Grossunternehmer: Terricus Teutonicus de Colonia in England, 1217-1257* (Stuttgart, 1997), Theo Holzapfel, *Papst Innozenz III., Philipp II. August, König von Frankreich, und die englisch-welfische Verbindung 1198-1216* (Frankfurt/Main, 1991), T.H. Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse, 1157-1611* (Cambridge, 1991), and Dieter Berg, *England und der Kontinent: Studien zur auswärtigen Politik der anglonormannischen Könige* (Bochum, 1987). Nonetheless, Professor Huffman is the first attempt in English to provide a detailed investigation of the subject centred on the economic and social interaction between Cologne and London. Particular emphasis is given to emigrants and families who were distinguished by their role in arranging, or in profiting from, relations between Cologne and the English realm. In many ways, the Rhenish metropolis lends itself to this approach. Its economic significance remains undisputed, and the political clout of its archbishops made the city a frequent agent and go-between in Anglo-German relations. In 1066, for instance, the archbishop had been instrumental in securing the diplomatic "Back-up" for William of Normandy's conquest of England. In 1198, they secured the necessary support, when Richard the Lionhearted decided to promote the candidacy of his nephew, Otto of Poitou, for the German throne, and in 1256 Archbishop Conrad of Hochstaden had enlisted the votes needed to facilitate Earl Richard of Cornwall's election as King of the Romans. Although this has long been recognised, Professor Huffman's chosen focus on the foot-soldiers of Anglo-German exchange, the merchants, clerics and adventurers, promises to shed new light on the technicalities and the personnel of economic and social exchanges in medieval Europe. For these reasons it merits close attention.

The book is divided into three sections. A number of shorter chapters deal with the material framework of economic exchange, the history of trade between London and Cologne, the latter's declining influence in the course of the thirteenth century, and a history of currency exchange. Special emphasis is paid to the legal

status of Germans in London from the eleventh century onwards, as well as the location and history of the London Guildhall, the "trading post" initially for Cologne, but increasingly for German merchants in general. This introduction to the economic background is rounded off by an investigation of currency exchanges between England and Germany, and in particular the role of the sterling as a *Leitwährung* in medieval trade, as well as the standard for designing coins and currencies, including, it would seem, a rather profitable forging-industry which sprung up in the Rhineland during this period. In the second part, Professor Huffman presents two case-studies, one of a number of Cologne families who seem to have originated in England, and their economic fortunes during the thirteenth century, and the second that of the Zudendorps, a Cologne family which was not only active in economic exchanges between Cologne and England, but who also acted as envoys and diplomats during much of the thirteenth century. Particular use is made of the *Schreinsbücher*, a set of legal documents outlining property transactions in thirteenth-century Cologne, so far a largely untapped source. This picture is complemented in part three by a survey of clerics whose careers spanned both the English and the German realm, as well as the relics and saints who can serve to illustrate the close cultural and religious connections between the two regions. It may be worth pointing out, for instance, that St Ursula was initially said to have been a British princess before being martyred with her 10,000 companions near Cologne, where she became one of the major attractions for medieval pilgrimages, including a visit by no lesser a person than Margery Kempe. All in all, some of the major elements of Anglo-German relations in the Middle Ages are dealt with. Much of this centres on the thirteenth century. This is, however, the result of the quantity and quality of material surviving from this period, and is nonetheless useful in assessing developments which occurred since the early eleventh century. As such, this book promises to fill an important gap in the study of the medieval economy, as well as bringing together German and English scholarship.

Unfortunately, Professor Huffmans study does not always live up to these expectations. This is due to reasons which are not always entirely within the authors control. Much of the chapter on the English in Cologne, for instance, is little more than a list of property transactions. To a large extent, this approach is conditioned by the sources available to Professor Huffman - the *Schreinsbücher* -, but it also highlights some of the perennial problems in having to rely primarily on legal and administrative materials for an investigation of social developments. We learn very little about the families involved, beyond what is revealed in these lists of property transactions. More importantly, the fundamental methodological problem at the heart of Professor Huffmans investigation - to what extent does the name *de Anglia* or *Anglicus* denote English origins, or simply close contacts with England - seems to have defied a wholly satisfactory solution. What Professor Huffman does show, however, is that sufficient evidence survives to suggest that English emigrants did settle in Cologne, and, as far as their property transactions imply, sometimes with considerable success. It is only in the final part of study, that the evidence allows the author to paint a more wide-ranging picture, when dealing with men such as Gerard Pucelle, a member of Thomas Becketts entourage and close friend of John of Salisbury, who later became one of the leading teachers of Canon Law in Cologne, or Bishop Savaric of Bath, who utilised his relations with the Emperor and his close access to Richard the Lionhearted to secure himself an Episcopal see in England. These are important elements in a picture, which may not be familiar to many anglophone historians. However, it certainly is not the major new contribution, which would encourage historians to reconsider their basic assumptions as to what constituted medieval Europe. That, however, is what Professor Huffman all too frequently proclaims his book to be.

This leads to two major criticisms, the first one of posture, the second one of approach and methodology. Professor Huffman promises more than he delivers, and more than he can deliver. He is certainly right in chastising the anglo-centric parochialism of much current medieval scholarship not just in Britain, but in the English-speaking world as a whole, and he is also correct in pointing out that medieval Germany was not a shadowy and semi-barbarous entity somewhere east of Dover, but a major factor in the economic, cultural and social development of medieval Europe. Moreover, the present study possesses considerable merit, inasmuch as it makes available substantial amounts of German scholarship to those who do not take a

professional interest in the history of either Germany or Anglo-German relations. It also provides us with detailed facets of what the so commonly acknowledged social and economic interchange in medieval Europe meant in practice. For once, we do not see kings and emperors negotiating, but merchants and artisans organising their exchanges and careers. Unfortunately, Professor Huffman does not seem to be content with this, and all too often he protests a degree of novelty for his contribution which is not always justified. The present book does not put forth a revolutionary new thesis or methodology, but applies existing approaches in greater detail than has previously been the case, while rarely departing from the well-trodden paths of historical scholarship. Professor Huffman moves within parameters which have been established for several generations, and they are rarely, if ever, questioned. By and large, he is deepening rather than expanding the field of Anglo-German relations. Neither the choice of his topic economic exchange and social mobility nor the geographical framework which he is considering Cologne and London go beyond what historians have been doing for the last 120 years. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it contrasts unfavourably with some of the rather grandiloquent claims put forth in this book. Pointing out that the London-Cologne nexus was an important one qualifies neither as a surprising nor as a new insight.

The second objection to be made follows from this. As Professor Huffman rarely goes beyond the established framework, the focus of his investigation often seems unduly limited. This refers not only to a general lack of interpretation and analysis, but also to the methodological, geographical and prosopographical focus chosen. There is very little in terms of interpretation in this book, which for its most part is a list of property transactions and excerpts from financial records. To some extent, as has been mentioned earlier, this is the result of the sources at hand. However, even so not very much is done with these materials. There is little reference as to their application beyond listing and citing them. We are thus well informed, for instance, of the Zudendorps economic and diplomatic role, but we do not know where to place them. How were they different from other families? How typical was their career as merchant-diplomats in the thirteenth century? How do they compare to other important families, either from Cologne or from elsewhere, as, for instance, the family of the advocates and mayors of Aachen (who attained a no less important role in facilitating diplomatic and economic exchanges)? How do the actions and undertakings of Arnold fitz Thedmar in London compare to those of the various English families registered as being active in the Rhineland? There certainly are limits as to what can be gleaned from the surviving records, but these are questions which could and should have been addressed. As this has rarely been done in any detail, much of the material unearthed by Professor Huffman remains in an interpretative void and leaves the reader at a loss as to what to do with it.

A similar problem is posed by the thematic, geographical and prosopographical restrictions which Professor Huffman has imposed upon himself. There are valid reasons, for instance, for concentrating on economic and social exchanges, while leaving aside the political history of Anglo-German relations. At the same time, an awareness of the political context within which the protagonists of Professor Huffman's study acted would have been helpful, and could have provided some of the analysis which the book as a whole is often lacking. It may have been worth considering, for instance, to what extent Colognes declining significance in Anglo-German economic exchanges from c. 1230 onwards was mirrored in the shifting emphasis of Anglo-German diplomatic contacts. Is there a connection between Henry III's diplomatic efforts concentrating on the Emperor himself, rather than the German princes, and a decrease in trading privileges for and other contacts with the Rhenish cities? To what extent were the problems of the English families and merchants in Cologne during the 1260s related to the increasingly hostile relations between the Archbishop and Richard of Cornwall? These are matters, which would not have forced the author to veer from his chosen field of enquiry, as they form part of the necessary background to the activities and undertakings which he is exploring. After all, the families considered by Professor Huffman merited their inclusion in this book by their outstanding role in diplomatic as well as economic exchanges. Certainly, even just highlighting the political parameters within which they acted and the impact these had or may have had on their careers would have been worth further consideration.

Similarly, English contacts with the medieval German empire outside Cologne are mostly left untouched.

This is certainly justifiable in the context of a study on economic and social exchange between London and Cologne, but, once more, at least some awareness of what else was going on would have strengthened Professor Huffmans argument. In its present form, the study does not go beyond the established assumption that prior to the foundation of the Hanseatic League - Cologne, and Cologne more or less alone, mattered in exchanges between England and Germany. As a result, some rather important pieces of information have been overlooked, even within the chosen parameters of Professor Huffmans book. For instance, although the attempts of Henry III to marry a Bohemian princess in 1227 are mentioned, as is the Bohemian envoy, Count Arnold of Hückeswagen, Arnolds identity remains unresolved. This is regrettable, as looking at this in more detail would certainly have underlined Professor Huffmans point of the pre-eminence of Cologne, as well as the wide range of men and people involved in economic and social exchanges. The Counts family originated from Westphalia, where they held fiefs of the archbishop. Arnolds father had frequently witnessed charters of Archbishop Adolf, while Arnolds son and heir joined the chapter of St Pantaleon in Cologne. Certainly, this would not have forced Professor Huffman to reduce his coverage of Cologne in any degree, which could be deemed irresponsible, but it would have broadened the range and scope of the material available for analysis.

Equally, Professor Huffmans prosopographical focus is sometimes unfairly restricted. Obviously, the nature of the sources will force any author to concentrate on merchants and those whose actions and undertakings were reported in financial or legal records. Nonetheless, a lot more could have been accomplished even with the material at hand. In addition, a number of sources survive which could have facilitated a broader coverage of people and social groups. In the final part of his book, Professor Huffman does cover some of the clerics and scholars who were involved in exchanges between Cologne and London, and he also gives a brief survey of religious relations, while parts of section two deal with artisans from Cologne active in England. By and large, though, we are presented with a list of contacts, little comparison, and no analysis. In addition, even some of the materials, which could have been used to present a broader picture, remain unexplored. Nicholas of Cologne, for instance, a goldsmith involved in the production of St Edward the Confessor's shrine at Westminster, is mentioned, but little effort is made to illuminate the range of his activities, and what effort there is has been banished to the footnotes. This is the more regrettable, as his would have been an ideal example to illustrate the pitfalls and difficulties faced by artisans in general, and presumably - emigrants in particular. After all, we mostly know of Nicholas, because King Henry III failed to pay up. As a result, his requests for money, and the kings promises and evasions run like a red thread through several issues of the Liberate Rolls. Similarly, the circumstantial evidence which could justify speculations as to mercenaries from Cologne being employed by Simon de Montfort at the battles of Lewes and Evesham is not even mentioned, and although Professor Huffman does refer to the clerics whose careers spanned both the English and the German realm, rather surprising lacunae remain. Who, for instance, was the "Magister Andelmus, natione Coloniensis" whose consecration as archbishop of Armagh in Ireland mentioned by Matthew Paris ? Certainly, he was potentially one of the most important "German" emigrants to the dominions of the English king during this period, and as such worth considering.

None of these omissions on their own would pose a serious criticism of Professor Huffmans approach and coverage. However, taken together, they underline the most serious weakness of Professor Huffmans investigation. This study remains a worthwhile contribution, not the least so, because it presents the results and approaches of earlier generations of German scholarship in English, and thus opens up this field to a wider audience. In addition, some new materials have been found and presented, and a number of additional sources have been mustered and examples found to illustrate the degree of interaction between Cologne and England. As a whole, this study deepens our knowledge of economic, diplomatic and social ties between the Rhineland and England, and confirms what most historians have held be the case already. At the same time, this is considerably less than what Professor Huffman originally intended. This is the result both of an exaggeratedly ambitious rhetoric, and of a failure to look beyond the established confines of the subject. Nobody would have expected a complete coverage of all contacts of any kind between Germany and

England from the eleventh to the early fourteenth century. Nonetheless, even with regard to Cologne some important fields have not been given the attention they deserve, and even within the context of social, religious and economic exchanges between Cologne and London, this study could have profited from an awareness of the broader framework of the events, institutions and topics it describes. Germany not to speak of the empire itself - does extend beyond Cologne. Many opportunities for using the materials unearthed have been left unexplored. On a more technical level, it would have been feasible, for instance, to reduce coverage of the Zudendorps and the English in Cologne, as both have been the subject of substantial articles by Professor Huffman, and instead to present more of a comparative analysis. Thus, Professor Huffman would have expanded and broadened our understanding of the cross-connections and intersections between England and Germany in particular, and within medieval Europe as a whole.

Other reviews:

[2]

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/95#comment-0>

Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/653>

[2] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>