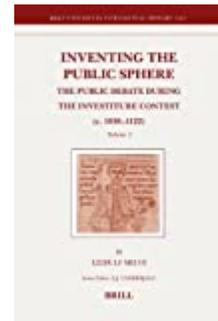




Leidulf Melve. *Inventing the Public Sphere: The public debate during the Investiture Contest (c. 1030–1122).* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007. XII, 776 S. \$247.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-15884-9.



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Propaganda, Polemics, and the Political Public in the Pre-Modern World

Over the course of approximately 650 pages, this two-volume work provides a thorough, detailed examination of the arguments employed by a broad range of polemical writers actively engaged in the Investiture Contest. The most notorious moment in this controversy, an outgrowth of a more general effort inside the eleventh-century church to promote religious reform and renewal, is the conflict between King Henry IV of Germany and Pope Gregory VII, but the contest incorporated a more wide-ranging debate about the nature of royal and papal authority in Latin Christendom. This study seeks to identify and explicate many of the key themes of this debate as it developed between approximately 1030 and 1122.

After an opening chapter that surveys the entire period he is discussing, Leidulf Melve begins his detailed analysis with a work written during the 1040s in early church reform circles: the *De ordinando pontifice* (chapter 2). He then turns to the polemics produced by the chanceries of Gregory VII and Henry IV in the letter-writing campaigns of the period 1073-82 (chapter 3). The final section of volume 1 focuses on a series of authors—including Gebhard of Salzburg, Wenrich of Trier, Mane-

gold of Lautenbach, and Guido of Ferrara—writing in the immediate wake of these initial royal and papal propaganda efforts and examines how these authors wrestled with the issues raised by the dramatic clash between pope and king (chapter 4). In volume 2, Melve analyzes in great depth a series of important treatises and considers why these works are significant for the course of the broader Investiture Contest. These texts include the *Defensio Heinrici IV regis* of Peter of Crassus, which dates to the years 1080-84 (chapter 5), the *Liber de unitate ecclesiae conservanda*, from the early 1090s (chapter 6), and the 1109 *De investitura episcoporum* (chapter 7). The final chapter focuses on the specific issue of investiture in a broad range of texts produced from the 1050s onwards, with special emphasis on treatises written in the years immediately preceding the Concordat of Worms in 1122.

Throughout both volumes, Melve systematically works his way through his sources, explaining how the author of each treatise and letter constructed the argument(s) central to the text. Melve identifies when his authors are using historical, moral-theological, philosophical, or legal arguments to make their cases; he points

out ad hominem attacks against Gregory VII and Henry IV and contrasts them to broader critiques of papal and royal power in the sources; and he attempts to demonstrate how the nature of the polemics changed over the course of the decades he is discussing. In all of these efforts, he is largely successful. Indeed, though the chapter on the royal and papal chanceries is unnecessarily long at over one hundred pages, it includes an extraordinarily rich analysis of the letters written by both sides. Melve effectively demonstrates the sophistication of the polemicists working at the royal and papal courts.

The second component of this work, however, is significantly more difficult to evaluate than the survey of polemics. Melve chooses to place his entire discussion of the texts produced during the Investiture Contest within a theoretical framework inspired by Jürgen Habermas's arguments concerning the "public sphere." As Melve rightly points out in his introduction, medieval scholars have typically not applied macro-historical theoretical approaches to the Investiture Contest, and his preliminary efforts at such a project are therefore most welcome.

Melve is appropriately cautious in admitting that one cannot apply notions of the "public sphere" developed for the early modern context directly to the eleventh century. In explaining the potential for a fruitful use of this concept in medieval history, he successfully makes some important observations. For example, Melve demonstrates how the use of open letters reveals polemicists' interest in appealing to a broad public (at least by medieval standards) during the Investiture Contest. He argues, moreover, that many different audiences were addressed in the polemical letters and treatises—bishops who supported Henry IV, pro-papal bishops, the German nobility, the church community in Rome, and so on—and that the authors of these works understood how to craft specific arguments for specific audiences. In addition, Melve shows that by the 1080s, people without strong attachments to either the royal or the papal camps were beginning to write treatises concerning the Investiture Contest and to engage in discussions of the merits of the various arguments. Thus, between the 1040s and 1122, issues surrounding church reform and the Investiture Contest went from being debated in very small elite circles to being discussed by a much larger segment of the political pub-

lic. In the process, polemicists gradually changed how they constructed their arguments, and Melve suggests that increased textualization, interpretation, and intellectualization were all significant long-term results of the development of medieval Europe's first "public sphere."

While Melve's use of the concept of the "public sphere" is intriguing, his reliance on this theoretical framework is not as convincing as it could be, for several reasons. First, because he is constructing a theory of the medieval "public sphere" while simultaneously discussing the specific arguments of his polemical texts in great detail, his claims about the "public sphere" are often lost within his dense analysis of the sources. This study might have been better as two separate books, one concerning the polemics and the other focusing solely on the complex issue of the "public sphere." Second, although Melve acknowledges on several occasions that the Peace of God movement, early heretical groups, and the Pataria in Milan also played roles in broadening the nature and scope of popular debate in the eleventh century, he fails to address this point with sufficient depth. Because of this neglect, readers will find it difficult to contextualize his argument about the public nature of the Investiture Contest effectively. Lastly, and most significantly, Melve bases his arguments about the "public sphere" more on authors' rhetorical strategies than on textual circulation and reception. As a result, his numerous references to "public opinion" are highly problematic. Melve is able to demonstrate that the authors of his sources were addressing a political public, but he fails to prove convincingly that this public genuinely engaged with the arguments the authors put forward.

For intellectual historians interested in the nature of the arguments employed by both the royal and papal parties during the Investiture Contest, Melve's study provides an excellent analysis of key polemical texts. While his use of the concept of the "public sphere" is not as successful as it could be, I hope his efforts to apply a theoretical framework to his subject matter are not simply dismissed or ignored by others in his field. Melve's work may well offer an effective starting point for further discussions of how scholars might apply theories developed outside the field of medieval studies to the reading of texts produced during the Investiture Contest.

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