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Christian Plath. *Konfessionskampf und fremde Besatzung: Stadt und Hochstift Hildesheim im Zeitalter der Gegenreformation und des Dreissigjährigen Krieges (ca. 1580-1660).* Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2005. 732 pp. EUR 89.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-402-03814-7.

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Published on H-German (April, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Catholics and Lutherans in Wartime Hildesheim

In this book, Christian Plath presents us with a comprehensive regional study of the ecclesiastical, albeit biconfessionally populated, lands of Hildesheim during the Thirty Years' War, including the semi-autonomous, predominantly Lutheran city of Hildesheim. Supported by thorough archival research, this very readable study examines the motivations and experiences of various political actors and social groups, as well as their various perceptions of the war, which resulted from their different backgrounds. In contrast to many existing regional studies on the period, the focus does not fall on religion, politics, or social developments as separate fields of enquiry; rather, Plath examines their interplay.

Plath's aim is twofold. First, in part 1, he seeks to demonstrate how the attempted imposition of confessional homogeneity, as one of the war aims of the different parties to the Thirty Years' War, went hand in hand with the so-called condensation of rule (*Herrschaftsverdichtung*) of the territorial lords, and thus with rather pragmatic, concrete political and juridical considerations. By describing how confessional identity was enforced and practices of piety were increasingly formalized and institutionalized on both the Catholic and Lutheran sides of the conflict, Plath remains very close to the confessionalization paradigm so famously applied by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling. A clear aspect of part 1 is that Plath does not simply follow the chronology of the Thirty Years' War. Instead, his periodization is dictated by the historical processes under scrutiny: the initial impetus for the Catholic Reformation within the Hildesheim area, for instance, appeared long before the war with the reign of bishop Ernest of Bavaria (1573-1612) or the church-visitation of 1608-09. Similarly, although military activity in the region had already ceased in the early 1640s, the war's economic consequences lasted until well after the Peace of Westphalia, as did the crystallization of confessional relations and power structures, so that the church-visitation of 1657 seems indeed a more appropriate caesura than the end of the war.

The second aim of this study, reflected in part 2, is to enhance our understanding of the way the effects of the Thirty Years' War played out concretely for the different social and political groups within the area, and show how different backgrounds influenced contemporary perceptions of the same war. Here, Plath is indebted to Hans Medick and Benigna von Krusenstjern, who have inspired a wide array of studies of contemporary experiences during this period, mainly drawing on so-called *Selbstzeugnisse*.[1] The great merit of Plath's work in this section lies in his systematic treatment of the different social and political groups and their experiences within a concrete historical context. He concludes that the question of whether the Thirty Years' War was a religious,

legal, territorial, or economically induced conflict cannot be answered unequivocally when one takes contemporary perceptions themselves as a point of departure. Rather, one should differentiate between the multiple socioeconomic, legal, political, or confessional groups that shaped early modern society. Their specific dispositions, interests, expectations, or what Plath calls their own collectively shared "space of experience," shaped their interpretations of the events of their time. In the process of determining the different angles of contemporary perceptions, which differed substantially in some cases, the local, microhistorical scope of the study reveals its value. This approach enables Plath to demonstrate how a minister might perceive and explain suffering or military violence very differently from, say, a council member, nobleman, or, for that matter, a farmer. In exploring these differences, Plath occasionally goes down to the level of individuals, describing their fates, experiences, and utterances. As a consequence of his results, Plath proposes to describe the Thirty Years' War as a "plurality of experiences."

An important contribution of the study lies in Plath's ability to prove that contemporary perceptions were not necessarily dictated by confessional distinctions or overall antagonism alone. Whereas, for example, large parts of the citizenry of semi-autonomous Hildesheim indeed clung to their Lutheran identities in reaction to the arrival of Jesuits, Catholic restitution, and the city's occupation by Catholic troops, a stance that fostered a religiously influenced image of the enemy in the city's publicity, quite a different picture is observed in the countryside. Here, the constant shifting of authorities on both confessional sides in the course of the war years actually resulted in an indifference towards religious affiliation, an attitude that extended to the various armies that passed through the region. For some, the coming of these armies even offered business opportunities or created new perspectives for social advancement. Plath shows that confessional differences were often ignored in such situations.

The focus of the second part of the book on contemporary experiences puts into new perspective some of the master narratives of the Thirty Years' War, which include state formation, juridification, and the waxing and waning of sentiments surrounding the religious divide. Plath's findings in part 2 therefore sometimes seem at odds with the first part, which adheres to a largely classic notion of the confessionalization paradigm. Despite describing some (mainly failed) attempts by local authorities or clergy to obstruct the increasing influence of the territorial lords, the perspective in the first part of the book remains predominantly "top-down." Plath does discuss some of the main points of criticism of the confessionalization paradigm, such as its chronology, the presumed generality and uniformity of the state-building processes it proposes to describe, or its emphasis on conscious disciplining. And indeed, the second part of the book could very well vindicate some of these points: apart from the relativizing perspective of contemporary experiences, this section also deals with themes such as problems with social discipline, disloyalty towards administrators, or confessional indifference, which could be perceived as an increasing interconfessional coexistence. The two parts of the book, however, remain largely separate narratives, and as a result, the interrelationships between the micro and macro levels of Plath's analysis do not always become clear.

Plath's study elucidates political, social, and religious developments in the Hildesheim area from a predominantly Catholic perspective. Of course, he is dealing with ecclesiastical lands, and he does make a sufficiently convincing plea for the re-introduction of the concept of "Counter-Reformation," not as a designation for the entire Catholic reform movement, but only for its "active," outward dimension: the immediate political, legal, and military measures taken by Catholic rulers and the Roman Church to contain rising Protestantism within their lands. When one applies this concept to the case of Hildesheim, however, one falls under the impression that the Catholic faction mainly initiated religious, juridical, or political processes, as well as taking a proactive approach to the wide range of practical considerations underlying them, while the Lutheran side remained merely reactive. That said, Plath's own description of (for instance) the pragmatic behavior of the neighboring Guelph dukes of Braunschweig, who also occupied parts of the Hildesheim region during the Swedish phase of the war, might indicate an equally enterprising attitude on the Lutheran side.

The depiction of Lutheran social segments in his study as reactive might well be the result of Plath's notion of law and religion as two separate domains. He proposes that the will to curtail the opposing confession was mainly perceived as a legal matter on the Catholic side, thus pointing to the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and its ecclesiastical reservation. Readers may wonder whether Plath is implying that Lutherans in the Hildesheim area conceived of the war mainly as a religious, even eschatological conflict, with "only" church and salvation under threat. Historiography reveals law and religion

as inseparably entangled at the time, whether among Lutherans or Catholics. Notwithstanding the fact that Lutheran publicity often inclined towards fanatical religious rhetoric, the goals it pursued were generally very concrete and politically inspired.[2] As was the case among all the confessions, religious issues were often implicitly also issues of political self-determination for either estates or local governments. Just as Catholic authorities or lawyers appealed to imperial laws and regulations to support their cases, so did their Lutheran counterparts: this strategy was common ground. In many ways, the legal interpretation of the different treaties on religious matters lay at the heart of many the antitheses within the Holy Roman Empire.[3] Overall, the calculations, political intentions, and legal means of Lutheran authorities or interest groups, as illustrated by the Hildesheim city government's constant striving for more independence (a process in which the decision for the Lutheran faith was an important element), remain somewhat underexposed in Plath's study and could well have been explored a bit more.

As a result of this mainly religious emphasis on the Lutheran side, Plath's assessment of the role of Lutheran ministers, which he describes mainly as a passive, admonishing one, lacks some depth. In their sermons they perceived and therefore propagated the war as a divine punishment, calling for better behavior and a more deeply lived faith. Indeed, such religious practice, described by Plath as a Lutheran "strategy of overcoming," seemed common practice, as has been observed elsewhere.[4] Recent historiography has also expounded a very distinct political as well as legal role played by Lutheran ministers. Earthly hierarchies, including policy and law, were still considered reflections of divine order. Within such a scheme, the minister's assignment was supposed to be one of monitoring this same political order, including the safeguarding of divine wishes in everyday political matters. This notion led ministers to take on advisory functions at courts or within city governments. Furthermore, Lutheran ministers were also enthusiastic pamphleteers, reshaping public opinion on concrete political topics. In short, one could say that although Lutheran ministers might not, by and large, have enjoyed the support of centrally directed organizations such as the Catholic Church, they, too, were at the center of political, juridical, and socioeconomic life.[5] Though Plath mentions the polemical inclination of the Lutheran ministers in the city of Hildesheim, he fails to elaborate on their concrete political roles and interests, as he does, for example, with the Jesuits. In this respect, it also remains unclear why, as Plath states, no anti-Catholic propaganda campaign worthy of mention occurred–whether official or clandestine–in Hildesheim. This absence is odd, since similar campaigns occurred in many other cities of the empire, (semi-)autonomous or not.[6]

Despite these comments, which mainly concern Plath's approach to the Lutheran "side" of the conflict, this study is an important contribution to the history of the Thirty Years' War. Not only does the book fill a historiographical gap in respect to regional studies on northern Germany, its alternating micro-macro scope and thorough research deserve to be mentioned favorably as well. No doubt, however, the most valuable contribution of this study is Plath's systematic differentiation between the multiple socioeconomic, confessional, and political groups that together shaped early modern society, as well as the examination of all their different perceptions. As such, this case study is truly a step forward in the further unraveling of the often complicated interconnections between religion, politics, and socioeconomics.

Notes

[1]. See Benigna von Krusenstjern and Hans Medick, eds., *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe. Der DreiÃigjÃ¤hrige Krieg aus der NÃ¤he* (GÃ¶ttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); and Geoffrey Mortimer, "Individual Experience and Perception of the Thirty Years' War in Eyewitness Personal Accounts," *German History* 20 (2002): 141-160.

[2]. Among the steadily growing research on publicity, and specifically the role of pamphlets, see for the German context Michael Schilling, "Medienspezifische Modellierung politischer Ereignisse auf FlugblÃ¤ttern des DreiÃigjÃ¤hrigen Krieges," in *Sprachen des Politische:. Medien und MedialitÃ¤t in der Geschichte*, ed. Ute Frevert and Wolfgang Braungart (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: GÃ¶ttingen, 2004), 122-138.

[3]. On the intertwinement of politics, law and religion, see, among others, the excellent study by Thomas Kaufmann, *DreiÃigjÃ¤hriger Krieg und WestfÃ¤lischer Frieden: Kirchengeschichtliche Studien zur lutherischen Konfessionskultur* (TÃ¼bingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

[4]. On the strong religious, also eschatological perception of the Thirty Years' War, see, among others Matthias Asche and Anton Schindling, eds., *Das Strafgericht Gottes: Kriegserfahrungen und Religion im*

Heiligen RÃ¶mischen Reich Deutscher Nation im Zeitalter des DreiÃigjÃ¤hrigen Krieges (MÃ¼nster: Aschendorff, 2001).

[5]. On the formation of and views on the "office" of Lutheran ministers, see Luise Schorn-SchÃ¼tte, "Die Drei-StÃ¤nde-Lehre im reformatorischen Umbruch," in *Die frÃ¼he Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch: Wissenschaftliches Symposion des Vereins fÃ¼r Reformationsgeschichte 1996,* ed. Bernd Moeller (GÃ¼tersloh: GÃ¼tersloher Verlagshaus, 1998); and, pertaining to ministers' role within cities, Ernst Rieg, *Konfliktbereitschaft und MobilitÃ¤t: Die protestantischen Geistlichen zwÃ¶lf sÃ¼ddeutscher ReichsstÃ¤dte zwischen Passauer Vertrag und Restitutionsedikt* (Leinfelden-Echterdingen: DRW-Verlag, 2002).

[6]. The role of pamphlets and propaganda in the Reformation era, or rather their pervasiveness, and also or especially during the Thirty Years' War, has been described by several historians, among them Silvia Serena Tschopp, Michael Schilling, Steven Ozment, Robert Scribner, and Andrew Pettegree. In the early 1990s Johannes Burkhardt described the war as mainly a media event in *Der DreiÃigjÃ¤hrige Krieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Beck, 1992).