



Richard Andrew Cahill. *Philipp of Hesse and the Reformation.* Mainz: Philipp von Zabern Verlag, 2001. x + 219 pp. EUR 35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-8053-2871-5.

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A Prince among Reformers

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Remarkably, Philipp the Magnanimous of Hesse (1504-67), unlike Frederick the Wise, Elector John Frederick of Saxony, Duke Ulrich of Wuerttemberg, and even several lesser lights among the Protestant princes of sixteenth-century Germany, has never been the subject of a major biography in any language. Richard Cahill's workmanlike dissertation only goes part way toward filling this lamentable gap. He covers the crucial early years to 1528, but the landgrave, who came into his inheritance in 1509 at the age of five, reigned until 1567. The book therefore deals with only one of the five decades in which Philipp had an active role in government. It is, however, useful in providing a fuller account of this period than do the previous English-language studies by William Wright and Hans Hillerbrand, so that Landgrave Philipp is now the Reformation prince most accessible by far to those without German. The volume is one of several in English published in the distinguished series on religious history under the auspices of the Mainz Institute for European History. Yet it has to be said that the elementary errors of spelling (e.g. "last rights" for "last rites," "lead" for the past tense "led," "canons" for "cannons") in this volume suggest that it was badly in need of a copy editor familiar with the English language.

The first one third of this study gives a mainly narrative account of the previous history of the principality and of Philipp's regency, with little reference to the Reformation. The complex struggle over the regency, which involved Saxon and other external relatives of the rul-

ing house, is competently summarized, being based on the *Landtagsakten* published a century ago. Philipp early showed his mettle as a military commander when, at the age of thirteen, he led a posse of armed men to capture his similarly-aged cousin Elizabeth. He emerged as a precocious ruler wary in the extreme of the nobles of Hesse who had fought against his mother Anna to control him. The narrative skips from his first successful feud with Franz von Sickingen in 1518 to the Diet of Worms in 1521, without considering the strategic role of the Hessian territories in the build-up to the election of Charles V as Emperor. However, the account of the other disputes of the period, notably with the counts of Nassau over possession of the lucrative county of Katzenelnbogen, bring out well the complex nature of regional and imperial politics. The hostility to the nobles drove Philipp into alliance with the electors of Trier and the Palatinate, and with the Swabian League, and culminated in their defeat of Sickingen and the knights in 1523. Cahill insists repeatedly that Hesse became "one of the more powerful territories of the Empire" (pp. 10, 14, 15), but the divided nature of the state which he describes does little to dent the received picture that Hesse was, during the Reformation era, a state which punched above its weight and used its joint leadership with Saxony of the political wing of the Reformation to enhance its standing in the Empire.

Chapter 4 carefully sets out the evidence on the landgrave's conversion to the evangelical position in 1524, some of which is translated in helpful appendices. In rebutting older views that at this early date Philipp's motives were wholly or partly political, rather than personal

conviction in the face of possibly dangerous political consequences, the author follows the consensus of more recent authorities, as he does in playing down the influence of Melanchthon. A comparison with Philipp's later actions in introducing the Reformation to his lands and as the head of a Protestant state would show political considerations playing an ever-increasing role. He continued for some time to use his extensive biblical knowledge to try and persuade the diehard Catholic George of Saxony to join the evangelical fold, and also cooperated with him in suppressing the Peasants' war.

Philipp's response to that insurrection in the following year is traced with the aid of the sources published over sixty years ago by Otto Merx and others. The revolt was confined mainly to ecclesiastical lands on the borders of Hesse, some of them jointly ruled with the landgrave. Hesse proper escaped serious problems, possibly because the landgrave had been attentive to earlier complaints by his own peasant subjects and kept the clergy of the diocese of Mainz under tight control. The landgrave was prepared to argue with Thomas Muentzer and the rebels, turning their own biblicism against them, but the suppression of Muehlhausen and other rebellious places was by no means lenient, though not as bloodthirsty as in some other theaters of the war. Fines extracted from the defeated more than paid for the costs of the campaign, which had left Hesse exposed while its ruler stamped out serious unrest further afield. The dangers at home gave the perfect excuse to inventory church property and confiscate church silver, but also earned him the congratulations of Pope Clement VII for his triumph over the Lutherans. The state was further strengthened by the obligation of its forty-two cities to pledge their loyalty once more to the landgrave.

The next section, on relations between the hardening Catholic and evangelical camps, is misleadingly labelled "political confessionalization," since the term confessionalization is normally applied to the somewhat later process of consolidating religious allegiances within the German territories. Here the use of the extensive manuscript collections of the ruler's political archive come into their own. Even as secret understandings were being formed on both sides of the divide, and more formal ones in the years 1525-26, Philipp sought to win his opponents to his way of thinking, and they reciprocated. George of Saxony even exchanged scriptural justifications with

the landgrave as each sought to recruit the other. These efforts reached their highpoint at the Diet of Speyer in 1526. Cahill brings out well the ways in which Philipp wanted to create and exhibit an evangelical solidarity at the diet by arranging for the like-minded princes to live in the same street and dress their retinues in the same brown livery and with the same emblem, "VDMIE" (*verbum domini manet in eternum*), and by having his preacher Adam Kraft preach despite the efforts of Archduke Ferdinand to prevent it. The negotiations of the diet themselves are merely summarized briefly, as they have already been adequately unravelled by previous scholarship.

The final topic, implementing the Reformation, suffers the most from the author's self-imposed cut-off date, dealing only with Philipp's victory over the see of Mainz in matters of disputed jurisdiction, the decision to close the convents, and the founding of the university of Marburg. Again, much of this is a familiar story, to which the author is able to make minor emendations. Altogether, the conclusion to the book claims greater originality for it than would seem warranted. We are told that, when aged twenty, the landgrave wrote to John Frederick, nephew to the elector Frederick the Wise, that he would rather "lose life and limb, land and people, than deny God's word" (p. 123). However, when these two allies were put to the test and taken into Charles V's captivity at the battle of Muehlberg in 1547, it was the Elector John Frederick who held steadfast to his faith despite all threats, whereas Philipp prevaricated and at least gave the impression that he would submit to the decisions of the council of Trent, if only he were restored to freedom and to his lands. It is to be hoped that 2004, the fifth centenary of Philipp's birth, will see not only the usual crop of lavishly illustrated exhibition catalogues and collections of scholarly essays, but the full, considered study of his whole life, with all its contradictions (not least the bigamy of a profoundly religious man), which he richly deserves.

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