

forum historiae iuris

Erste europäische Internetzeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte

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Rezension vom 13. Juli 2012

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Erstveröffentlichung

Zitiervorschlag:

<http://www.forhistiur.de/zitat/1207fischer.htm>

ISSN 1860-5605

Grünbart, Michael (Hg.),

Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft. Gabentausch und Netzwerkpflege im europäischen Mittelalter

Byzantinische Studien und Texte, Band 8

LIT Verlag, Berlin 2011. XXV u. 280 Seiten

ISBN 978-3-643-10897-5

Rezensiert von: Carsten Fischer (Zürich)

The volume under review contains the conference proceedings of an international colloquium on gift-giving and networks in medieval Europe that took place in Münster / Germany in November 2009. The colloquium was part of a project called “Medieval Friendship and Friendship Networks”, supported by the British Academy. The conference theme allowed for papers on a wide variety of topics, and the range of the contributions mirrors this. They include papers on the early as well as the late Middle Ages and on various European regions. From the participants’ research interests, however, two main areas emerge: the Byzantine Empire, and the role of written correspondence as a means of comprehending gift-giving, networks, and friendship.

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The papers are preceded by two introductions: **Julian Haseldine** (Hull) outlines the overall project “Medieval Friendship and Friendship Networks”. Haseldine places the title “Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft” within the project’s broader context and sketches the history of research on friendship in the pre-modern world (“Medieval Friendship and Friendship Networks – A British Academy-sponsored International Collaborative Activities project”, pp. ix-xi). **Michael Grünbart** (Münster) introduces the contributions, distinguishes the volume’s topic from other related ones, for example donations, and outlines the central questions with which the volume is concerned (“Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft – Einleitung”, pp. xiii-xxv).

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In the first contribution **Floris Bernard** (Ghent) elucidates gifts and intellectual friendships in Byzantium, using written refusals of presents and of “gifts of words”, i.e. letters or poems (“Greet me with words”. Gifts and intellectual friendships in eleventh-century Byzan-

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tium”, pp. 1-11). Bernard traces how Byzantium’s intellectual elites playfully inverted social convention with such refusals. By showing that he expected the addressee to understand this inversion, the writer could mark their friendship as intellectual and close, as well as by offering an “intellectual gift” – a letter or poem – instead of a material one.

Hartmut Beyer’s (Münster) article (“Nesciunt muta esse munera sapientis. Geschenkekexegese und Geschenktheorie in der lateinischen Epistolographie des Mittelalters”, pp. 13-53) concerns itself with letters explaining or interpreting gifts (sent or received) as allegories. He highlights similarities between gifts and letters, like their suggestion of voluntariness and unselfishness. But apart from sharing certain characteristics, the two also served as juxtaposed symbols and messages, and – when seen together – formed a complete message: The gift of a dying horse was interpreted in the accompanying letter as that of a perfect horse. The material aspect of gift-giving was ridiculed, thus its emotional basis of unshakable friendship was stressed. Beyer also portrays letter collections as propaganda devices: The collector often conserved those letters which made mention of gifts he received or sent and which contained flattering remarks, underlining the collector’s social position and importance. Concluding, Beyer can state that often enough items were used as presents which already carried an allegorical meaning, like liturgical objects. Favoured occasions of such allegorical interpretations were those in which the author of the letter could not explicitly state his opinion, like expressions of delicate political standpoints.

Complementing Beyer’s topic, **Dimitrij Chernoglazov** (St Petersburg) focuses on gifts in Byzantine letters: “Was bedeuten drei Fische? Betrachtungen zu Geschenken in byzantinischen Briefen (IV.-XII. Jh.)” (pp. 55-69). He emphasizes the importance of shedding light on the varying patterns of Byzantine epistolary etiquette. That way, the necessary tools for interpreting individual letters could be provided. Following this approach he scrutinizes the established and expected motives for reflections on gifts in letters and detects a change in interpretative approaches: from late Antiquity onwards the accepted rule of mentioning gifts in letters had been to construe them as a symbol, riddle or advice. From the 12th century on, however, elaborations on concrete aspects of the gift and on its material nature began to dominate, even though both modes continued to coexist and to feature in letters.

Georg Jostkleigrewe (Münster) takes into account diplomatic and foreign political contingencies of gifts (“Zwischen „privater“ Netzwerkpflege und „öffentlicher“ Bündnispolitik. Außenpolitische Valenzen des Geschenks am Hofe Karls VI. von Frankreich (ca. 1400)”, pp. 71-86). He focuses on one specific instance, the Byzantine emperor Manuel II’s state visit to the French king Charles VI’s court (1400-1402). Jostkleigrew points to the fact that the emperor’s only readily disposable assets at this time were relics and the prestige the host received by maintaining such an esteemed guest. Manuel himself was, on the other hand, dependent on his host’s financial assistance to enable him to visit France. His expenses were not only shouldered by the kingdom’s treasury, but also by various nobles inviting Manuel and his court. Jostkleigrew shows that this need for financial and political help was not responded to by all greater nobles: Duke Ludwig of Orléans must have met

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the emperor at court, but even though the duke personally presented gifts to other foreign visitors of rank, there is no evidence that he offered support to Manuel II. Jostkleigrewe interprets this neglect as being founded upon political considerations: the emperor had in the past supported the duke's political adversaries.

Michael Jucker (Lucerne) traces the history of gifts originally acquired by the donor as plunder ("Geraubte Gaben, Verschwiegene Vergangenheit. Hoch- und spätmittelalterliche Geschenk- und Kirchenpolitik mit Objekten aus Byzanz und Burgund", pp. 87-102), using the examples of relics plundered during the sack of Constantinople in 1204 and of a prayer book originally belonging to Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy and plundered by Swiss troops after the battle of Grandson. In both cases the spoils were used by the victors as presents to cement political alliances and friendships. But in order to achieve the desired effect, the donors and donees had to "forget" the mode of acquisition by plunder.

Paul Magdalino's (Istanbul – St Andrews) study looks at details of the Byzantine art of diplomatic gift-giving ("Évaluation de dons et donation de livres dans la diplomatie byzantine", pp. 103-116). Magdalino describes the administration and protocol surrounding the receiving of presents offered by foreign emissaries to the Byzantine emperor's court and the subsequent procedure to establish a proper and fitting counter-gift by the emperor to the diplomat. In particular, Magdalino traces the use of books in these exchanges and describes the problems in assessing the value and import of an item to which a market value could often only imperfectly be ascribed and which derived its importance as a gift mainly through the esteem in which it was held by giver and receiver.

Ulrich Meurer (Vienna) offers a view of Odysseus' visit to the cyclops Polyphemus from the perspective of the rules of hospitality ("Niemand will ich als letzten verspeisen ... Zur Politik der Gastfreundschaft in der *Odyssee*", pp. 117-127) and considers reciprocal gift-giving and -receiving as an element of these rules.

Meta Niederkorn-Bruck (Vienna) focuses on a gift as a message of political support ("Ein liturgisches Officium als Geschenk (*hoc opus dono dedit*) und die damit verbundenen Erwartungshaltungen", pp. 129-143): in 1482 the University of Vienna presented to Frederick III of Habsburg a liturgical *officium* dedicated to the service of St Morandus. The saint had already before carried some importance as a family patron of the house of Habsburg. With the present the university made reference to the saint's main area of activity and to the regional centre of reverence, the Sundgau (region between Basle, Mulhouse and Belfort), and thus endorsed the Habsburg claim to these territories, which the Habsburgs had lost by this point.

Gerald Schwedler (Zurich) turns his attention to diplomatic gifts and gift-giving among late medieval kings ("Diplomatische Geschenke unter Königen im Spätmittelalter. Freundschaft und Gabentausch zwischen politischer Praxis und der schriftlichen Norm der Fürstenspiegelliteratur", pp. 145-186). After recounting a number of instances and their political

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contexts, he illuminates the often celebratory occasions and arrangements for presenting gifts. Schwedler then contrasts this practice with the respective demands and guidelines contained in late medieval *specula principum* and assesses these findings against the backdrop of the beginnings of a medieval theory of gift-giving by rulers on the one hand and modern interpretations of gifts on the other. He concludes by framing late medieval rulers' diplomatic gifts as "means of empathetic communication": they were important instruments for demonstrating honour and willingness to oblige and were able to carry a host of messages beyond a mere transfer of valuables. Accordingly, they were consciously employed as highly flexible, mostly unique material vehicles for diplomatically relevant messages.

Gabriela Signori's (Constance) observations focus on friendship as encountered in medieval letters ("„Geschenke erhalten die Freundschaft“. Freundschaftsideal und Freundschaftspraxis in der mittelalterlichen Briefliteratur", pp. 187-208). She perceives 'spiritual friendship' as an especially important type of friendship, i.e. friendship based on shared religious beliefs. Such common convictions made it possible to overcome social and gender boundaries in particular. Expressing their amity, the writers of letters often made use of pictures and metaphors found in the letters of church father Jerome († 419/420). Due to this uniformity in expression the exact nature of friendship thus described in linguistic codes or conventions is, according to Signori, often only hard to determine.

In the last, extensive contribution **Sita Steckel** (Münster – Harvard) determines the role of presents with an especially symbolic value in the early Middle Ages ("*Ammirabile commercium* – Die Widmungen des Hrabanus Maurus und andere symbolische Geschenke als Gaben im Angesicht Gottes", pp. 209-249). She looks at dedications contained in Hrabanus Maurus' works, for example the dedication of his *Liber sanctae crucis* to the monks of St Martin at Tours and to the saint himself. Steckel illustrates the contemporary mindset behind gift-giving as characterized by religiously conditioned expectations and aspirations geared towards the afterlife.

The gathered proceedings, complemented by a bibliography and an index, illustrate gift-giving and gift-receiving as important aspects of friendship in the Middle Ages. The exchange of gifts at different times and in various cultures – as recorded especially in letters and historiography – appears as an important and flexible tool to create, shape and maintain amicable bonds. The main current of the papers seems to be that independently of temporal, spatial, cultural and religious circumstances, to present someone with something was a very delicate business, demanding a thorough command of underlying unwritten rules of communication. To have traced these unwritten rules and their actual working in medieval society is an achievement deriving from the project's comparative approach.

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