Political Society and the
Late Medieval State

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There is little doubt that political history, at least in the usually accepted meaning of these terms, has become a rather unfashionable area of historical research. One of the reasons for this situation is well known: it is the violent attack upon the traditional historians of institutions launched by the so-called 'Ecole des *Annales*' in the thirties;[1] they were exposed for their useless erudition and their artificial reconstruction of a past organised as an endless succession of dates, events and constitutional changes, seen in a teleological perspective. On the contrary, historians were expected to adjust to different scales of time, and to unearth, from under this upper crust, the blood and life of men with the help of economic and social history. At first, the influence of these views was rather weak outside of France, but it gained a new strength when in the sixties suspicion of the state in general grew. The hardly conscious view that the model of the occidental state was the ultimate goal of the evolution of all political structures was in its turn exposed and definitively collapsed; significantly, American historians, once the most productive group in the field of medieval political history, have now deserted it.

However, political history has not entirely disappeared, far from it. True, academic theses and text editions have continued to appear regularly, but even more important is the fact that during the last thirty years, which are those I intend to scrutinise, the aims of political history have undergone a more or less complete transformation. If the history of the state as such, and even more that of a given state or of a given institution, no longer appears as a legitimate and self-justified object for historical research, politics are understood as one of the many ways in which power was exercised

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1. See Philippe Contamine's comments on the review of Henri Jassemin's study of the *Chambre des comptes* of Paris in the fifteenth century by Lucien Febvre in the *Annales* of 1934: Contamine 1996, pp. xxxi-xxxvii.

in a medieval society; politics has taken its place alongside economy, social relations, religion, social history and cultural history; and political history has practically merged, as most other 'specialised branches' of history, in a global history of medieval culture and society.[2] It is noteworthy that the historians of the *Annales*, who had practically withdrawn from this particular field of historical research, despite their later denials, came back to political history[3] through their search for what Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Toubert call an 'histoire totale du Moyen Age',[4] even going as far as to vindicate the merits of 'historical biography', an historical genre which the *Annales* school disapproved of as such (though Marc Bloch did not despise it):[5] Fernand Braudel's comments on the non-mention of the death of Philip II in the course of his *Méditerranée* still provides the best example of this attitude.[6]

To take but one example, the general organisation of the 'Origins of the modern state'[7] programs was not conceived in a political history framework, but in a more general interdisciplinary context. This willingness to work inside a global perspective has on the one hand had consequences for the definition and the understanding of the medieval state as such, and on the other hand for the various approaches to the analysis of power which appear most useful, depending upon the definition which has been accepted.

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2. This would be long to substantiate, but it seems clear to me that, if certain branches of history keep more autonomy than others (religious history, for instance), the general evolution is unmistakable and has to be related with what American medievalists call the realization of the alterity of medieval societies: see on this alterity the comments of Alain Guerreau: Guerreau 2001.
3. Le Goff 1971 (reprinted in French in Le Goff 1985, pp. 333-49).
4. Le Goff and Toubert 1977; see also Le Goff 1964; Le Goff and Schmitt 1996.
5. Le Goff 1996, pp.13-27; if Le Goff's *Saint Louis* epitomizes the *Annales*' redemption of biography, another kind of distance from traditional historical biography may be found in Bernard Guenée's books: Guenée 1987 and 1992.
6. Braudel 1993, vol. 3, pp.417-20.
7. Genet 1990, for the CNRS program. The results of the ESF program have been published under the direction of Wim Blockmans and myself in seven volumes published in English by Oxford University Press and in French by the *Presses Universitaires de France*: Bonney, ed. 1995; Coleman, ed. 1996; Reinhard, ed. 1996; Blickle, ed. 1997; Padoa Schioppa, ed. 1997; Ellenius, ed. 1998 and Contamine, ed. 1999.

The definition of the state

It seems to me that the publication in 1970 of Joseph Strayer's short but influential book *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State in Europe*[8] and in 1971 of Bernard Guenée's *L'Occident aux XIVe et XVe siècles. Les États,*[9] may provide us with a convenient starting point. Joseph Strayer's work had a striking effect, because Strayer, though with retrospect he may today be seen as idealising medieval kings and their motives far too much,[10] was not considering the medieval state as a blueprint for a constitutional draft to be perfected, but simply testing the administrative methods and the political devices of the kings of France, England and Aragon in terms of sheer efficiency. The French historian brought for his part a distinctive social flavour, nurtured in his own thesis on the *gens de justice* of the *bailliage* of Senlis (with its companion book, a prosopographical catalogue, issued much later)[11] and in the contemporary works of Raymond Cazelles[12] and Edouard Perroy.[13] As a matter of fact, constitutional problems disappeared from view, which is a paradox if we consider the title of Strayer's probably best known article ('Philip the Fair – a Constitutional king'):[14] his preoccupation was with the real day-to-day working of finance and bureaucracy, enabling the historian to assess the actual efficiency of the government and the real impact of its decisions; the power of kings grew by the acceptance of their claims by subjects who reaped the benefits of a more secure, more peaceful, less aggressive and probably less unpredictable structure of power.[15] Justice, administration, finance and even more so men, either as agents of the state or as subjects, came to the fore, making the discussion of the nature and the definition of the state a technical nicety with-

8. Strayer 1970.
9. Guenée 1971 (Fourth ed., 1991).
10. Spiegel 1999, especially pp. 118-24.
11. Guenée 1963 and 1981.
12. Raymond Cazelles appears to be the first to have used the phrase 'political society' at least in French historiography: Cazelles 1958 and 1982.
13. Édouard Perroy is not mainly remembered to-day as a political historian, but his contribution to the economic undercurrents of political life, embodied in several of his papers, remains highly valuable; see Perroy 1979.
14. Strayer 1969 and 1980.
15. Kaeuper 1988.

out much interest and the medieval state being simply seen as the direct chronological (and not necessarily structural) ancestor of the modern European state (which it is…).

This new line of enquiry was followed by Strayer's American colleagues and pupils, and in France by historians such as Bernard Guenée, Jean Favier, Philippe Contamine and their disciples. Though English historians could not or would not entirely free themselves from their own insular tradition of political history, they were perfectly aware of what was going on and followed very much the same lines, as shown by Gerald Harriss' work,[16] whereas Thomas Bisson[17] introduced the new approach in the Iberian peninsula, mainly in Catalonia and Aragon, soon to be followed on their own terms and following well established traditions in their respective historical schools by Iberian historians of the crowns of Aragon, Castille, Navarra and Portugal[18] who contributed highly significant works to the history of fiscality,[19] ideology,[20] state departments[21] and representative institutions.[22] American historians also brought the same kind of approach to the history of the Italian city state, and nowhere more strikingly than in Florence.[23] Only in German history did this new approach have a less significant impact, both because the German historians were paying more attention to earlier periods of political history, and because the development of medieval 'states' in Germany had to be approached from completely different points of view, and through a reconsideration of the power and organisation of cities and of

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16. Harriss 1975; see also Harriss 1988.
17. Bisson 1979; and a convenient summary of his views in Bisson 1996.
18. See Gonzalez Jimenez 1999; Palacios Martin 1999; Nieto Soria 1999 and Ladero Quesada 1999.
19. Of specific importance are Ladero Quesada 1993 and Sánchez Martinez 1993 and 1995.
20. Nieto Soria 1993.
21. Pérez Bustamante 1976; de Carvalho Homem 1990 and Gonçalves de Freitas 2001.
22. Pérez Prendes 1974; O'Callaghan 1980 and 1988; Más y Solench 1995; Sarasa 1977; see also the important publication by Sánchez Martinez and Orti Gost 1997. For Portugal, De Sousa 1990 and see the publication by de Oliveira Marques, Campos Rodrigues and Pizarro Pinto Dias 1982 and de Oliveira Marques and Pizarro Pinto Dias 1990.
23. Brucker 1977 and Trexler 1980 and in general Martines 1963 and 1968; for Venice, Lane 1973.

regional principalities[24] rather than an analysis of the *Reich* itself (obviously, this does not apply to German historians working on non-German areas[25]). We shall come back to the results of this economic and social approach, which has deeply modified our understanding of medieval realities, but for the time being, we must first concentrate on the problem of the definition of the state.

It is striking that during this period, medievalists were shy of theorising their findings. In Europe, theoretical discussions used to be monopolised by Marxist historians: whatever its own specific interest, the long-drawn discussion on the transition between feudalism and capitalism offered few new insights on the history of the medieval state.[26] Most of the debates of the *Annales* school turned on other problems as well. In the United Kingdom and in the United States, theoretical reflection did not spring from historians alone, but also from historical sociologists and politologists who so to speak, needed them for their own trade, in order to be equipped with a coherent view of the medieval period. The findings of the historians having contradicted the analysis of the great sociologists of the previous generations, Marx, but also Weber and Elias, who saw the modern state as fully modern, and not at all medieval: Perry Anderson,[27] Charles Tilly[28] and Michael Mann,[29] emulated in Great Britain by W. G. Runciman[30] and by John Hall,[31] did enter the field and, quite reasonably, encapsulated the history of the state as a political structure in a general analysis of the dif-

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24. Some of the most significant works are Blickle 1973; Heinig 1983 and Isenmann 1988. For a general view, see Moraw 1985.
25. Paravicini 1975 and 1976 and his edition of the correspondence of Charles the Bold, Paravicini, ed. 1995; Bulst 1992.
26. For instance Philpin, ed. 1985; see also Bois 2000 and the papers of R.H. Hilton: Hilton 1985.
27. Anderson 1974.
28. Tilly, ed. 1975 and more especially his two own chapters, 'Reflections on the History of European State-Making', pp. 3-83 and 'Western State-Making and Theories of Political Transformation', pp. 601-38. But see now Tilly 1990 and 1993.
29. Mann 1986, chiefly chapters 11 to 15. See also Mann 1988 and his introduction to Mann, ed. 1990.
30. Runciman 1989, especially pp. 192-208 on 'Functional alternatives' and pp. 386-411 on 'Test-Cases'. See also Runciman 1993.
31. Hall 1985.

ferent forms of power and constraint.[32] Perry Anderson was exceptional in his adhesion to the Marxist framework, while most of the others operated within a broadly Weberian structure. The result is that, whereas Perry Anderson highlighted the class struggle between monarchy, nobility and peasants, most of the other exponents of these problems insisted upon the organic nature of the medieval state (Mann distinguishing between two phases, 1155-1477 for a first phase of centralisation and territorialisation, and 1477-1760 for a second phase of development of the organic states proper), usually equating the modern state with the nation state; but though this seems to point towards a somewhat later period than the medieval one, they considered that the modern state, the direct ancestor of our own contemporary state, came into being well before the so-called modern times, and therefore during the medieval period. The 'Origins of the modern state' program, while comparative and interdisciplinary, tried to reintroduce the theoretical discussion within the scope of the historian's interests. The denomination of the program itself equates the modern state with the late medieval state without restricting itself to a precise chronological span of time, to adjust to the different rhythms of development of European countries. Several definitions of this type of modern state were worked out during the course of the program, the latest to my knowledge being that of Wolfgang Reinhard,[33] but I shall restrict myself here to the definition I gave in my own paper about the program.[34]

In this definition, the modern state is understood as a state whose material basis depends upon a public tax system accepted by the political society, and this on a scope larger than that of a city, all subjects being concerned at some stage. This is my own working definition, and it has not necessarily been followed by the participants of the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique and European Science Foundation programs. Let us stress three points. First, the description is that of a structure, and implies no chronological restriction (which the use of the epithet 'modern' would make untenable): such a state may be late medieval (as in the case

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32. Skinner 1978: see vol. 2, pp. 349-58 for the pre-requisites to the emergence of the concept of the state and Skinner 1989.
33. Reinhard 1999.
34. Genet 1997. See also Genet 1992.

of France, England, Scotland, Portugal, Aragon and Castille, not to speak of large principalities such as Savoy, Burgundy, Britanny or Brabant or even large city-states such as Florence, Venice and Milan) or early modern (such as Sweden and Prussia) or even late modern (as Russia). Second, the description is not that of a political form: this state may be a monarchy or a city-state, though its size has to be specified, since it has consequences for the structure, and this makes it more likely that such a state will be a monarchy.[35] But the main point is the importance this definition gives to the political society and to the notion of acceptance, by this political society, of taxation. The political society is the part of society which is affected by the operations of the state: through its justice, through its military activities and requirements, through its taxes, levies and purveyance, that is, in fact, practically everyone. But everyone is not affected in the same way, either in benefit or in loss: if the political society encompasses more or less all sections of a given society, it is organized in response to the action of the state in a specific way which does not correspond exactly to traditional social divides, which, in thirteenth century Europe at least, have been shaped by the feudal revolution (or mutation, or evolution, since I do not wish to be drawn into that other controversy). If the part played by the political society is so important, it follows that its study is the corner-stone of knowledge of the medieval state, and this is why we are led to walk out from the traditional field of political history to explore other fields of study which shed new light upon political society, and therefore upon the late medieval state as well.

The social approach

Given our working definition, the first interesting line of approach is that of social and economic history. True, it has been stimulated by the intellectual atmosphere of the sixties and its accent on the primacy of economic and social factors, and it is still thriving, because its methods have been made much more efficient by the appearance and development of computing. First of all, there

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35. For the problem in a non-monarchical context, in Italy, for instance, see besides Skinner's works mentioned above the papers in Chittolini, ed. 1979 and in Chittolini, Molho and Schierra, eds. 1994.

is the descriptive and empirical history of the political society. However, historians have usually worked within the framework of what could perhaps be labelled the 'Cazelles' concept of political society',[36] which though extremely useful is more restricted in its empirical scope than the one I have just proposed.[37] Generally speaking, they have been working on the history of the elites, writing the history of state institutions and of their agents, and the history of the ruling classes (nobility as such, and court society). The sociology of the medieval state has therefore made remarkable advances during the last thirty years, and this advance has been made both easier and more wide-ranging by the use of prosopography[38] and even of computerised prosopography.[39] A catalogue of all the populations which have been studied would be as impressive as, unfortunately, it would be tedious, but an enormous amount of data about officers, bureaucrats and members of representative institutions have been collected, organised and interpreted in many European countries.[40] However, it is impossible to draw a strict borderline between people who are serving the state and those who are not: here the concept of political society proves useful, because we are not obliged to see conflicts or contradictions in the service of the King, of a prince or of the Church; most people moved from the one to the other, or even served simultaneously Church, cities, princes and King![41] More important, the prosopography of the agents of the state is only part of a general prosopography of elites which the advent of serial sources makes easier and that of the computer feasible: here I am thinking of canons and clerics, students and masters, the knowledge of whose careers is essential to our understanding of the status of the agents of the state. For instance, we now know that many canons were serving the state, but proportions differ widely from one European area to another, as one of too few comparative studies has

36. See note 12 above.
37. For an application of the concept albeit to England with its own definition, see Payling 1991.
38. Genet and Bulst, eds. 1986; Genet and Lottes 1996.
39. Millet, ed. 1984.
40. Outstanding is the British contribution: Roskell 1965; and Roskell, Rawcliffe and Clark 1992, among many others. For France, see Bulst 1992.
41. Many examples in Matteoni 1998.

proved.[42] It is also important to remember that not all students were employed by the Church, and that recent studies have shown that the whereabouts and careers of a high proportion of apparently lay students are unknown.[43] What became of them? Why was the state so slow to make use of these able and apparently available men? To understand the social fabric of the medieval state, it is necessary to be able to look at it from both sides: from the inside, and from the outside. From the inside, we may be struck by the proportion of law graduates employed by a given state among its agents: but from the outside, this proportion may appear very low in relation to the number of graduates produced by the new university system, the birth of which, it must be observed, is contemporary with the appearance of the 'modern state', a point to which we shall come back.

The other social approach is that of the political elite, centred upon the nobility and court society. The study of aristocracy (that is nobility and gentry) is still thriving, but it is very remarkable that here prosopography is scarcely used at all,[44] even when the sources are abundant and well explored: I am at a loss to understand why the many (and excellent) studies of the gentry done county by county in England have not led to a prosopographical and statistical survey that could be extremely rewarding; no other European country is in such a favourable situation, both in terms of sources and scholarship. It is a serious drawback, because recent studies of the nobility point to a number of problems that deserve quantitative treatment. The first one concerns the homogeneity of European nobilities/gentries: these two levels that English historiography has made us familiar with seem to be found in many other European countries,[45] though with different reasons and different effects. Several comparative enquiries have been made, but these ought to be based upon fresh research, and if possible, as in the study of the canons I mentioned earlier, on a common questionnaire and a

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42. Millet, ed. 1992.
43. De Ridder Symoens 1992; the most systematic examination of this issue is Schwinges 1986; see also Verger 1997.
44. Ornato 2001.
45. Jones, ed. 1986; Contamine 1998; for France, Contamine 1997; for England, McFarlane 1973, remains of fundamental importance, to be updated by Given-Wilson 1987; but see Carpenter 1992; for Germany, Ranft 1994 and new perspectives in Morsel 2000.

common methodology including quantitative measurement. Two connected problems are here especially important: the implication of the aristocracy in the war business, and its relation with the new aristocracy, that of knowledge and bureaucratic efficiency, which will one day give birth in France to the *noblesse de robe*, still a distant prospect in medieval times. It is not simply the subject of humanistic dialogues or moral debates: Attendance at medieval universities socially opened a way to promotion and offered elevation to the elite of power for the sons of bourgeois and peasants.

Another trend, and a very popular one at the moment, is the study of courts and court life.[46] Some important research is still in progress[47] and in some ways the most important of all medieval courts, the court of France, has not yet been adequately surveyed, but here too important advances have been made or may be confidently expected.[48] However, the notion of court itself (especially in relation with notions such as 'household' or *hôtel*) seems to raise some problems,[49] and the medieval court must not be seen with the distorting glasses of Norbert Elias and of modern historians unable to recover from the Versailles trauma. It is still in essence a feudal court; if the direct exercise of power by the King himself or by his men is becoming more and more limited by the work of the administration and bureaucracy (and the court itself is in some respects an administrative department), it is still the place from which princely power radiates and the people surrounding the Prince in his daily life are therefore of great importance. But there are probably different types of courts, and the social and cultural importance of medieval courts as specific organisations is probably not to be exaggerated, as opposed to the importance of 'courtly' society as such (that is, aristocratic society). It is noteworthy that only Italian medievalists have systematically investigated the matter of princely courts, and precisely thrown a clear light upon the transition from the medieval to the modern court.[50]

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46. Vale 2001.
47. For the study of the Burgundian Courts, see Cauchies 1998, and some of the many papers by Werner Paravicini: Paravicini 1986, 1991 and 2001.
48. See the papers in Chapelot and Lalou 1996.
49. On *hôtel*, see Gonzalez 2004.
50. See the publications of 'Europa delle Corti', Centro studi sulle società di antico regime: for instance Cerboni Baiardi, Chittolini and Floriani 1986; Papagno and Quondam 1982.

The main weakness of this sociological approach in relation to our concept of political society is that the prosopography of the elites of power and culture and the study of the ruling classes only provides a truncated vision of political society. Urban society and the peasantry, which is the vast majority of the medieval population, is left out. We know that these sections of society were also affected by the activity of the state and were quite conscious of it: as regards even the lower social strata, this is made crystal clear in the course of the great social upheavals, be they the numerous fiscal urban revolts, the *Jacquerie*, the Peasants revolt of 1381,[51] the *Ciompi*,[52] the *Remensas* or the War of the Peasants in Germany.[53] But if the relations between urban oligarchies and states have been explored,[54] the positions of the other social strata have hardly been taken into consideration, with the possible exception of their attitude towards royal justice.[55] This gives a distorted image of the medieval society as a political society, and this is certainly one point upon which we might be led to modify in depth Strayer's analysis of the medieval state.

We have said that the idea of an accepted taxation was of crucial importance. An accepted taxation is a taxation which has been legitimised in such a way that it becomes practically impossible to refuse it (though cheating remains – and still remains, should I add – an open possibility, but precisely because such a refusal is not to be admitted). The legitimisation is usually (though not always) juridical, that is the levy is made with the official approval of a representative body, but the sources of this legitimacy spring from a deeper level, playing upon the military necessity and the preservation of peace and of national integrity and defence. However, the ultimate test of the acceptance of state taxation by political society is the level reached by the taxation output, in a system in which means of coercion are few and weak, rather than the formal conclusions of the institutional dialogue itself: to put it briefly, the actual sum levied after the grant of a tenth by the English Parliament is a better and more precise indication than

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51. See the papers in Hilton and Aston, eds. 1984; two recent books illuminate the point in discussion here, Faith 1997 and Justice 1994.
52. Stella 1993.
53. Blickle 1985.
54. Chevalier 1982.
55. Gauvard 1991 and Chiffoleau 1984.

the grant itself. It is noteworthy that most recent works on fiscal history (from John Henneman to Mark Ormrod, Manuel Sanchez Martinez, Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada or Eberhard Isenmann) have been deeply concerned with the measurement of the exact sums levied by the governments.[56] This is not to belittle the role of the representative institutions, but to suggest that, below the public and visible dialogue acted by the King, his councillors, and the deputies (this being easily transferable to a civic structure in the case of a city-state), some sort of political dialogue is going on and is thriving in all sections of the political society. To express it in a more provocative way, class struggle is an element, and a most important one, in the building of the modern state. All strategies are possible in such a context: the alliance of monarchy and peasantry against lords is plausible, enough at least to be expected by peasant rebels in 1381; the alliance of monarchy and aristocracy against peasantry is however much more likely.

How, through which channels, does this political dialogue work? It is obvious that one answer is that the dialogue is channelled through the traditional social fabric, which is the feudal one, following the lines of lordship and vassalage. Medieval aristocrats are lords, which is not true, at least at the same point, of aristocrats of the modern area. The links of patronage and clientele, the feudal ties, the lord's authority over his men, either military vassals or peasant tenants, all this was used and played its part. Acceptance was therefore not a question: it was a due, extracted not by an anonymous and distant king or his government, but by his vassals, clients or servants. However, that was not enough, and acceptance had to be gained by other means as well.

The cultural approach

This drives us toward another field of study which is now gaining a central position for the history of the later medieval state, the study of medieval culture. As I mentioned earlier, the transformation of feudal monarchies into strong states started at the end of the eleventh century, with the organisation of the English king-

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56. Bonney and Bonney, eds. 1999. For France, see also Lassalmonie 2002.

dom of William the Conqueror,[57] but the most impressive changes appear to be those introduced by Henry II after the middle of the twelfth century.[58] Other feudal kingdoms were soon following the same path, and these feudal monarchies started to turn into modern states in the second half of the thirteenth century. Now, broadly speaking, this happens to be a period of cultural revolution in the West: the spread of literacy[59] and the diffusion of pragmatic writing,[60] the appearance and development of a new school system, with cathedral schools succeeding monastic schools and then being replaced by universities,[61] a move initiated in Paris and Bologna and later on followed throughout the whole of Europe. The dramatic increase in the number of educational opportunities offered from the elementary levels of education, the rediscovery of Roman Law and the assimilation of Greek-Arab science and philosophy combined together to engender a totally new cultural atmosphere. A key element in this transformation was the birth of written vernacular literatures, which made communication through texts familiar and generalised: and these texts were not only charters or legal documents, but narratives, dealing with facts, sentiments and abstractions alike. It does not necessarily mean that everyone was able to read these texts, but that everyone had access to them, either through public reading or simply by the fact that some of the content of these texts inspired speeches, sermons and, though they left no traces, conversations.

The same observation may be made about the gothic style,[62] which from its first realisations inside the Capetian demesne spread quickly throughout Europe: not only its purely architectural manifestations, but also a new style of decoration and representation which made images far easier to read and interpret, and easier to organise in narrative sequences, opening new paths

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57. Bates 1982.
58. Brand 1992; Hudson 1996. On the Angevin Empire, Gillingham 1984 (Second ed., 2001).
59. Clanchy 1979 (Second ed., 1992).
60. Britnell, ed. 1997.
61. Genet 1999.
62. I am not speaking of the architectural and decorative components of the gothic 'style' some of which are noticeable at Durham for instance as early as 1093, but of complete buildings such as the Saint-Denis of Suger or the Sens of Henri Sanglier; in general, see Recht 1999, pp.146-62.

for the diffusion of messages of all kinds. The new role conferred to images prompted the development of complex liturgies and ceremonies, not restricted to small groups in secluded naves, banqueting halls or chapels, but designed for a much wider public, such as solemn processions[63] and public entrances.[64] The excellent work of the so-called 'american ritualists',[65] many of them pupils of Ernst Kantorowicz whose *The King's Two Bodies* still exerts an enormous influence upon younger generations of historians,[66] has drawn attention to all these royal ceremonies, combining the insights of law history, art history and medieval theology to elucidate the mass of material they have assembled and mastered, among which the coronation records are outstanding, but by no means unique.[67] In fact, a complete reorganisation of the communication system took place, transforming the relative positions of text, image, and speech; the writing of a large corpus of literature, often directly related to positive action, offered new opportunities for explanation, controversy, discussion and justification, using either rational demonstrations or symbolic illustrations.

The whole structure of communication indeed appears to be of fundamental importance for the formation but also for the working of the late medieval state. The writing of a large corpus of texts written in connection with public life offered new opportunities for explanation, discussion and justification, using either rational demonstrations or symbolic illustrations. Obviously, one of the most important sections of this corpus of literature for the proper understanding of the medieval state (I shall leave images aside for the time being but they would also deserve consideration)[68] is the corpus of political and historical texts. I shall be brief on these topics, since this happens to be the field of my own personal re-

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63. Rubin 1991.

64. See Kipling 1998; Guenée and Le Houx 1968.

65. For instance, Giesey 1960; Jackson 1984; Hanley 1983.

66. Kantorowicz 1957. See Benson and Fried 1997.

67. Le Goff, Palazzo, Bonne and Colette 2001.

68. This is also partly because I feel we are just at the beginning of the exploration of these corpus of images. Several research teams (Jean-Claude Schmitt's GAHOM at the EHESS in Paris, or the Krems Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit) are producing important studies. For a brief sample, Schmitt 1996; Pastoureau 1996, 1998 and 2000; and Baschet 1993 and 2000.

search, and that would lead me to concentrate upon one particular trend, which is not the aim of this paper. Suffice it to say that neither history nor politics were included in the curriculum of the new schools when they emerged in the twelfth century,[69] politics simply because it did not exist as a subject in a feudal world, history because it was still part of the traditional monastic culture. And they remained largely so: politics as an autonomous field of text production did not appear before the mendicant friars created the genre of the *Fürstenspiegel* at the Capetian Court in the second half of thirteenth century, modelling it on the towering figure of Saint Louis while cautiously preserving the prerogatives of the superior spiritual power of the Church.[70] 'Political literature' is but a modern concept which covers a wide range of different texts, from speeches delivered in assemblies, whether they were circulated or not, to satirical verse, not forgetting law tracts or works of moral theology. As regards history,[71] ecclesiastical writers continued to produce universal, ecclesiastical and even national histories up to the end of the Middle Ages, but the writing of history was deeply transformed by the appearance of a vernacular historical literature, written first by clerics to answer the demands of a lay public, and then by lay *litterati* and by clerics together, either to charm a chivalric and aristocratic public or to meet the requirements of city officials or merchants.[72] In both cases, there will be no unified language and norms until humanists made both subjects an important part of their pedagogic program, thus breaking with the medieval university curriculum.

For this period, historical and political literature ought not be studied only with the 'history of ideas' paradigm in mind; in the perspective of a history of the late medieval state, they benefit from being approached, as literary and artistic works, through a careful history of their reception and of their public audience. Thus we may reach some of the basic components of this political dialogue which is both so important and so difficult to trace. Even more important is the fact that they give us access to what the linguist Saussure described as 'the most important of all social

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69. Flüeler 1992.
70. Krynen 1993.
71. Guenée 1980; for England, see Gransden 1974 and 1982.
72. Genet, ed. 1997.

institutions', the language. Here, the interest must be focused on contemporary texts, but historians need to learn to borrow the methodological tools of linguists and lexicologists, as they must learn how to use them for their own purpose: this process is now slowly emerging, though it will gain in impetus when medieval texts are made more easily available on CD-Rom or internet.[73]

Cultural anthropology

However, whatever the importance of the study of the communication system and of these corpuses of texts and images, no one would agree that 'acceptance' was obtained by convincing people that there was such a thing as the 'Modern State', and that this new system would improve their status and life! Acceptance came because it was enforced, not simply by the strength of soldiers or non-existent policemen, but rather because a process of legitimisation of the state and of its ruler, be they kings, princes or city magistrates, took place and resulted in a widespread recognition of such a legitimacy; from this recognition sprang the authority of rulers.

To understand this, we have to turn our attention towards a new field of research, which I shall call cultural anthropology, and which is absorbing many subjects and issues which were usually dealt with by a more traditional religious history. The two fields are closely related and one could even say that the first named is an updated version of the second. Two points may be worth stressing here. First, a decisive factor in the development of the medieval state was the relative independence which medieval monarchies enjoyed from the encroachments of papal power. By siding to a certain extent with the popes to rescue some of the basic tenets of the 'Gregorian' program while safeguarding most of their own pretences, Western kings gained a certain degree of ideological independence while keeping the collaboration of churchmen for the development of their own administrations. They soon reaped the benefits: while using at low cost for them the services of the

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73. It is for obvious reasons impossible to provide a list of sites here, but the best way for research is through generalist medievalist sites such as *Labyrinth* (UK), *Menestrel* (France) or *Reti Medievali* (Italy).

best-educated men of the period in their households and courts, they could also bend to their proper ends the intellectual expertise of these clerics to create and develop a symbolic discourse which instilled in the minds of their subjects the new legitimacy and the sacred authority which they now claimed to be theirs.

The second point is precisely the fact that the symbolic power of the Church was itself violently challenged. Medieval heresy is often perceived as a succession of distinct manifestations of autonomy by small groups of people (even when such a group gained widespread support, as in the case of the Cathars), crushed in the end by the central authority of the Church to eradicate all temptations to deviate from the right path. In fact, heresy appears to have been a spiritual by-product, so to speak, of the cultural revolution mentioned previously: the first heretics of the eleventh century, those of Orléans, for instance, are strictly contemporary with the rise of the cathedral schools. When people started to read more widely, turning their eyes to the pages of the Bible or opening their minds to those who did, they began to question the authority and the status conferred on the priestly order as it was defined by the so-called 'Gregorian' reform. As their monopoly of access (and interpretation) to the fundamental texts of the Christian religion had now gone for ever many other problems soon emerged, when the Church tried to reassert its symbolic authority by innovations such as the creation of the purgatory[74] and the complex structure of the *économie du salut*[75] (salvation economy), the very triumph of which, best exemplified by the tremendous success of the selling of indulgences was also one of the immediate causes of the Reform.

This process necessitated a new repartition of symbolic power between rulers and the Church to emerge and gave a wide circulation to its manifestations. The antagonism between the lay and ecclesiastical powers which is conveyed by many subjects of religious art and literature in the high Middle Ages left room for images (in paintings, sculptures, but also texts) which were leading towards an unconscious identification between Christ and his mother as king and queen and the kings and queens of this world. The peak reached by the crisis of the relations between Church and state under the pontificate of Boniface VIII was soon succeeded

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74. Le Goff 1981.
75. See Chiffoleau 1980; Fournié 1997.

by a period of co-operation: the Pontifical State borrowing more and more the appearance of the 'modern' state (taxation system, army, war-making, territorialisation of its lordship, bureaucratisation and professionalisation of its manpower),[76] and states (monarchies, principalities and cities alike) benefiting from the help of the Church and of churchmen both to invent and to realise these ceremonies we have just alluded to, and to staff the courts and the offices of these states. This interpenetration had its advantages for both parties, but it also prompted theologians to turn their minds to the problems towards which it inevitably led. Augustinism, which was the fortress behind which Giles of Rome and the followers of the Hermits of Saint Augustine had entrenched political pontifical supremacy, became its plague in the hands of Wyclif, Hus and, later on, Luther. This means that theology too is an important field where we can trace important elements for the understanding of the medieval state.

Conclusion

This discussion seems paradoxically to have left political history as such outside its scope. In fact, I take it for granted that those who are interested in the late medieval state (or, to use my own working definition, the 'modern state' in its creation stage) are still doing political history, and doing it well, as many of the works mentioned in the footnotes of this paper testify, not least the seven volumes of the 'Origins of the Modern State' program which offer, among other things, an excellent European bibliographical guide to recent publications in this field. But, to give full justice to its object (the late medieval and 'modern' state), political history has had to enlarge its horizon and to consider other approaches and other fields which were often thought to lie outside its preoccupations. To take but one example, Alan Ellenius and Janet Coleman[77] were able to muster in their panels of experts for the

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76. Guillemain 1966; Partner 1990; Prodi 1982.
77. She herself started as a philosopher, and one of her recent books could not have been written without this training: Coleman 1992; but she has also been interested in literature (Coleman 1981) and is of course mainly an historian of political thought (Coleman 2000).

volumes they directed for the 'Origins of Modern State' program scholars coming from different backgrounds and equipped with different skills: political history has entered the age of pluri-disciplinarity.

The fields toward which historians of later medieval policy are now turning their attention are among the most productive and lively in historical research today. However, it is remarkable that some of those who are most active here are doing this precisely to escape the determinist, positivist and Eurocentric view of history they denounce in what purports to be the history of the state, its institutions and its officers. But global history also has its constraints: if political historians are starting to take into account economic and social history as well as cultural anthropology, the historians specialised in these fields must not forget that the late medieval state is a reality, and that most of the late medieval states are typologically modern states, which means – though I am afraid this is not a very trendy view – that they find themselves at the root of the long evolutionary process that has produced the kind of political organisation and structures which are still dominant in today's world. The deep otherness of the Middle Ages is one thing, but historians must be careful not to have time chopped up into seperate compartments between which evolution will be neither recognisable nor comparable.

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