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POLITICS AND  
CULTURE IN  
EARLY MODERN  
EUROPE

*Essays in Honor of  
H. G. Koenigsberger*

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*Edited by*

PHYLLIS MACK

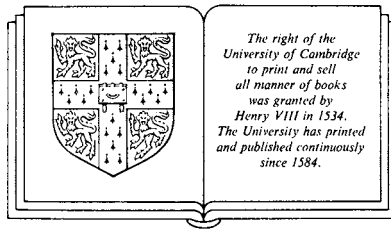
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# CONTENTS

Introduction	<i>page</i> 1
The court of the Spanish Habsburgs: a peculiar institution? J. H. ELLIOTT	5
The magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici: between myth and history MELISSA MERIAM BULLARD	25
Political rhetoric and poetic meaning in Renaissance culture: Clément Marot and the Field of Cloth of Gold PHYLLIS MACK	59
The unlikely Machiavellian: William of Orange and the princely virtues GUY WELLS	85
The Estates of Brabant to the end of the fifteenth century: the make-up of the assembly EMILE LOUSSE	95
Presents and pensions: a methodological search and the case study of Count Nils Bielke's prosecution for treason in connection with gratifications from France RAGNHILD HATTON	101
Between Bruni and Machiavelli: history, law and historicism in Poggio Bracciolini FREDERICK KRANTZ	119
Constitutional discourse in France, 1527–1549 SARAH HANLEY	153

## *Contents*

Lieuwe van Aitzema: a soured but knowing eye HERBERT H. ROWEN	169
John Calvin's contribution to representative government ROBERT M. KINGDON	183
Luther and the humanists A. G. DICKENS	199
Scholars and ecclesiastical history in the Early Modern period: the influence of Ferdinando Ughelli DENYS HAY	215
'By an Orphean charm': science and the two cultures in seventeenth-century England JAMES R. JACOB	231
The crisis of the European mind: Hazard revisited MARGARET C. JACOB	251
Isaac Beeckman and music D. P. WALKER	273
Decadence, shift, cultural changes and the universality of Leonardo da Vinci DOROTHY KOENIGSBERGER	285
<i>Bibliography of the writings of</i> HELMUT GEORG KOENIGSBERGER	305
<i>Index</i>	309

## INTRODUCTION

The subject of these essays is politics and culture in early modern Europe; themes long regarded as central to the historiography of the period. As separate and distinct areas of human experience and as the interaction of ideas and values with the necessities of power and interest, politics and culture have occupied the scholarly attention of H. G. Koenigsberger for the last thirty or more years. His interests and expertise have ranged, in geographical terms, from Sicily and Spain to Germany, France and The Netherlands. In cultural terms, he has excelled at analyzing figures as diverse as Machiavelli and Monteverdi, themes as disparate as artistic inspiration and political corruption – all of which has been both inspiring and somewhat daunting to his students. The contributors to this volume pay tribute to Helli Koenigsberger's interests, and to their remarkable yield, by taking up themes that resonated through his lectures and seminars as well as in his published writings. As his former students, most of us know that spoken legacy intimately; for those among us who are peers there have been the many hours of conversation and reading that have enabled us to share, and to attempt to emulate, the subtlety and enthusiasm which continue to inform his work.

In his writings, in his teaching, and in his professional activities (in particular, his service as President of the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions), Helli Koenigsberger has conveyed a particularly dynamic way of thinking about the relation of politics and culture. Not only has he made the machinations of political actors come alive; perhaps more important, he has alerted us to the less obvious, but more profound connections between political behavior and cultural values. He has written on the mutual impact of culture – in particular religion, art and music – and changes in the structure and operation of the early modern state, giving special attention to the phase of the decline of state power and the power

## Introduction

of religious groups, and the impact of that decline on contemporary attitudes and systems of belief; on scientific advances, political thinking and aesthetic judgements. It has become almost common-place for social and cultural historians to attempt to link cultural artifacts and customs with underlying trends in political and economic development, relating popular festivals or artistic genres to the circumstances of power and patronage; few historians have tackled the problem of analyzing the actual nature and quality of artistic creativity, as Koenigsberger has done so ingeniously in his articles on mannerism and music in the courts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.

Others of Koenigsberger's books and articles have dealt with what might be called the anatomy of political behaviour: the organization of revolutionary parties, the informal mechanisms of political patronage, and the varied rationales for the exercise of power, from theology to doctrines of reason of state. In these works he has shown himself to be a master of synthesis. In discussing the evolution of revolutionary parties in France and The Netherlands, he focused on the parallel development of political attitudes and behaviour in the disparate religious ideologies of the French Catholic League and Protestants of the Low Countries. In his forthcoming work on the States General of The Netherlands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he will consider the problem of Dutch and Belgian historiography in relation to representative institutions and the growth of absolute monarchy in Europe as a whole.

In this volume we have sought to be both general and specific. Helli Koenigsberger is a master of close, archival work, a presenter of new evidence with which to fashion new historical insights. Yet he never feared generalization; and here too we are prepared to address problems of cultural shifts, declines and crises. Several of these essays deal directly with the theme of political behavior and with the relationship of culture to the character and scope of political authority. J. H. Elliott writes on the Spanish court of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on the use of theatre and court ceremonial as elements in the construction of the mythology of kingship. Melissa Bullard discusses Lorenzo de' Medici as both political actor and cultural icon. Phyllis Mack interprets the poetry of the courtier Clément Marot in relation to the political persona of king Francis I of France. Guy Wells writes on William of Orange as an embodiment of Machiavellian *virtu*, while the Belgian scholar Emile Lousse focuses on the Estates of Brabant. Finally, Ragnhild Hatton dissects the machinations of bribery and corruption in relations between the courts of Sweden and France during the reign of Louis XIV – based, to quote her original letter outlining her paper, on 'exceptionally rich

## Introduction

and unique material (I found the cypher key to documents which had defeated me for twenty years)'.

Other writers take political thinking as their central theme: Frederick Krantz writes on the development of the humanist juridical thought of Poggio Bracciolini; Sarah Hanley, on the *lit de justice* assembly in sixteenth-century France and the political and rhetorical debate which surrounded it; Herbert Rowen, on a little-known, highly astute chronicler of the seventeenth-century political order, the Dutch diplomat Lieuwe van Aitzema.

The relationship between political activity and the broader cultural developments of the time forms the basis for contributions in the areas of religion, science, literature and music. Robert Kingdon discusses the religious and political evolution of Calvin's Geneva, while the scholarship and values of Martin Luther and the Counter Reformation and of the historian Ferdinando Ughelli are presented by A. G. Dickens and Denys Hay, respectively. James Jacob investigates the origins of modern science and the impact of scientific thought on the widening gulf between elite and popular culture in seventeenth-century England, while Margaret Jacob re-assesses that moment in early modern Europe when the new elite culture emerged as triumphant – what Hazard once called 'the crisis of the European consciousness.'

What emerges from a juxtaposition of these figures is an overriding concern with intellectual unity: a worldview which would both encompass and reconcile the values of the politician or scholar with those of the spiritual idealist. D. P. Walker's (sadly posthumous) account of Isaac Beeckman's musical theory relates church music to contemporary ideas about architecture, colors, memory and expectation, and the effects of ancient music, while Dorothy Koenigsberger reconstructs the mental universe of Leonardo da Vinci, focussing on Leonardo's attempt to achieve intellectual unity through experiments in art, natural science and geometry. In these and several other essays, we see thinkers and political actors searching for a synthesis which would render their scholarship, or art, or expertise, compatible with their larger cosmological or religious interests. Even the most overtly political of these major cultural figures, as Robert Kingdon's discussion of Calvin demonstrates, bent their political will to the service of an extraordinary spiritual idealism.

To lavish praise on a modest man is to risk exposing his shyness. Helli Koenigsberger taught on both sides of the Atlantic, lived in profoundly different cultures and excelled among the historians of his generation, while always remaining a generous, unassuming, immensely charming

## *Introduction*

human being whose social and intellectual companionship is a source of great pleasure for all who have experienced it. He and Dorothy have stimulated and entertained (and civilized) two generations of graduate students while maintaining a profound interest in music, opera and the arts. We wish there were more music and art history for him in these pages; we wish we could say how much we cherish him and his historical achievements without causing him embarrassment. Perhaps the best we can do is ask him to enjoy this volume as much as it gives us pleasure in presenting it.

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