JUSTICE, EQUITY AND THE COMMON GOOD

THE STATE IDEOLOGY OF THE COUNCILLORS OF THE BURGUNDIAN DUKE\textsuperscript{1}

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Introduction

Members of a political society tend to justify and legitimate their actions with ideological discourses marked by certain 'key words'. The French political vocabulary from the period during the rise of the so-called 'absolutist' modern state is still insufficiently studied, and the same can be said of the 'Burgundian' political space.\textsuperscript{2} More particularly, historians have shown little interest in the political thought of the princely officers who stood at the base of the more centralised forms of state that developed from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards.\textsuperscript{3} The late medieval period shows the production of a substantial amount of theoretical political writing, which, so far, has not received the attention it deserves. In this contribution, however, it is not my intention to undertake a classical study of the normative political theory commonly found in this type of source.\textsuperscript{4} Neither

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\textsuperscript{3} K. Daly, 'Private Vice or Public Service? Civil Service and chose publique in Fifteenth-Century France', in: A. Curry and E. Matthew, eds., Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 118.

\textsuperscript{4} See especially A. J. Vanderjagt, 'Qui sa vertu anoblist'. The Concepts of noblesse and chose publique in Burgundian Political Thought (Groningen, 1981).
will the ‘constitutional’ documents of this period be my point of departure. What I wish to focus on is the question of the ‘practical ideology’ of the princely officers of the later Middle Ages, and more specifically that of the superior officers of the Burgundian state of the fifteenth century.5

Following Charles Taylor, we can distinguish two different levels of political thought.6 On the one hand, there is ‘high theory’, which systematically and critically examines political notions. Scholarly literature on medieval political thought mostly focuses on this kind of theory. It remains very difficult, however, to measure the actual influence of these learned theories on the practical politics of councillors and other medieval jurists.7 On the other hand, there is a pre-theoretical notion of political practice as developed by the members of a society reflecting on their own constitutive role in practical politics. Such a notion is necessary for every form of political activity and recaptures some of the elements of the more learned theories.8 In this article, I will search for the existence of such a middlebrow ideology, a discourse consisting of a number of elements proper to the principal agents of state formation during the late Middle Ages, that is to say the officers. How did they legitimate their political actions and which ideas were used? I will focus on the Burgundian state of the fifteenth century.

The development of a bureaucratic elite, fully aware of its own function within the state and society, can be considered as an essential factor in the state formation process. This elite identified itself with a specific ideological and symbolic discourse and trained its political personnel in the roles and the types of institutional behaviour necessary for the reproduction and the expansion of state structures.9 We might say that social groups, more or less consciously or reflexively, select values that are fundamental for their identity and their interests to construct an ideology.10 I therefore consider an

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8 Taylor, ‘Political Theory’ (see n. 6), pp. 62-63.