

Imagined Communities. Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe, edited by Andrzej Pleszczyński, Joanna Aleksandra Sobiesiak, Michał Tomaszek, and Przemysław Tyszka. Explorations in Medieval Culture 8. Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. x + 395. 3 c. ill., 1 b/w map.
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The editors of this book explain that their work was motivated by the necessity to produce studies analyzing how “the existence of selected communities was ideologically justified, and how the members of these groups distinguished themselves from others” (1-2). This book relies, then, heavily on two famous cultural theories: that of imagined communities, developed by Benedict Anderson, and of emotional communities, coined by Barbara Rosenwein. However crucial these notions are, they are only mentioned in the introduction of the book and do not seem to be a cornerstone of the volume. The editors have compiled an impressive, generous, and wide-ranging collection of essays on the subject, which they have divided into five parts: “Dynasty and Power”; “Spirituality”; “Social Condition and Gender”; “Region”; and “We and the Other.”

In part 1, Daniel Bagi focuses on genealogical fictions in eleventh- and thirteenth-century hagiographies in Central Europe. He argues that these works were crucial to imposing successful narratives on a ruler and his successors in a manner that made them stick for a long time. Zbigniew Dalewski’s paper examines how dynastic identities were built in Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia. Rulers in these kingdoms tried to change the traditional rules of succession to create the ruler as a God-anointed entity, thus eliminating those who would not fit this mold. Georg Jostkleigrewe focuses his paper on a new interpretation of the *Rex imperator in regno* in France. He argues that this treaty of exemption from imperial rule evolved into, and that it should be seen as, a tool used to reinforce the power of the French kings as it was not known or observed outside of specialist fields such as the judiciary.

The first essay of part 2, Tomasz Tarczynski’s study, lies at the intersection of royal power, national identity, and spirituality in England, and examines how the use of religion in the definition of royal power was a tool not only to shape and justify royalty but also to create England as a saintly adorned kingdom. Michał Tomaszek, in the best essay of this collection, examines the emotional relation between monks as subjects and the objects in their environment, and how these objects are as important as people in the creation of monastic communities. In part 3, Bartosz Klusek focuses on medieval social identity and the role of law in community-building. Through the analysis of chronicles of England and Scotland, he explains how law became one of the most important facets of the

process of building well-organized groups. The family of the count of Anjou is at the center of Karol Szejgiec's paper, notably their organization through a dynastic legend. He explains that the authors of chronicles had to not only keep in mind the interest of the readers, but also the demands of the royals in their writing. Wojciech Michalski studies how epic poems from Scotland might have been used to build and reinforce the identity of noble families through a study of the heroics depicted in them. Tatiana Vilkul examines the use of social terms and tries to explain how they operate semantically in old Russian chronicles. She uses her finding to explain how the very writing of these texts was as important as their content. Andrej Pleszczyński's paper addresses the identity of guilds and communes in the Middle Ages. He focuses on their representation in official papers and how their identity as communities influenced or was influenced by their identity as self-governed groups. Przemysław Tyszka focuses on the definition of masculinity and femininity in books of penance from the early Middle Ages and how sexual practices are of prime importance in this task.

Part 4 starts with a paper by Euryon Rhys Roberts who analyzes Welsh identity through regional Welsh and British paradigms and explains how these different notions are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. Przemysław Wiszeszki's paper examines how, in Moravia and Poland, regionalism appears as a social construct, principally how the notion of regional consciousness was present and employed. Stanisław Rosik's paper focusing on the issue of regional identity in eleventh- and twelfth-century Pomerania concludes part 4. Finally, part 5 begins with a paper by Mariusz Bartnicki in which he analyzes the distinction between Ruthenians and non-Ruthenians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Joanna Sobiesak focuses on the German-Czech relationship as described in Czech chronicles from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. She particularly explains how Germans are often ill-portrayed in these, even though the Czech relationship with the German aristocracy was generally courteous otherwise. Martin Nodl examines the issues of corporative interests and nationalism at Prague University in the sixteenth century. Finally, Paweł Kras examines the creation of the image of heretics as an imagined community.

This volume presents a wide range of different subjects, and they are well combined as a collection. The various subjects treated are, however, extremely specific, and a non-specialist may have problems perfectly understanding the specifics of each article. In spite of this, this volume is very well assembled and presents fascinating subjects.

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