

A constitutional culture. New England and the struggle against arbitrary rule in the Restoration empire. By Adrian Chastain Weimer. (Early American Studies.) Pp. xiv + 365 incl. 4 figs. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. £40. 978 1 5128 2397 4
JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924001386

When thirteen of Britain's colonies rebelled against imperial authority in 1775, many observers quickly assumed that post-Puritan colonists, especially from New England, were the core of the problem. As New York's Anglican clergy remarked in 1780, 'It is a certain Truth that Dissenters in general and particularly Presbyterians and Congregationalists were the active Promoters of the Rebellion.'¹ Following suit, historians have long worked to trace the links between Puritanism – its theology and its history – and a distinctive devotion to covenantal or constitutional government. Adrian Weimer's thoughtful and inventive contribution to these discussions is welcome for its tight focus and clear argumentation. Her examination of the careful and crafty negotiations between New England's colonies and royal authorities in the 1660s argues that 'colonists creatively and determinedly rallied behind local authority while fending off accusations that they posed a danger to monarchy'. They did so by 'articulat[ing] a powerful – and pointed – threshold for deference, limiting their obligations to each other, to God, and to their descendants' (p.10). Weimer continues that these were the ingredients for a 'resilient, popular constitutional culture'.

A constitutional culture is, at heart, a social history of political culture. It provides close readings of a series of events and documents that shaped the transatlantic relationship, beginning with the anxieties and problems that arose from New England's sheltering of English regicides after the Restoration and then moving chronologically through the 1660s until debates in 1666 about complying with a royal request to send agents of Massachusetts Bay to London. By that point, Weimer argues, colonists had started 'to imagine their "true interest" as distinct from that of England or other English colonies – another tentative yet crucial step toward theorizing divided sovereignty' (p. 234). Each of her first ten chapters investigates a means through which colonists debated and articulated their opinions, both to one another (often with disagreement) and to royal authorities. A final chapter looks forward to the colonial side of the Glorious Revolution.

Importantly, Weimer locates discussions about the nature of political authority in a remarkably diverse set of social locations, from courts to fast days, and from petitions to demonstrations. This effort to find political voices and philosophies at all levels of society serves her argument well, because it helps to demonstrate a broadly-based political culture that moved beyond elites. She describes moments when political leaders turned to clergy for advice, and she demonstrates how ordinary freemen expressed their views about the Massachusetts government. (Unsurprisingly, Massachusetts looms large in this book, though Weimer attends to other regions and governments as well.) With regards to a 1661 discussion about sending agents across the Atlantic, Weimer describes 'months of patient, ground-level mobilizing to address' difficulties (p. 74). Several years later, petition

¹ New York clergy to Thomas Bradbury Chandler and Myles Cooper, 28 Oct. 1780, Lambeth Palace Library, London, SPG X, 189–92.

campaigns captured the attention of colonial leaders, who ‘realized they would need an informed and mobilized citizenry to have even a chance of preserving local institutions against imperial infringement’ (p. 132). One of this book’s greatest strengths is the careful attention to these episodes, to what they demonstrate about participants’ assumptions, and to the consequences – on the level of political theory – of those assumptions.

Religion – or rather, the right to collective religious practice unhindered by royal authorities – loomed large within New England’s constitutional culture. New Englanders were highly protective of their collective religious liberties, Weimer argues. When Charles demanded (while affirming the Massachusetts Charter) that colonists change practices related to the Book of Common Prayer, to baptism, and to the franchise, there was significant resistance, both in the form of non-answer-answers (from the colonial government) and more directly seditious refusals to propagate the king’s directive in the town of Woburn. In town petitions a few years later, the same issues echoed. But, as Weimer shows, religious liberties could not be separated from ‘charter’ liberties – the political independence New Englanders believed to be guaranteed by their charters, and which they thought put a limit on the spectre of arbitrary government to which they were so opposed.

Several further themes about New England’s political culture emerge from Weimer’s narration of this fraught decade. It is astonishing how frequently the trope of evangelising Indigenous peoples recurred on both sides of the squabbles between colonists and court representatives. Colonists relied on their work among Native peoples to show that they were on the right side of the struggle against popery. On the other hand, royal representatives feared that ‘the Bay colony’s injustices toward Natives might invalidate New Englanders’ authority in the region’ (p. 165), and they used colonial abuses of Indigenous peoples to ‘discredit the colonists’ moral authority, and therefore their authority to rule’ (p. 203). Weimer deftly weaves Indigenous actors and politics into a story that could far too easily have been limited to European participants, but her chronicle of how both sides attempted to instrumentalise their treatment of Native communities is also a reminder of how historically specific this constitutional culture was, framed and developed on a multiracial frontier, and thus influenced by all local populations.

The intertwining dynamics of rumour and anxiety on both sides of the Atlantic also played a central role, and they highlight another of Weimer’s key findings. Those in New England were profoundly worried about rumours that circulated in England and at court. Perceptions of disloyalty could lead to drastic actions. Those in America thus regularly protested their submission, even as they also insisted on limits to royal authority. As they resisted the efforts of royal commissioners, for example, they also wrote to English friends about how their foes, “‘ith al[l] imaginable mischief & spite” stood ready to echo the royal commissioners’ characterization of them as “Rebells & traitors” (p. 237). The careful dances of reputational maintenance required in such moments highlight a third important aspect of Weimer’s tale. She reminds her reader that the arguments presented by New Englanders of the 1660s were not the stuff of modern liberal rebellion. ‘Colonists’ categories were more often medieval than modern’, she writes, ‘embedded in social obligations’ rather than ‘individual freedom’. The

constitutional culture that emerged from these moments was the ‘coalescence of a set of ideas and practices for defending local liberties and fending off arbitrary rule’ (pp. 6–7). Those who worried about their reputations across the Atlantic did not seek chances to cast off monarchical rule, but rather accepted the authority of the sovereign and worked – often obliquely – to ensure that Charles II would not demand more than they wanted to give.

Weimer’s investigation of New England’s political culture is fresh and compelling. It ably connects the evolution of ideas to contingent events. It invites the reader into the pressures and anxieties of colonists who wished to protect their independent cultures and the new social units they had built from a volatile government at home that they none the less recognised as rightfully sovereign. The Puritan political culture they built was neither English nor completely American, and it bore the stamp of the porous relationships that linked the region both to its Indigenous neighbours and to its English connections. It is well worth reading by those drawn to the religious and intellectual history of Puritanism and to the political history of British North America.

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Leichenpredigten und Trauerzeremoniell der geistlichen Kurfürsten Studien zum Bischofsideal und zur Sepulkralkultur in der Germania Sacra zwischen Westfälischem Frieden und Säkularisation. By Jan Turinski. (Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhessischen Kirchengeschichte, 147.) Pp. 560. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2023. €79. 978 3 402 15952 1

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924001337

Funeral sermons, writes Jan Turinski on the back cover of his book, were central media of representation and memory in the early modern period. Catholic eulogies particularly distinguished themselves by their glorifying portrayal of the deceased and, because of this, were characterised already by contemporaries as fabrications. As a result, scholars have tended to bypass them in favour of other sources. Turinski instead turns to the three ecclesiastical electorates in the Holy Roman Empire – meaning the prince-archbishoprics of Mainz, Cologne and Trier – and takes up the funeral sermons written for the twenty-five electors who ruled them between the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and the electorates’ secularisation *circa* 1803. He proposes a change of perspective, namely, to approach the sermons as sources mediating norms and reflecting what contemporaries understood to be the ideal character of a prince-archbishop.

The book breaks things down into five main chapters, each one proceeding in a fashion familiar to German academic historical writing – systematic, methodical and detailed, with lengthy footnotes and a brief recapitulation at a chapter’s end. Chapter ii highlights how the ecclesiastical electors embodied a variety of ambitions and functions. As members of noble families their occupation of the cathedral seat perpetuated dynastic interests. As spiritual shepherds they issued ecclesiastical ordinances, decrees and liturgical guidelines and had the power to anoint. As territorial lords they governed and administered sizeable lands and