Politics, c.1000-1500: Mediation and Communication

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1. Introduction

The history of politics, long so central in national historiographies, occupies an ambivalent position in global history. On the one hand, comparative questions bearing on the organisation of power – state-formation, the rise and fall of empires, the different forms taken by government – are very prominent.[1] While treatments of these questions refer in part to extra-political causes, such as economics, culture, ecology and social organisation, they focus primarily on political or constitutional outcomes. Equally, discussions of periodisation typically have a political dimension: the 'cultural crystallisation' at the heart of Arnason and Wittrock's *Eurasian Transformations,* for instance, is the reorganisation of literate bureaucracy in pre-modern Europe and China, and its results for the nature of governance are

[1] Among classic examples see, for example, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires: the Rise and Fall of the Historical Bureaucratic Societies* (New Brunswick, 1993; first published in London, 1963); S. E. Finer, *The History of Government*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1997); Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: South-East Asia in Global Context, c.800-1830*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2003-9); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London, 2007). A useful up-to-date survey is Johann P. Arnason, 'State Formation and Empire Building', in *The Cambridge World History Volume V: Expanding webs of Exchange and Conflict*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge, 2015), ch. 18.

a central concern of the studies in that volume.[2] Even where the principal thematic focus is ostensibly non-political, as in the case of Jerry Bentley's analysis of global 'early modernity', changes in the organisation of power are accorded nearly as much significance as transformations in culture or seaborne trade and exploration.[3]

And yet, for all the discussion of power and government, surprisingly little attention is given to politics itself: that is to say, to actual interactions – not just to events and individuals, but to patterns and dynamics induced from political practice. When our main concern is with periodisation, for instance, we can all too easily slip into adopting the normative perspective of our primary sources which may tell us little about the messier ways in which power is negotiated: privileging 'the consciousness of elites over the being of all (including elites)', as Tim Reuter neatly put it. [4] Meanwhile the comparative study of political transformations or institutions across wide geographies runs the risk of recycling textbook generalisations which no practitioner would accept for the place and period she really knows about. Of course, one of the challenges of global history is that of scale, and, in order to make extra-regional

[2] Johann P. Arnason and Björn Wittrock, eds., *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances* (Leiden, 2011).

[3] Jerry H. Bentley, 'Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodisation in World History', *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996); and see also his 'Early Modern Europe and the Early Modern World', in *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity*, ed. Christopher H. Parker and Jerry H. Bentley (Lanham, MD, 2007), 13-31.

[4] Timothy Reuter, 'Medieval: Another Tyrannous Construct?', in *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities*, ed. J. Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), 37.

comparisons, the global historian needs to generalise and theorise.[5] But it seems to us that these generalisations and theories might usefully be based on those which are currently in play in regional historiographies of politics. As we shall see, in the case of the medieval centuries these historiographies are becoming considerably less concerned with turning-points, their treatment of institutions recognises the significance of surrounding social complexity, and their handling of state-formation is correspondingly nuanced.[6] Today's historians of medieval politics are more likely to be concerned with *process* rather than with trajectory and outcomes, and while, as we shall see, this by no means forecloses consideration of 'the state', political history does not have to be framed by that particular problematic. In this newer literature, two particularly salient processes are mediation and communication, and they form the focus of the present essay.

By 'mediation' we mean 'brokerage': the activity of powers that were in some sense in the 'middle'. These powers might connect 'centre' and 'locality', as in the case of officers, aristocrats or the members of representative institutions; or, since the 'centre' was itself a locality and sometimes a fiction, they might connect localities with one another. Looking at them in a different way, mediators might negotiate the tensions between formal or institutional power ('the state', its laws and offices, and those principles and practices which were acceptedand normative) and informal or 'social' power (networks, private interests, public opinion). The activities, identities and social standing of mediators varied considerably, and this is reflected in the examples discussed below, but, to focus the

[5] Note the comments of Alan Strathern in this volume: below, p. 00; and his review of Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, in *Journal of Global History*, vii (2012), 129, 131-2, 142.

[6] References to relevant local and regional historiography are in the next section and subsequent sections.

discussion, we look primarily at those engaged in some way in the transaction and reproduction of high 'public' power: that is, the rule of kings and emperors and political bodies that exceeded the bounds of the local.

A concern with mediation extends beyond 'pork-barrel' politics or mere patronage: the multi-directional relationships that were integral to day-to-day political life turn out to be an important means through which the conceptual framework of an entire political society was continuously created, critiqued and reshaped, a framework we might term the *imaginaire* of the whole polity.[7] Here, we also connect with the sphere of 'communication', by which we mean the production and exchange of words, images and ideas pertinent to politics: that is, *political* communication. Communicators were a kind of mediator, and perhaps all mediators were communicators, in that their actions affirmed, and were structured by, contemporary understandings of power and political principle. But it nonetheless seems appropriate to distinguish political communication from other forms of mediation, in part because it is separately conceived and handled in the scholarly literature, but also because the sphere of communication has its own distinctive distributions and forms of power.

In this essay, we shall look at the activities of mediation and communication in three Eurasian settings from the second half of the 'middle millennium': eleventh- to thirteenth-century Song China, eleventh- to thirteenth-century Byzantium, and fifteenth-century France.

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[7] The words of Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger are an inspiration here: 'every social reality is performatively regenerated through individual acts of communication' (from her essay, 'The Impact of Communication Theory on the Analysis of the Early-Modern State-Building Processes', in Wim Blockmans, André Holenstein and Jon Mathieu, eds., *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900* (Aldershot, 2009), 313).

As Johann Arnason has recently pointed out, these centuries were a period of notable fragmentation and polycentricity in Europe, but rather less so in China, where, following the early Song reforms, the imperial state continued to prevail in a reasonably coherent way over a large area, even if the social basis of its power changed significantly.[8] A benefit of our study is that it explores mediation and communication across three different but important types of polity observable in medieval contexts: (1) empires (represented here by Song China, Map 5); (2) kingdoms and other states that claimed a kind of homogeneity for their members (represented here by fifteenth-century France, Map 1); (3) 'galactic polities', where an exemplary 'superordinate' centre often lacking executive clout could nonetheless serve as a model for a series of largely autonomous satellite powers in the localities or further afield (represented here by post-1204 Byzantium, Map 6).[9] Within these polities we look at different political levels. Some of our mediators are local figures – landowners or prominent townsmen for instance, trying to bend or accommodate the apparatus of the state in areas where they have social and economic power. Some are very prominent political actors,

[8] Arnason, 'State Formation', 494-501.

[9] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, 'The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia', in his *Culture, Thought and Social Action: an Anthropological Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA, 1985), ch. 7. Although it was developed in a southeast Asian context, this is a powerful model for expressing the ambiguities between charismatic centre and political fragmentation in post-1204 Byzantium. Tambiah's ideas have much in common with Mary Helms' identification of superordinate centres, an approach explored by Jonathan Shepard with reference to Byzantium (see, for example, his 'The Byzantine Commonwealth', in Michael Angold, ed., *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 11-14 (where he cites Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal. Art, Trade and Power* (Austin, TX, 1993).

engaged in wider and more elaborate acts of brokerage, including in the French case a royal duke – who managed multiple followings while maintaining a high public profile. Some – like the student activists in Kaifeng, the 'Burgundians' of Paris, and the Byzantine chronicler Akropolites – are positioned within or close to major centres where they could seek to wield and exploit the *imaginaire* of the whole polity. The choice of examples in each case partly reflects the expertise and interests of the authors, but it is also shaped by differences, as well as parallels, in the configuration and conceptualisation of power in each region. Our aim here is not principally to explore those differences as an exercise in formal comparative history, but rather to describe the patterns identified by historians working at a regional level, to draw on specific examples, and then to assimilateour findings, looking for insights into the practice of politics in the 'global middle ages'. Our analysis is prefaced by brief surveys of the historiography of each of our regions, in order to understand how, and in what forms, the study of mediation and communication has arisen. We then present our three case studies and a conclusion which distils out common patterns and differences. Although our study is rooted in historiographies and case-study material from Eurasia, in the final section we also make some preliminary suggestions about how our findings could be integrated with methods and conclusions from the study of politics in other regions of the medieval world, including in the Americas and Africa.

2. Historiography

The creation and exercise of state power has been a central feature of historical writing on politics in all three of our regions, and it has followed somewhat similar paths. Chinese political historians have long been concerned with the rise of imperial autocracy, typically tracing it back to the centralisation efforts of the Song Dynasty between the tenth and

thirteenth centuries.[10] Political historians of Western Europe have focused on the making of nation-states, often from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards.[11] Those interested in the political history of Byzantium have been preoccupied with the military and diplomatic activities of emperors, and the legal and administrative frameworks that underpinned their power.[12] In all three regions, a later period of political dislocation – under the Yuan dynasty in China (1279-1368), in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe, and in Byzantium after the Latin conquest of 1204 – was traditionally juxtaposed with an earlier period of growth and progress in state formation, but the picture has begun to change, as historians (particularly those of China and western Europe) have moved away from narrowly institutional and top-down treatments of government, and towards socially- and culturally-informed accounts that acknowledge the wide distribution of forms of power and the presence of negotiation between their holders.

This is the context in which mediation and communication have become prominent scholarly concerns. In Chinese historiography, since around the 1990s, treatments of politics have opened out in three main ways: first, through the recognition of a 'turn inward' on the part of imperial elites, towards locality and family, from around the twelfth century onwards;

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[10] For an overview of the Chinese and Japanese historiography, see Bao Weimin 包伟民, ed., *Songdai zhidu shi yanjiu bainian, 1900-2000* 宋代制度史研究百年 (Beijing, 2004).

[11] For a traditional and influential account, see Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, 1970); for a discussion of the political historiography, John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 2009), 9-48.

[12] Two examples among many: Nikolaos Oikonomides, 'L'Évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle', *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976), 125-52; Warren Treadgold, Byz*antium and its Army 284-1081* (Stanford, 1995).

second, in the articulation of a more 'dynamic' political history, shaped less by the grand plans of rulers and ministers than by relationships and tensions between individuals, collectives and institutions; and, third, via a particular interest in political communication and information management, as a sphere in which the so-called 'literati' – well-born, educated families, with an orientation towards state service – could reproduce, but also appropriate, the values and technologies associated with imperial power.[13] In western Europe, where tensions

[13] For an insightful review of the first wave of the local turn scholarship see Roy Bin Wong, 'Social Order and State Activism in Sung China: Implications for Later Centuries', *Journal of Sung and Yuan Studies* 26 (1996): 229–50. On the intellectual shift away from empire-wide politics, see James T. C. Liu 劉子健, *China Turning Inward: Intellectual-Political Changes in the Early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1988). For the new political history, see especially the work of Deng Xiaonan, notably her essay, 'Xuyan' in Deng Xiaonan *et al*, ed., *Zhengji kaochao yu xinxi qudao: Yi Songdai wei zhongxin* 政**绩**考察与信息渠道：以宋代**为**重心 (Beijing, 2008); and also 'Zouxiang huo de zhidu shi—Yi Songdai guanliao zhengzhi zhidu shi yanjiu wei li de diandi sikao' 走向活的制度史—以宋代官僚政治制度史研究為例的點滴思考 in Bao Weimin, ed., *Songdai zhidu shi yanjiu bainian*, 10-19. The first work that includes a chapter dedicated to political communication is Zhu Ruixi 朱瑞熙, *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tongshi, Songdai* 中國政治制度通史--宋代 (Beijing, 1996). For the literati, see Eisenstadt, *Political Systems of Empires*, ch. 12; Charles Hartman, 'Sung Government and Politics', in John Chaffee and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China, Volume 5, Part Two: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279* (Cambridge, 2015); Hilde De Weerdt, *Competition over Content: Negotiating Standards for the Civil Service Examinations in Imperial China (1127-1279)* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); Winston Lo, *The*

between centralising states and practically autonomous powers – lords, towns and churches – were already a feature of the historiography, a social turn in the mid-twentieth century established these latter groups as rational and legitimate, and began to challenge the idea that the interests of states and social powers were necessarily opposed.[14] Aristocrats and oligarchs began to appear as mediators between states and localities, and, while the conflicts that surrounded their activities continue to receive attention, recent work has tended to argue that these conflicts had a consolidating tendency over the longer term.[15] Until very recently,

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Life and Thought of Yeh Shih (Hong Kong, 1974); Hoyt Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch'en Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds., *Ordering the World. Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China* (Berkeley, 1993); Sōdaishi kenkykai 宋代史研究会, ed., Sōdai shakai no nettowaaku 宋代社会のネットワーク (Tokyo, 1998). Some of this early work is reviewed in De Weerdt, 'Recent Trends in American Research in Song Dynasty History: Local Religion and Political Culture,' in Taiwan Song shi yanjiu wang 臺灣宋史研究網, February 1, 2006. http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~twsung/breview/subpage/02/files/Recent_Trends_in_American_Research_in_Song_Dynasty_History.pdf.

[14] e.g. Jaime Vicens-Vives, *Approaches to the History of Spain*, trans. Joan Connelly Ullman (Berkeley, 1970); K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973); Otto Brunner, *Land and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria*, ed. and trans. Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton (Philadelphia, 1992); Jacques Heers, *Parties and Political Life in the Medieval West*, trans. David Nicholas (Amsterdam, 1977).

[15] For example, Bernard Guenée, *L'Occident aux XIVe et XVe siècle: Les États* (Paris, 1970), trans. (Eng.) Juliet Vale as *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1985); Jean-

accounts of European political praxis centred on the prosecution and exchange of material interests, but – since the linguistic turn of the 1980s and 90s –there has been an increasing interest in the communicative dimensions of politics: the use of writing, speech and ritual to persuade audiences and convey resistance; the ways in which prevailing ideas and values could shape the options before politicians and populations.[16] Some similar trends are also perceptible in the work of Byzantinists, most markedly in concern for the cultural (especially ceremonial) forms in which imperial power was constituted and transacted by Constantinopolitan elites, but also in recognition of the material dimension of court politics, which has come to be seen as something like a social stock exchange for investors drawn from an insular and highly-privileged elite.[17] A long-standing emphasis on the workings of state institutions is now complemented by recognition that the volatility of Byzantine court politics was not necessarily the symptom of a dysfunctional polity destined to decline but instead an integral and continuous dimension of political life. There are even the beginnings

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Philippe Genet, 'L'État Moderne: un modèle opératoire', in Genet, ed., *L'État Moderne: Genèse* (Paris, 1990), esp. 265-9; Giorgio Chittolini, 'The "Private", the "Public", the State', in *The Origins of the State in Italy*, ed. Julius Kirshner (Chicago, 1995)

[16] For a survey, see Jan Dumolyn, 'Political Comunication and Political Power in the Middle Ages: a Conceptual Journey', *La Edad Media. Revista de Historia* 12 (2012), 33-55.

[17] Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), chs. 3-5; Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le "césaropapisme" byzantin* (Paris, 1996); Alexander Kazhdan and Michael McCormick, 'The Social World of the Byzantine Court', in Henry Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, D.C., 1997), pp. 168-97; Floris Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025-1081* (Oxford, 2014).

of moves to consider the influence of a wider public on that politics (at least in Constantinople itself), and to consider the means by which connections were maintained among imperial elites, and between them and wider populations, across the Byzantine space.[18] To sum up, then, all three historiographies have registered a shift from the 'formality' of state institutions to the 'informality' of social action and the interplay of state and society; they have also featured a series of attempts to incorporate communication into accounts of politics. In the European case where the later part of the period had been viewed as one of political disorder, there are moves to reinterpret it in terms of enhanced complexity. These centuries are now seen as a time of increased power-sharing between state and people and increasing communication: an era of 'politicisation', rather than mayhem.[19]

But if there are some broad commonalities, there are also some important differences. One is that the interactions between local power, public activism and the state has long been a concern of western European writing, whereas it is a late import to Chinese historiography, and is still poorly-integrated in work on Byzantium, particularly after the seventh century.[20]

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[18] On volatility: Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance* (Paris, 1990); on a wider public: Dimiter Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330* (Cambridge, 2007); Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

[19] Watts, *Making of Polities*; Blockmans et al., *Empowering Interactions*; Laurent Bourquin and Philippe Hamon, eds., *La Politisation: Conflits et construction du politique depuis le Moyen Âge* (Rennes, 2010).

[20] For a turning-point contribution on this theme in Chinese history, see Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge, 1986). Examples for the pre-800 period in Byzantium include, Tom S.

Conversely, for Chinese historians, 'mediation' and 'communication' are closely entwined topics, whereas Europeanists have long seen the former activity in material terms and are only now getting to grips with the cultural dimensions of political exchange. In part, these differences reflect differences in the sources. Those for Europe, dominated by state archives, are full of evidence of dialogue and conflict between high authorities and semi-subordinated locals, whether these were private powers, such as lords and towns, or public representatives in local or national assemblies.[21] Byzantium lacks this abundance of archival material, and the dynamics of local power are correspondingly difficult to reveal.[22] In Chinese history, meanwhile, the huge volume of surviving evidence combines archival with literary and historiographical material, often in carefully crafted collections, designed to guide examination candidates and to promote the cultural objectives of the literati and the state: the issue of communication is consequently foregrounded, but local interests are occluded.[23] But it is not only a matter of evidence: some of the differences of approach derive from differences of political organisation and the ways that researchers have engaged with these. Among Byzantinists and Chinese historians, political histories have focused above all on centripetal elites – state officers, courtiers and ministers, state-focused literati – whereas

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Brown, Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A. D. 554-800 (Rome, 1984; Peter Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2006), which focuses mainly on an elite with substantial estates in Egypt.

[21] For a convenient summary, see John Arnold, *What is Medieval History?* (Cambridge, 2008), ch. 2.

[22] Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 600-1025 (London, 1996), pp. 2-3.

[23] Hartman, "Sung Government and Politics," 24-7.

historians of western Europe have been more interested in the incorporation (and resistance) of more-or-less autonomous powers, such as towns or the lords of militarised peripheries. Even so, there are counter-currents. More recently, Chinese and Byzantine historians have been reaching beyond imperial networks. The Chinese literati were a huge class, many of them with no realistic prospect of imperial office, and newer work, focusing on the commercialisation of literate knowledge from the twelfth century, has drawn attention to a 'middle space' of interaction between literati and local people which was hard for the state to control.[24] In Byzantium, meanwhile, recent interest in letter writing, both as a means of

[24] On communication with local communities see esp. Huang Kuanchong 黄寬重, "Cong zhongyang yu defang guanxi hudong kan Songdai jiceng shehui yanbian" **从中央与地方关系互动看宋代基层社会演变**, *Lishui yanjiu* **历**史研究 2005.4: 100-109; Gao Keli, "Songdai zhouxian guanfu de bangyu" 宋代州縣官府的榜諭, *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究 17 (2006): 77-108; id., "Songdai fenbi kaoshu—Yi guanfu zhaoling de chuanbu wei zhongxin" 宋代粉壁考述—以官府詔令的傳布為中心, *Wenshi* 文史 66 (2004): 126-135; Dai Jianguo 戴建国, "Songdai de gongzheng jigou—shupu" **宋代的公证机构-书铺**, in *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究 1988.4; Chen Jingliang **陈**景良, "Songxue yu songshi: Songdai sifa chuantong de quanshi" **讼学与讼师：宋代司法传统的诠释**, in *Zhongxi falü chuantong* **中西法律传统** 2001: 201-32. See also contributions in the following edited volumes Deng Xiaonan, et al, ed., *Zhengji kaochao yu xinxi qudao: Yi Songdai wei zhongxin* **政绩考察与信息渠道：以宋代为重心** (Beijing, 2008); *Wenshu, zhenglin, xinxi goutong: Yi Tang Song shiqi wei zhu* **文**

contact and as a way of spreading cultural capital, has thus far focused primarily on the administrative elite, but it has the potential to reveal more about connections between that elite and locals interested in gaining access to power.[25] Equally, looking in the other direction, European historians have maintained an active interest in courts, officers and powerbrokers – in the dynamics of power at the centre, and in the cultural routes through which centres were able to influence localities.[26] In these ways, regional historiographies are picking up on similar themes; indeed, their common features may be more striking, perhaps, than their differences.

3. To Be Local and Imperial: Students and the Rise of Political Mediators in Song China

From the eleventh century onwards mediation processes become more visible in the Chinese historical record. Tensions, networking, and power differentials between different kinds of

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书•政令•信息沟通：以唐宋时期为主 (Beijing, 2012); *Songdai zhengzhi shi yanjiu de xin shiye guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 宋代政治史研究的新视野国际学术研讨会论文集 (Beijing, 2013). Deng Xiaonan and Huang Kuanzhong, ed., "Songdai de xunxi chuandi yu zhengling yunxing" 宋代的訊息傳遞與政令運行 theme issue in *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 (*Chinese Studies*) 27:2 (2009): 1-200.

[25] For example, Margaret Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid. Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Aldershot, 1997).

[26] For example, Wolfgang Reinhard, ed., *Power Elites and State-Building* (Oxford, 1996); Robert Stein, ed., *Powerbrokers in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2001), and see Dumolyn, 'Political Communication'.

intermediaries, including powerful local families, clergy, legal experts usually referred to as 'litigation masters', clerks, local students, local militia and police chiefs, and local officials, are attested in legal case books and the rapidly expanding volume of literati prose writings. Two more or less simultaneously occurring processes help explain the increased prominence of these intermediaries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[27]

First, far-reaching marketisation led to an increase in the use of official and non-official processes of mediation by literate and illiterate commoners of all status groups. In large parts of the Song territories agricultural production grew, the population expanded, and, particularly in the south, farmers were drawn into marketing networks and exchanged not only local produce but also artisanal products. The state adjusted to the commercialisation of the economy, recognized private property, and gradually moved towards a taxation system based on the assessment of wealth, thus doing away with the more egalitarian early medieval fiscal system that was based on family size and land distribution. Illiterate farmers participating in the monetised rural economy paid litigation masters for drafting cases or petitions for all manner of conflicts amongst themselves or between themselves and local elites or with local government. The high demand for such services is evident from a case in which a prefect noted in passing that four to five hundred people were waiting by his offices to submit documents.[28] Second, the centralisation and standardisation of institutions of

[27] For a more extensive discussion of mediators in Song history see Hilde De Weerdt and John Watts, 'Towards a Comparative Political History: Structural Transformations in Political Communication, c. 1000-1500', in De Weerdt and Julius Morche, eds, *Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 1100-1600*, under submission.

[28] James T. C., Liu, and Brian E. McKnight, *The Enlightened Judgments: Ch'ing-ming chi: The Sung Dynasty Collection* (Albany, NY, 1999), pp. 445-7.

political communication (petitioning, gazettes, schools, civil and military examinations, legal codes and procedures) in the eleventh century also contributed to the higher profile of local intermediaries. The increasing numbers of those preparing for the examinations combined with the decision not to expand the number of salaried officials beyond earlier levels created a pool of men taking on occupations in legal and other forms of mediation.

These two processes of marketisation and centralisation and their effect on the dissemination of an imperial political culture in late imperial Chinese history down to the grassroots level can be illustrated by the example of the local and metropolitan activities of twelfth- and thirteenth-century students who constituted one among the many emerging groups of mediators mentioned above. Students refer here to the hundreds of thousands of men enrolled in government schools and private academies and preparing for the civil service examinations, ranging in age roughly from their teens to their forties. As they enrolled men preparing for the examinations, these schools did not offer a curriculum that developed with student age but rather a common curriculum focused on the interpretation of classical, philosophical, historical, and administrative texts and writing skills tested in examination essays. Students turn up in local land disputes in which schools, landholding families, and tenants were embroiled with some regularity in this period. Students who moved up through the government school hierarchy and gained access to the Imperial College also featured in some of the largest demonstrations on record for this period. Two case studies are used here to illuminate the goals and outcomes of student mediation at these two levels, and to point to some broader conclusions about the influence of these new kinds of mediation on late imperial Chinese politics.

In a case dating to the 1220s we see government school students from Pingjiang (Suzhou) act as if representing the interests of the local community as a whole.[29] They were reportedly called upon by the head teacher to join a case that had been brought to the local yamen (government office) by a few tenant farmers who cultivated the fields of the prefectural school. The tenants brought the case against two brothers, members of the Chen family, who charged them rent for plots that supposedly belonged to the school. The headteacher, an imperial office holder with a relatively high social status but no background in the locality, called on other staff and students from the school to support the claim that protecting school property was needed to ensure the provision of education to future generations in Pingjiang, and to demand that all land be returned to the school and compensation for lost rent for the preceding nineteen years be paid to it, so that it could cover its students' expenses.[30]

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[29] "Song jifu xuetian shengzha" 宋給復學田省劄 (1228) and "Song jifu xuetian shengzha" 宋給復學田省劄 (1230) , in Jiangsu tongzhi ju 江蘇通志局, comp., *Jiangsu tongzhi gao* 江蘇通志稿, "Jiangsu jinshi zhi" 江蘇金石志 (*Zhongguo fangzhi congshu*,Taibei: Chengwen, 1966), 16.50-56. Transcription by Yang Yuxun 楊宇勛, http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~twsung/song/93/50.pdf; http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~twsung/song/93/51.pdf.

[30] "Shaoxing fuxue zhengfu zhaiqian bangji" 紹興府學整復賃錢牓記 (1248), in Du Chunsheng 杜春生, comp., *Yuezhong jinshi ji* 越中金石**記** (Zhanboguan, 1830*)*, 5.50a-52b. Transcription by Liu Xingjun 劉馨珺, http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~twsung/song/93/48.pdf. It is also possible that students asked the head teacher to throw his weight behind their claims for adequate support for the school as they were prominently featured in not only this but also

This case illustrates the dual legacy of eleventh-century centralization and marketization. On the one hand, tenant farmers in the Suzhou area routinely rented land from multiple landlords. Local powerholders had accumulated large estates and kept expanding them by reclaiming land from lakes and the Yangzi estuary.[31] Temples, schools, and shrines were often under pressure from large landlords but also participated in the market economy to fund community projects. On the other hand, the reformist regimes of the eleventh century set up government schools throughout the Song territories in the hope that they would turn into a reliable recruiting ground for the newly restructured bureaucracy. In the twelfth century government schools continued to be overseen by bureaucrats but curricula were, as in the growing number of private academies from which they were often hardly distinguishable, no longer imposed from the top. Neo-Confucian activists developed and taught their own curricula in government schools as well as in private academies. Other local teachers wrote in their textbooks that schools should be considered part of the functional hierarchy of government in which the emperor makes policy decisions, councillors and ministers select appropriate policies, and the bureaucracy and students (even though a majority of them would never hold office) discuss public affairs. Students and scholars without formal ties to the

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other similar cases, including one in which they demanded that rent collectors pay rents in cash rather than in quickly depreciating paper currency. On disputes concerning school lands during the Song and Yuan dynasties, see Lee Ju-Chun 李如鈞, "Xuexiao, falü, difang shehui—Song, Yuan de xuechan jiufen yu zhengsong 學校、法律、地方社會──宋元的學產糾紛與爭訟," Ph.D. dissertation, National Taiwan University, 2012.

[31] Joseph McDermott and Shiba Yoshinobu, "Economic Change in China, 960-1279," in Chaffee and Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China, Volume 5, Part Two*, esp. pp. 340-52, 355-67, 392-6, 409-20.

bureaucracy could thus claim a legitimate place within both the local community and the larger body politic.[32]

The Chen family had apparently been able to rely on strong connections to other local intermediaries (clerks and local office holders) for over a decade to claim both land and rent, but in the 1220s the students were able to mobilize formal hierarchical bureaucratic power structures that reached all the way to the capital. The Chen family appealed against an earlier decision in favour of the claimants, but saw their appeals overturned twice by ministerial order. The case may not have been closed at this point, but the evidence that remains demonstrates that local actors had learned to make effective use of the growing arsenal of administrative texts and the different media available for political communication. The school had the ministerial orders inscribed on stone and displayed on school grounds in the hope of enforcing the central government ruling in perpetuity.

During the twelfth and thirteenth century it was common for central and local government orders to be communicated openly in public spaces. Central government orders relating to the ascension of a new emperor, amnesties, tax relief or new impositions were proclaimed before audiences consisting of all levels of local society. Local government ordinances were similarly read out, sometimes by local gentry who spoke the local languages. The texts were also transcribed, printed, and posted on walls and wooden placards in central places throughout the locality including yamen, bridges, and main streets. The appearance of governmental orders in public spaces inspired private reproductions of the genre: some of these were considered illegitimate and were banned; others were left standing and lent force to government decisions in favour of local corporate bodies and propagated legitimate procedures for claims.

[32] De Weerdt, *Competition over Content*, 135.

The two Pingjiang steles on which the case was inscribed set out in detail the lengthy procedures and the steps taken by all sides (tenants, school, and the Chen family). They also documented the evidence that was considered necessary and legitimate to substantiate claims. The school provided an account book and an earlier stele text listing its holdings; the county administration checked its land registers and also had its registrar survey the relevant holdings and interview neighbours and elders to verify accounts; the Chen brothers provided contracts which were alleged to have been falsified. In this way the documentary conventions and networking hierarchies of the Song bureaucracy became currency in the resolution of local conflicts.

The close and complex relationship between mediation and communication in the Song period is also evident in the role that students played in the politics of the capitals of Kaifeng and Hangzhou. In the heyday of the government school system in the early twelfth century there were as many as 3800 students enrolled in the most prominent of the capital schools, the Imperial College.[33] Enrolment declined to less than half this number in the Southern Song but Imperial College students continued to lead and participate in demonstrations throughout the Song period. They also left a legacy that was taken up in later history and were remembered as nationalist heroes by students protesting in the early twentieth century. A prominent example of the student activism that resonated in later collective memory was the life and death of Chen Dong (1086-1127).

[33] For a recent treatment and additional references, see John Chaffee, "Sung Education," in Chaffee and Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China, Volume 5, Part Two* esp. pp. 300-308. For student activism in the Song, see especially Wang Jianqiu, *Songdai Taixue yu Taixuesheng* (Taibei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan; Jinghua yinshuguan, 1965); Thomas H. C. Lee, *Education in Traditional China, a History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

In the mid-1120s, as the Jurchens invaded Song China and its capital Kaifeng, Chen Dong was one of the student leaders who repeatedly descended upon the palace gates to submit petitions demanding the dismissal and punishment of those in high office deemed responsible for the debacle and to protest against concessions made to the Jurchens. The demonstrations reportedly attracted large numbers of commoners and soldiers and grew to the size of a crowd estimated by contemporaries to be one hundred thousand. At first, and thanks to the intervention of the Kaifeng prefectural governor who argued that the student demands reflected popular opinion, the students' demands were met. However, after another round of petitions demanding that the recently installed Emperor Gaozong dismiss his new appointees and employ the notoriously hawkish Li Gang (1083-1140) as councillor, Chen Dong and another student leader, Ouyang Che (1091-1127), were publicly executed in the temporary capital of Yingtian.[34]

The story does not end here. Student demonstrations continued in the following decades, some expressing dissatisfaction with local government, and others rallying behind the same patriotic agenda of resistance to Jurchen demands that had motivated the student activism of the 1120s. Students typically focused their grievances on the perceived misrule of

[34] For brief accounts of the events see Ari Levine, "The Reigns of Hui-Tsung and Ch'in-Tsung," in Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith, ed., *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 5, pt. 1, The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 638-39; Tao Jing-Shen, "The Move to the South and the Reign of Kao-Tsung (1127-1162)," ibid., pp. 645-51. For selected translations of Chen Dong's biography and petition, see William Th. de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 641-3.

individual governors and councillors. Despite his execution, Chen Dong's story symbolized the status that students and literati more generally occupied in the body politic. Emperor Gaozong, who had ordered the execution of the student ringleaders, later attributed this poor decision to the then ruling chief councillors and his own youthful ignorance, and the two students were posthumously given honorific titles. The story was embellished in Neo-Confucian historiography, ensuring Chen Dong a place in the biographies of loyalists in *The Song Dynastic History* written under Yuan rule.[35] A leading activist thus became a symbol of the ideal intermediary in the eyes of late imperial literati: voicing the opinion of the cultured elite at large on state affairs at the risk of death and loyal to the dynastic house and the imperial polity imagined as encompassing all territories between the Great Walls and the northern tip of the South China Sea. Almost 800 years later Chen Dong's actions were invoked as a model by Duan Xipeng (1898–1948), one of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Students then, and again 1989, applied the same repertoire of techniques of political communication (posters, handbills, and petitions to the central government) that had been in use for centuries.[36]

In sum, students are an example of the new types of intermediaries that emerged as a result of the centralization of Chinese politics and the marketization of Song society in the eleventh century. Emperors and councilors sought to centralize political decision making, education, religious and ritual practices, as well as to strengthen control over agricultural production and

[35] Charles Hartman and Li Cho-Ying, "The Rehabilitation of Chen Dong," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75.1 (2015), 77-159.

[36] Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 86.

commerce. Centralizers like Wang Anshi (1021-86) and Cai Jing (1047-1126) fell short of their goals. Their campaigns had been motivated by the desire to reduce the impact of local intermediaries but they continued to be frustrated not only by the intermediaries of the past who had interfered with tax collection but also by the new types of intermediaries that arose as the unforeseen consequence of the centralization and expansion of education, and especially the new prominence given to the civil service examinations. There was therefore a considerable gap between the aims of centralizing power as articulated in the memorials and edicts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the exercise of power locally as well as in the heart of the empire itself, the capital of Kaifeng, as shown in the student-led demonstrations of the 1120s. Intermediaries were more diverse than in the past and obtained greater visibility in a wide range of media (manuscript and print bills, stone steles, demonstrations, etc). The reported activities suggest that intermediaries played an ambivalent role in the mediation of state and local power, at once extending and limiting the reach of the state. Some historians point to the activities of families like the Chen as evidence of the contraction of state power in late imperial times. These families ruled locally and managed to convince most local officials to cooperate with them. But the case between the Chen, their tenants, the school teacher and the students also powerfully underscores the opposite side of the coin. Both the Chen and the students attempted to settle their dispute through official networks, both local and central, for years. Both saw their powers to some extent constrained by statist frameworks. The students defended their claims on the basis of the role of the school in the public realm, and thus recognized and accepted that their status was intimately connected to state power. With passionate rhetoric the leaders of the student demonstrations also articulated their claim to represent the best interests of the dynasty and the realm; they could therefore be readily co-opted as loyalists not only by defiant students in years to come but even by the emperor who had had them executed.

4. Mediation and Communication in Fifteenth-Century Western Europe: John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy and the French civil war, c.1405-19

In the case of Song China and, as we shall see shortly, late medieval Byzantium, historians have only recently focused on the powers that were able to mediate between state institutions and local society. In western Europe, on the other hand, the presence of brokers or mediators is much more transparent and familiar. The principal questions before us in this section therefore concern the nature of mediation, its legitimacy, and the nature and legitimacy of the state institutions themselves – in a world where mediators could often be more prominent than states. Additionally, as in the other sections, there is a story to be told about political communication and its relationship with processes of mediation.

The central figure in this section is John 'the Fearless', duke of Burgundy, cousin of the king of France and ruler of a network of territories to the east and north of Paris, including the rich counties of Artois and Flanders, which were major centres of population, agriculture and textile production, as well as the duchy and county of Burgundy.[37] His father, Philip 'the Bold', had been the most powerful peer of France, looming over the administration of his nephew, King Charles VI, who suffered bouts of madness from 1392 and was frequently

[37] The leading work on the duke is still Richard Vaughan, *John the Fearless* (orig. London, 1966; new edn, with introduction by B. Schnerb, Woodbridge, 2002). For the Flemish dimensions of Burgundian power, see Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: the Low Countries under Burgundian Rule, 1369-1530*, trans. Elizabeth Fackelman (Philadelphia, 1999).

unable to rule for himself. Duke John expected to inherit his father's position, but was pushed aside by the king's brother, Louis, duke of Orléans, on Philip's death in 1404. Orléans seized the regency and gained control of the royal administration, helping himself to key assets in central and southern France as he did so. Duke John's response was to launch a military coup in 1405, denouncing Orléans as a tyrant, appealing to French towns for support on a ticket of reducing taxation, and seizing the heir to the throne and parts of Paris. Peace was briefly restored, but in 1407, Burgundy's men murdered Orléans and took control of the capital and the government. Over the next few years, two great parties were formed – the 'Burgundians', who generally controlled Paris and much of the north and east of France, and the 'Armagnacs', who drew support from the west and south and what was left (after a series of Burgundian purges), of Orléans' following in the royal administration. These parties alternately fought each other and patched up truces, notably under pressure from a series of English invasions, led by King Henry V (1413-22) who advanced a claim to the French crown. By 1419, the English had overrun Normandy and were almost at the gates of Paris, but at a summit meeting at Montereau, John the Fearless was murdered in his turn by the leader of the Armagnacs, the future Charles VII of France (1422-61). This act catapulted the Burgundians into alliance with the English and led directly to the establishment of Anglo-Burgundian control of northern France in the 1420 Treaty of Troyes.[38]

The kingdom of France, over which these parties fought, was a large territory, headed by a king with overall jurisdiction, a powerful network of officers, and a striking capacity to

[38] For details of these events, see Bertrand Schnerb, *Les Armagnacs et les Bourguignons* (Paris, 1988); Bernard Guenée, *Un Meurtre, une société: L'assassinat du duc d'Orléans, 23 novembre 1407* (Paris, 1992); R. C. Famigilietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392-1420* (New York, 1986).

raise huge sums in taxation. [39] Beneath this structure, power was discreetly but extensively shared with a series of semi-independent powers: princes and lesser nobles; towns; the French portions of the international Roman church; and a host of provinces, loosely constituted by representative assemblies, local networks and frameworks of custom. There was plurality in most fields of politics – law and jurisdiction, language and culture, tenure and alliance – but the huge flows of taxation into and out of the royal network provided an important unifying feature, tying this massive and diverse kingdom together. That basic structural reality was affirmed by other more cultural features of French political life – a sense of common history, centring on the *stirps Karoli* (the line of Christian kings supposedly descended from Charlemagne in the eighth century); a burgeoning national political literature and a growing primacy for the northern French vernacular; a steady growth in royal legislative and judicial primacy, and a broad acceptance of the monarchy as a divinely-appointed institution. In common with every other 'state' or 'polity' in later medieval Europe, the kingdom of France featured a delicate mixture of centripetal and centrifugal forces: a meaningful thread of unity, but also copious sources of conflict. It also had highly uncertain boundaries. The networks of the king and leading princes extended beyond France into the Low Countries, Italy, Spain and Scotland: this was an imperial kingdom, with some

[39] The major treatment in English remains P. S. Lewis, *Later Medieval France: the Polity* (London, 1968), but an excellent up-to-date introduction is Graeme Small, *Late Medieval France* (Basingstoke, 2009). A collection of new essays on French politics and government, written in a comparative context, is Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Philippe Genet and John Watts, eds., *Government and Political Life in England and France, c.1300-c.1500* (Cambridge, 2015).

pretensions to the rule of western and central Europe, and it was with the help of earlier kings that Burgundy had acquired his estates on the French periphery.

These overall conditions set the terms for the kinds of mediation offered by Duke John and other princes of a similar type. Within France, the duke's private assets and networks were interwoven with royal offices and implicit public responsibility; outside France, his holdings in Flanders and the county of Burgundy brought him obligations to other populations, as well as contact with foreign rulers on a more-or-less equal footing.[40] So it was that Burgundy was simultaneously engaged in several different kinds of brokerage: the headship of more-or-less informal, private or 'familial' networks (in a culture where 'familia' indicated both kin-groups and more extended followings of servants and well-wishers); the leadership of towns and provinces; the conduct of international diplomacy; and the representation of French public opinion. John was the feudal lord of the nobles of the duchy of Burgundy, and they had little choice about offering him allegiance, but in other regions of France, he acquired followings through his exploitation of royal authority: the northern frontier area of the Boulonnais is a good example, where the captaincy Burgundy was given

[40] Flanders was nominally subject to the jurisdiction of the French crown, but at this time was effectively an independent province, with its own courts and financial arrangements, as well as its own language and network of allies and trading partners. For the international dimension of Burgundy's career, see esp. John Bell Henneman, *Olivier de Clisson and Political Society under Charles V and Charles VI* (Philadelphia, 1996), ch. 11 and Vaughan, *John the Fearless*, chs. 1, 2, 9.

by the king placed him in charge of royal taxes.[41] The local nobility, its rents depleted by skirmishing in the borderlands with English Calais, was readily drawn into royal and ducal service, while Burgundy's position as royal broker was strengthened by his nearby estates, by his chivalrous reputation (he had fought with great honour in the Balkans during the Nicopolis Crusade against the Ottoman Turks in 1396) and by his retention of the leading lord of the region, Enguerrand de Bournonville, whose own estates, kin and relations harnessed neighbouring lords to the duke's allegiance. In a similar way, as lord of Burgundy, Artois, Champagne and other French provinces, the duke negotiated with local representative assemblies and leading towns for taxation and troops, agreeing in return to forward petitions to the king and to protect ancient liberties.[42] Links to the duke were a means of power for allied groups of oligarchs, and – during the civil war – many towns divided into 'Burgundian' and 'Armagnac' factions, loosely affiliated to ideological programmes discussed below, but more tangibly prospering (or failing) with the progress of one leader or the other at the centre of France. And, of course, that 'centre' should also be understood as a locality, where John of Burgundy had cultivated support not only in the city of Paris, but also among those lords and courtiers who had been alienated by the rise of Orléans. He had strengthened his hand by purges of the royal administration and household, and also by subtler means, such as a growing dominance over the 'Cour Amoureuse', a cultural association founded by his father and the duke of Bourbon in 1401 as a way of binding together the princes, nobles and rich

[41] Marie-Thérèse Caron, *La Noblesse dans le duché de Bourgogne, 1315/1477* (Lille, 1987), 12, 87; Bertrand Schnerb, *Enguerrand de Bournonville et les siens: un lignage noble du Boulonnais aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Paris, 1997), chs. 1, 4, 6 and pp. 61-6.

[42] Guy Lurie, 'Citizenship in Late Medieval Champagne: the Towns of Châlons, Reims and Troyes, 1417-c.1435', *French Historical Studies*, xxxviii (2015).

townsmen of (especially) northern France in ritualised exchanges of poetry and courtly-love play.[43] In all of these ways, then, the duke's aims and interests intersected with the aims and interests of substantial constituencies, constituencies that were partly distinct, but partly interlinked by the royal structure and the common business of the kingdom.

That common business was a public, discursive and ideological matter, as well as a space for material exchange, and Duke John's political struggle involved a range of communication strategies as well as the management of inter-personal networks. The civil war of c.1405-1419 has been seen as marking a turning point in the politicisation of the French population and the extension of the French 'public sphere'.[44] The duke and his opponents sought both to justify their actions and to co-ordinate their supporters through a series of public appeals and demonstrations, pitched at different – but, as we have seen, connected – audiences. A major concern was to represent apparently wrongful actions, such as uprisings, demonstrations, assassinations, in ways that made them correspond to the accepted values of society at every level: that is to say, unity and peace, loyalty to the king, defence of the realm, and promotion of the 'utilité de la chose publique', or public good.[45] From 1405 onwards, Burgundy and Orléans wrote letters to the corporations of the leading towns and to the *Parlement* and University of Paris, respectively the highest court in the land

[43] Carla Bozzolo and Hélène Loyau, eds., *La Cour Amoureuse dite de Charles VI*, 3 vols. in 2 (Paris, 1982-92), vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

[44] Nicolas Offenstadt, 'Guerre civile et espace public à la fin du Moyen Âge: la lutte des Armagnacs et des Bourguignons', in Bourquin and Hamon, eds., *Politisation*; and see also Bernard Guenée, *L'Opinion publique à la fin du Moyen Âge, d'après la Chronique de Charles VI du religieux de Saint-Denis* (Paris, 2002).

[45] For the quotation, see Lurie, 'Citizenship in Champagne', 373-4.

and centre of jurisprudence, and the principal seat of learning in the kingdom. From these Paris institutions, Burgundy sought authoritative backing for his protests against Orléans, particularly in the wake of the murder of 1407, which Jean Petit, a Burgundian agent in the *Parlement*, attempted to justify as tyrannicide in a widely-circulated speech of 1408 (in return, Duke John lent support to the University of Paris's position on the papal schism in the church).[46] From the towns, Burgundy sought men, money and validation; in return he offered them a mixture of appealing policy initiatives – defence of liberties and suspension of certain royal taxes – and the projection of a plausible public profile, not only as a reformer, but as a prince with the power to make reform stick. The Armagnacs, meanwhile, posed – rather tacitly – as the party of order, defending the royal right to taxation while denouncing the violence and treason of Duke John. The mass circulation of rumours, bills and libels encouraged the sense that a wider public deplored the iniquities of the other party; the distribution of badges, beginning in 1410, demonstrated the extent of support. Burgundy's choice of symbols – the plane, the mason's weight, the hop-branch, St Joseph – and his use of a Flemish-language motto, indicated the groups to which he particularly wished to make appeal: urban artisans, on the one hand, and the towns of Flanders – a key source of wealth, but also a symbol of reformist energy – on the other.[47] The duke's platform was thus designed at once to justify his interventions, to mobilise wider sympathies and to advance those interests on which he was most intimately dependent.

At the same time, the numerous rapprochements between Burgundians and Armagnacs, however short-lived, were essential to the legitimacy of the combatants. The gospels taught

[46] Vaughan, *John the Fearless*, 31-2, 69-72.

[47] Emily J. Hutchison, 'Partisan Identity in the French Civil War, 1405-18', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxiii (2007).

that a divided kingdom could not stand, and both parties in France were constrained to work towards unity, especially as the English threat mounted. When in 1413 Burgundy's support for reform prompted a revolt of Parisian guildsmen with a revolutionary programme, the duke and his followers temporarily lost their footing in the capital, as moderate opinion swung back behind the Armagnacs.[48] On the whole, therefore, the positions of the two parties were ambivalent almost to the point of incoherence, seeking both to contain and articulate division, to pursue peace and wield the sword of justice, and to defend the indefensible – murders of royal princes and treaties with the English enemy. The publics to whom appeal was being made, meanwhile, sought mostly to remain within the bounds of safety while taking advantage of whatever opportunities arose: they insisted on their loyalty to the king, accepted the lordship of Burgundy or Armagnac on a more or less regional basis when neutrality became impossible, promoted their ancient liberties, and limited purges and their associated divisions as best they could. In these ways, just as in the direct appeals to sectional groups, the ideological programmes of leading politicians were closely aligned with social and political realities: France was divided and fragmented, but it was also linked together by a royal structure, even when that structure had no single, effective head. Mediators and communicators had to try to capture that uneasy mixture in their activities, but what is striking about this example is that, even in a situation of overlapping structures and uncertain boundaries, the communication strategies of leading mediators reinforced the *imaginaire* of the kingdom. John of Burgundy, an international prince with diverse interests, promoted a framework of values and institutions that were intrinsically linked to the sovereignty and good rule of the king of France. Even the English were obliged to subscribe to these values when they accepted succession to the crown in 1420. The logics of political communication

[48] Vaughan, *John the Fearless*, 98-102.

and mediation in the fragmented world of later medieval Europe actually worked towards the consolidation of kingdoms.

5. Mediation and Communication in Byzantium before and after 1204: George Akropolites and the case of Serres and Melnik

Byzantine political history is usually framed according to a tripartite periodisation. An 'Early' period starting in the fourth century gave way in the eighth to 'Middle' Byzantium; this was followed by the 'Late' phase around the time of fall of the empire's capital city, Constantinople, to the army of the Fourth Crusade in 1204. During this 'Late' period, which lasted until the Ottoman conquests of the mid-fifteenth century, the Byzantines, in the shape of the regime led by Palaiologan dynasty, regained Constantinople but were never able to restore a unitary Byzantine empire, facing instead a series of regional rivals from among Latin, Serb, Bulgarian, Turkish and even other Byzantine rulers.[49] The essentially fragmented nature of the post-1204 Byzantine space is widely recognised in current scholarship, and there has been considerable interest in the ways in which both the Palaiologoi and their rivals legitimised their claims to regional hegemony.[50] Far less, however, is known about local

[49] Stephen Reinart, 'Fragmentation', *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, ed. Cyril Mango (Oxford, 2002), pp. 248-283. Foremost among the other 'Byzantine' powers were the rulers of Trebizond in eastern Anatolia and of Epiros in the western Balkans; these non-Constantinopolitan regimes often referred to themselves in imperial terms.

[50] E.g. for the Palaiologoi: Ruth Macrides, 'The New Constantine and the New Constantinople', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6 (1980), pp. 13-41; Alice-Mary Talbot, 'The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993),

responses to those legitimising enterprises or about the roles, or even the existence, of mediators who may have connected would-be hegemons to indivduals and communitiesin the localities. In this context, the thirteenth-century history of the Constantinopolitan bureaucrat George Akropolites is of particular interest. Akropolites himself was a spin-doctor for the Palaiologoi who seized power in Constantinople in 1261. This was a regime which needed legitimising, not simply because the Byzantines had been out of power in Constantinople for more than half a century, but because the emperor himself, Michael VIII, was a usurper.[51] Akropolites' is a eulogistic account which describes how some of those Byzantines who fled Constantinople after the Fourth Crusade in 1204 initially set up camp in Nicaea in western Anatolia and then went on to fight valiantly against regional rivals. It charts Michael VIII's rise to power in the 1250s and his eventual triumphal entry into Constantinople in 1261. But while legitimation may be integral to Akropolites' text, his account also makes it clear that to impose any kind of imperial authority in erstwhile Byzantine provinces, the emperors based at Nicaea were required to engage in complex processes of negotiation with a multitude of local power-brokers. One particularly revealing episode concerns the emperor John III Vatatzes (1222-54), and his campaign in Macedonia, in the Balkans, in 1246 in territory that

243-61; for the Grand Komnenoi of Trebizond: Anthony Eastmond, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium. Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond* (Aldershot, 2004); Teresa Shawcross, 'Conquest Legitimised: The Making of a Byzantine Emperor in Crusader Constantinople (1204-1261)', in Jonathan Harris, Catherine Holmes and Eugenia Russell (eds.), *Byzantines, Latins and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World after 1150* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 181-220.

[51] Ruth Macrides, *George Akropolites: The History: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford, 2007), introduction, esp. pp. 64-5.

was contested between the Nicaeans, the Bulgarian rulers, and a rival Byzantine regime based further west in Epiros. Akropolites appears to have been present on the expedition and very closely involved in the complex processes of consultation and the multiple mediations by which regional power was negotiated.[52]

The facts of the story according to Akropolites are as follows. On learning of the death of the Bulgarian child tsar Kaloman from the Bulgarian commander at Ochrid, John began to ponder an attack on the city of Serres, then held by the Bulgarians. His associates, including several leading generals and noblemen, were divided in their opinion, given that John's own forces were far from a full-scale field army and Serres was a well-fortified city; despite those caveats, some felt that even if an attack failed, aggressive action could be a way of opening a negotiating position with the Bulgarians. Following a Byzantine assault on the unfortified lower city, the Bulgarian commander, one Dragotas, surrendered Serres in return for a purple cloak and gold coins; he also offered to surrender the neighbouring fortress town of Melnik then governed by another Bulgarian commander, Litovoes. With Litovoes seriously ill, Dragotas tried to persuade a leading townsman in Melnik, Nicholas Manglavites, to effect a surrender to the Byzantines, but Nicholas was unable to do this until he had called an assembly of 500 fellow townsmen, described as 'well turned-out and honourable', some of whom were enrolled in the army (whose army is unspecified). This group then appears to have entered into negotiations with the Byzantines during which a chrysobull (imperial charter) was produced in response to the requests of the townspeople. Following the eventual surrender of Melnik, more towns appear to have gone over without blood being spilled; although no details are provided about those changes in loyalty, we may assume that just as

[52] George Akropolites, *Opera I, II*, ed. A. Heisenberg (Leipzig, 1903); repr. with corrections P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1978), chs. 43-44; trans. in Macrides, *Akropolites*, pp. 225-35.

many participants and intermediaries were involved as in the case of Melnik. Following these events, the Byzantines negotiated a new treaty with the Bulgarians, in some ways then vindicating the boldness that John had displayed at the start. But the more important point to register is how far the authority of those regional hegemons, on whom historians usually focus, depended on the piecemeal transaction of relationships with far more localised individuals and groups with striking degrees of political leverage.

That local intermediaries exercised surprising degrees of power is in itself a line of enquiry worth investigating in other contexts across the Aegean world in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. But the case study outlined above may also indicate that the power of local intermediaries was not simply a product of a post-1204 fragmented political landscape, but also characterised the pre-1204 Byzantine world as well, during centuries that have usually been regarded as the heyday of a centralised, unitary empire, in which an emperor permanently resident in Constantinople administered a far-flung territorial state characterised by a salaried civil and military bureaucracy. Some characters from the Serres and Melnik case study, such as Litovoes and Manglavites, for instance, had longstanding family links with this region of the Balkans, going back in the case of Litovoes to the eleventh century.[53] Indeed, we know that a much earlier emperor, Basil II (976-1025), usually regarded as the epitome of a centralising autocrat, actually engaged in rather similar negotiating processes during many years of warfare with Bulgarians in the same arc of Macedonian towns stretching from Ochrid in the north-west to Melnik and Serres further south. These negotiations were typified by an almost constant to-ing and fro-ing of local commanders between the Byzantine and Bulgarian 'sides', as well as key members of this local elite acting

[53] *Ibid.,* p.232.

as political go-betweens. [54] Roughly contemporaneous instances of powerful local intermediaries can also be traced on other frontiers, including in northern Syria, Mesopotamia and Armenia around 1000 in a period of imperial expansion, when a series of local chronicles in a variety of languages, supported by evidence from bilingual seals struck by regional officials, demonstrate the degree to which local families who had once 'served' rival Arab or Armenian local potentates became the agents of Byzantine power on the ground; a context of collaboration between metropolitan authority and provincial elites which parallels the experiences of many other empires regardless of period.[55] A rather similar picture has been suggested for southern Italy around 1000 too.[56]

Arguments about local agency and mediation provoke several important questions. One is whether we need to reconsider the classic periodisations of Byzantine political history, especially the contrast between a unitary and centralised pre-1204 empire and a chaotic and fragmented 'late' state. Another is what we mean by the term 'empire' that is so usually and often casually attributed to Byzantium. Is the empire in the instances explored here simply a Cheshire cat: all smile and no substance? Was there anything more to Byzantine political history than seriously distorting imperial image-making; a self-perpetuating court in Constantinople peopled by a tiny group of self-aggrandising officials all trying to climb the greasy pole; and a set of equally self-interested and self-perpetuating local elites? Was there

[54] Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 105-8, 417-28; Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 4 for further 11th *c*. evidence.

[55] Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 368-91.

[56] Vera von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien vom 9. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1967), pp. 103, 109-11, 128-9.

anything to tie all this together aside from the occasional coincidence of self-interests, moments when all parties had something to gain from each other?

Such pessimistic reductionism may be premature, particularly if we complement our consideration of mediation with some thinking about communication. Or to put it another way, if we think about the common ideas and practices that imperial elites, local communities and mediators may have shared; about how it was that they knew about any commonalities; and about how it was that they could overcome differences in order to protect or promote their own interests. As the historiographical section of this chapter suggests, the question of how the politically significant communicated with each other in Byzantium, particularly outside the highest imperial court, administrative and ecclesiastical circles, is not a topic which has received much attention. It may be that with the exception of Egypt in the early Byzantine centuries, where records on papyrus and other materials such as clay *ostraka* (pot sherds) have survived as a result of a unique climate, it is impossible to trace the letter-writing activities of Byzantines outside the central elite; but as yet we do not know that for sure, because no-one has tried to do it.[57] Another potentially exciting but under-utilised source base for the recovery of patterns of communications in Byzantium are lead seals which were struck and attached to both private and public documents by the politically active throughout Byzantine society, especially in the centuries before 1200. Most scholarly attention has focused on using the data on these inscribed objects to taxonomise official hierarchies, but as one study of tenth- and eleventh-century sigillographical material found at Preslav in eastern Bulgaria suggests, lead seals can help us trace networks through which those involved in central government, the regions, and locations beyond the empire

[57] Stratis Papaioannou, 'Letter-writing', in (ed.) Paul Stephenson, *The Byzantine World* (London and New York, 2010), p. 117, n. 17.

communicated, and thus could be a way into identifying the activities of mediators and processes of mediation.[58] Moreover, as Hilde De Weerdt shows in the Chinese case, there historians have bountiful evidence to show how the popular practice of collating of notebooks (*biji*) had the capacity to unite in a shared political culture those deeply involved in imperial administration and those who were not. [59] The evidence for similar processes in Byzantium is far more limited, but it is striking that in the case of the eleventh-century *Book of Advice and Admonitions* produced by Kekaumenos - a florilegium of episodes, examples and gnomic sayings- we have a rather striking instance of a provincial figure from central Greece, who in a very rudimentary Greek register was, nonetheless, interested in similar political questions, events, models and behaviours as more high-profile contemporary figures associated with imperial administration in Constantinople.[60]

If such materials are a way into thinking about what tied political behaviour together across the Byzantine space, then it can be tempting to assume that such communication was generated from Constantinople outwards: thus Kekaumenos copied the examples set by

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[58] On circulation: Jean-Claude Cheynet, and Cécile Morrisson, 'Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux', in Nikolaos Oikonomides (ed.), *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*, 1 (Washington, D.C., 1990), pp. 105-31; for Preslav, Peter Doimi de Frankopan, 'The Workings of the Byzantine Provincial Administration in the 10th-12th Centuries: the Example of Preslav', *Byzantion* 71 (2001), pp. 73-9.

[59] Hilde De Weerdt, *Information, Territory and Networks. The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), esp. ch. 6.

[60] Charlotte Roueché, 'The Literary Background of Kekaumenos,' in Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring (eds.), *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden, 2002), esp. 128-36.

higher profile figures associated with the imperial centre. The same case could be made for the very conspicuous overlaps between history-writing traditions in Greek with those in neighbouring traditions and languages: in this case, historians working in Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, Slavonic and Latin, often borrowed from histories in Greek, even when they were in fact hostile to the imperial regime in Constantinople; something which itself points to a circulation and recycling of such texts and the sharing of political ideas and models well beyond the usually-assumed restricted readership of highly trained bureaucrats in Constantinople. But such a Constantinople-centric reading may be overly conservative, and instead we may get closer to how political communication operated in the Byzantine space if we sideline centre-out readings and think instead about more organic and multi-directional contacts. There is much more work to be done on how such multiple flows may have worked, but as the Serres and Melnik negotiations of 1246 described above demonstrate, political communication in Byzantium often involved the continuous interplay of oral and written forms the legitimacy of which were accepted by all sides. In this instance the group of military men who met to advise the emperor on his preferred strategy and the assemblies of townsmen who gathered to discuss the terms on which they were willing to surrender point to oral modes of communication. But written documents were equally integral to the processes by which transfers of loyalties were effected, including the chrysobull which confirmed the requests that the townsmen had made and, one assumes, the eventual treaty drawn up with the Bulgarians. Vital intermediaries in both oral and written modes were the drafters of chrysobulls and treaties, including quite possibly bureaucrats such as Akropolites himself, but also the ambassadors who shuttled between the relevant parties. If those ambassadors conveyed messages to recipients in the ways that have been charted for the sending and receipt of letters written by elite figures in Byzantium, then we can assume that their delivery of tangible documents was embedded in a much more elaborate performance that could

involve the passing on of oral messages and giving of tangible gifts. [61] Indeed the Serres and Melnik example provides some evidence of this wider spectrum of communicative media and messages when we are told that Dragotas, one of the central negotiating figures, was the recipient of precious materials and coins.

6. Implications, Comparisons and Conclusions

We have argued in this chapter that mediation and communication are powerful lenses through which to study the practice of politics in large parts of medieval Eurasia, especially from the eleventh century onwards. Influenced by strikingly similar impulses in our different regional historiographies, we have examined the ways in which mediation and communication in three medieval contexts connected the actions, interests and expectations of individuals and communities in the localities to the creation, maintenance and critique of high 'public' power. Our stress throughout has been on politics as process rather than on institutional outcomes or trajectories, although as we hinted at the outset and as we will elaborate more fully now, a focus on process does not necessarily preclude thinking about structures. If anything it focuses our attention more fully on the degree to which structures, including the institutions and ideologies of the 'state', are the products of multi-directional political relationships which are forged in real-time contexts but which may also refer to eternal abstractions such as 'the public good'. These are relationships in which material

[61] Margaret Mullett, 'Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium', in Rosemary McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 156-85.

interests are pursued in creative tension with ideas; in which centres become localities and localities centres; and in which the tangible and the intangible are inextricably connected, particularly when we consider the symbiosis of medium and message in political communication. We do not claim that the actual political structures that were produced in practice by the multidirectional politics we describe here were strikingly similar in Song China, late medieval France or Byzantium. The structures of power in all three polities were shaped not just by mediation and political communication alone but by a host of other interwoven variables all of which differed at a regional level, including: geography, formal mechanisms for the extraction and distribution of resources, and society-specific thinking about how political life should -ideally- be organised. These are variables that a formal and sustained comparison of political structures in the three polities under consideration would need to take into account. But the point of this chapter is not to produce a formal comparison of political structures in medieval China, France and Byzantium, but instead to demonstrate how setting these three examples alongside each other can reveal patterns of mediation and communication that were characteristic of political life across medieval Eurasia and plausibly in other medieval societies too.

The political societies that we have analysed in this chapter are to varying degrees characterised by gaps between the imagined structures of power that were often formalised in high power/'state' institutions, ceremonial, and ideologies (including those of an imperial or universal sort), and the social and political realities that habitually involved the interplay of official structures and less formal networks of kin, clientage, and neighbourhood. 'Formal' written sources generated by ruling authorities tend either to overlook this gap or present it as

various forms of ignorance, corruption, crime, or even as rebellion and treason.[62] But, as we have seen in these examples, the formal structures associated with high public power and their associated ideologies also permitted, or invited, this kind of interplay and power-sharing in a host of ways, by accepting, tacitly or openly, that powerful figures of all sorts - whether locally-based, those with more regional heft, or those very closely associated with the high power regime - could act as mediators with the ruled. These forms of mediation took a variety of forms depending on the context in question. Such figures could act as representatives in encounters with high power or state authority, most notably in assemblies in the western European setting, but with some potential parallels in the town meetings hinted at in Byzantine contexts and in the student demonstrations in Song China. In a somewhat similar way, they could act as mediators for those individuals and communities among the ruled who wished to communicate with high powers, as the activities of lawyers, petitioners or petition-helpers visible in the three settings in this chapter demonstrate. They could also be the local or regional agents of high power, channelling onwards official endowments and appointments to the governed). These agents and others could also represent themselves as the upholders of the true meaning of official ideologies that were, in their view, insufficiently practised (or completely ignored) by current power holders, as in the cases of the Song students defending territorial integrity and dynastic loyalty and the loyal opposition of the

[62] Although note recent work on fifteenth-century Egypt which suggests the reverse: that charges of corruption and crime are also made by those with alternative forms of power who feared the incursion and growth of a Mamluk state in that period (Jo Van Steenbergen, Patrick Wing and Kristof D'hulster, 'The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate? State Formation and the History of Fifteenth Century Egypt and Syria', *History Compass* 14 (2016) p. 566).

supporters of the duke of Burgundy. Other mediatory activities might include participation in alternative legitimating ideologies and cultural practices that enjoyed wide social currency but which were not focused on the holders of high power and their institutional structures and ideological frameworks. Such alternatives could take the form of devotional practices, martial cultures, and neighbourhood or other more locality-based social activities, as in the case of the ritualised exchanges of poetry and courtly-love play noted among princes, nobles and townsmen in northern France, or in the case of the participation of leading families in local cults, local defence and community compacts in Song China. The involvement of powerful mediators made such alternatives potentially useful resources or indirect channels of communication for those with hegemonic claims.

One of the most important implications of this perceptible gap between the imaginary and practice in politics and of the importance of mediators in bridging that gap is that we should be wary of engaging in a global political history of the Middle Ages which simply looks to compare or connect the very large scale units of government, formal institutions, or ideological formulations presented in official, high power sources. Due consideration must also be paid to the activities, interests and ideas of receiving communities and individuals, and to the processes of mediation which put the ruled into a relationship with those who claimed to rule. To put it another way, our three settings suggest that those claiming high power required mediation, communication and interaction just as much as any top-down deployment of the military, bureaucratic and fiscal tools more usually associated with regime-building. Without some understanding of the process dimension to politics we cannot really gauge how these regime-building tools were developed and deployed, or when, where and why it was that they could be widely-accepted, long-lasting structures with powerful practical reach rather than abstractions alone. More fundamentally, we need to be aware of

the complex of symbiotic and mediated relationships integral to politics in order to grasp what made for legitimate rule in these medieval contexts. By assimilating processes of mediation in different cultural contexts as we have done here, we have also suggested that states that appear fragmented such as the French kingdom or the Southern Song state may have become more unitary through processes of mediation and political communication and the supposedly united and centralized nature of the Byzantine Empire may need to be re-examined from this perspective.

That said, we should not allow gaps between the formal and the informal, the imaginary and practice, or between rulers and ruled to lead to the assumption that high power, or the 'state', was simply a non-existent fiction. We can see the 'reality' of high power most readily indeed if we keep our focus on mediation and mediators. Thus a capacity to access and influence the local operations of a high power could be valuable to a variety of social actors for a host of different reasons, delivering authority and resources to individuals and groups with mediatory power. It is particularly important to note the paradox that the imagined distinction between high public power and private power was an important part of this alliance of interests: mediators acquired some of their social distinction from the fact that they were, in some sense, recognised agents of that high power.[63] This meant that there were limits to the ways

[63] Noted by Timothy Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics', *The American Political Science Review*, lxxxv (1991), though he overstates the extent to which the state is a mere cover for private power, rather than a public-private partnership, in which each side contributes and receives something. There is an intriguing point along similar lines in Chris Wickham, 'The "Feudal Revolution" and the Origins of

in which mediators configured high power to their own ends – after all, they did not want to lose it, and they did not want it to lose its public qualities, its 'stateness'. That, in turn, reinforced the reflex noted throughout this paper, that mediators extended the reach of high power.[64] This relationship between high power, mediators, and localities may, indeed, be regarded as one of several ways in which high power forms could structure and re-structure social and political relations in the localities, particularly if we think of the relationship between the Song reforms and the commercialisation of the Chinese countryside, or of the synergies between royal taxation, more effective urban governance and more co-ordinated public protest in western European contexts. One might question the degree to which this relationship was to be found across Eurasia throughout the medieval period, or whether it was more temporally and geographically bounded, to be found only in particular environments such as the Song Empire or late medieval western Europe. Was it so true of other more fragmentary, fluid and varied contexts: the tenth-century Islamic world after the Abbasid caliphate broke apart; the Five Dynasties in tenth-century in China; tenth-and eleventh-century Europe following the fracturing of Carolingian power; eleventh-century Iberia after the disintegration of the Umayyad caliphate; eastern Europe and Anatolia following the thirteenth-century Mongol conquests; or the former Byzantine empire after 1204, the setting described here? In these contexts, the mediating powers may have been different but if we turn our focus away from macro-scale, top-down formal institutions of government to a more process-focused analysis, one could argue that such fluid political societies sometimes

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Italian City Communes', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., xxiv (2014): the informal can only exist because of the formal.

[64] On 'reach' see Dudbridge in this volume, although with 'reach' being deployed in a different context.

retained a sense of high power, and even of 'the state', particularly if it was in the interests of mediators between would-be hegemons and local communities to continue to subscribe to the ideas, ceremonial and other formal mechanisms (including taxation systems) of the state. Indeed, an argument developed from a process-focused perspective about continuities of high power even in times of political fragmentation could intersect in productive ways with Victor Lieberman's thesis that early modern polities across Eurasia were built on the foundations of medieval predecessor regimes which 'chartered' (in the sense of authorised) their early modern successors.[65]

But for all that mediators were integral to the creation, maintenance and re-creation of high power, we should not necessarily assume that being a mediator in a medieval context was particularly easy. One of the arguments of this chapter has been that the social use of state power included both public and private elements. This was a processual politics which almost always benefited specific networks connected together by interpersonal ties; but it was also a politics which also involved making appeals to wider and often multiple audiences, including subjects of the high power, groups of officials, perhaps even the hegemon or those close to him or her, and potentially in fragmented polities, rival high powers. This was often a difficult balancing act for mediators, typically involving a complex array of strategies of communication. As the fate of John the Fearless indicated, while mediation and mediators

[65] Victor Lieberman, 'Transcending East—West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Disparate Areas', *Journal of Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997), pp. 463-546; 'Charter State Collapse in Southeast Asia ca. 1250-1400, as a Problem in Regional and World History', *AMH* 116 (2011), pp. 937-963.

were ubiquitous, personal success for even the most powerful figures could not be guaranteed.

As we have seen in this chapter, particularly with reference to the Byzantine case, historians have sometimes struggled to connect the wider world of communication with the means through which high power and even state-structures were extended into a wider society. However, in this chapter, our three settings provide plausible examples of such connections in action in the shape of something we labelled at the outset 'political communication'. As the Song case study indicates, participation in the forms of knowledge and expression associated with imperial service was integral to the identity and social resources of the literate gentry in Chinese history. While that connection could encourage forms of entry-ism by the next tier down – clerks, legal experts – it also encouraged exclusionary action by the literati, thus defining and defending the boundaries of the state. The content of what is communicated in literati political communication also mattered in the sense that dynastic loyalty and territorial integrity became rallying cries that tied these actors, whether or not they exercised official power, firmly to the state. The belief among French historians that society was 'politicised' in the wars of Armagnacs and Burgundians reflects the mass-circulation and mass-promotion of articulate critiques of the political order, but it also provides an explanation for the course of events: there was, in other words, a direct causal connection between the widening culture of political communication and the forms taken by politics in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe. In Byzantium, meanwhile, the existence of a text like the *Book of Advice and Admonitions* demonstrates the importance for local elites of aping the styles and forms of imperial power. European and Chinese history also furnish examples of official texts turning up in far-flung locations and of hybrid texts which simultaneously parade high power authority while also demonstrating adaptation for local use. For example,

in Tang-Song China and in late medieval western Europe, mirrors for princes and city chronicles and gazetteers were genres associated with lay high power rulers and, in the European case, also ecclesiastical; but they were copied, annotated, revised, appropriated and collocated with other texts by distinctly non-high-power readers. Communication thus built political community in different ways in these different contexts, through the articulation of political divisions as well as through the articulation of territorial integrity, and through the creation of horizontal alliances among independent power holders as well as through the manipulation of bureaucratic hierarchy and imperial power.

The evidence furnished by our three settings, however, suggests that we need to be alert to considerable breadth and variety in the media involved in political communication.. The settings we have described were characterised by communicative genres that were inscribed on materials other than paper or parchment: some materials were highly durable, as in the stone which was used by the local opponents of the Chen family to record the ministerial order in their favour; others were far more throw-away: the posters, handbills and petitions of student protestors in China; the petitions, bills, libels and letters of late medieval France; or the lead seals of Byzantine officials, which we know from the archaeological record were constantly reused and re-struck. And, of course, integral to all three contexts was frequent use of the oral mode too: speeches given in assemblies, protests, or meetings of councillors; and perhaps even more strikingly by modes in which oral and written intersected as with the reading out of imperial orders in China and the circulation of speeches in late medieval France. There was also a strong performance dimension of this kind of politics, whether in the form of speaking or listening in an assembly, making a student protest or receiving honorific gifts of cloth and coins, as in the examples from thirteenth-century Byzantium. And

as we have seen, material goods could be integral to political communication, not just high monetary value items, but also materials bearing images or mottos which transmitted important political messages or confirmed loyalties, as in the badges worn by the different parties in the Armagnac: Burgundian struggle or the distinctive ritual dress and stern comportment associated with Neo-Confucian scholar-officials. But perhaps more important than charting the nature, variety or durability of particular materials is the recognition that whether throw-away or permanent such materials were widely used and accepted parts of what it meant for contemporaries to engage in political communication. They were also integral elements of a strongly performative political practice. They were in that sense very durable media.

A host of further questions is raised by this study of medieval politics in a trans-regional context. Probably the most significant in the context of the 'global Middle Ages' asks how far conclusions derived from three Eurasian historiographies and settings travel. Do they resonate with interpretations of political life in medieval contexts elsewhere in Eurasia and beyond? This is a complex question, to which we give only a preliminary answer, based for the most part on developments in other regional historiographies. It is, for instance, clear that the scholarly focus on politics as process and on the symbiosis of formal-public and private-informal power we chart here has some striking parallels in recent research on other Eurasian political societies, including Muslim polities in the post-Abbasid era. Thus, current thinking on Egypt after 1250 describes the ways in which an apparently fluid, unstable and multi-agent form of politics coexisted with longer-term processes of broader political consolidation,

giving rise ultimately in the fifteenth century to the formation of a Mamluk state.[66] There are striking similarities elsewhere too. As long ago as 1983, Elizabeth Brumfiel argued that a distinct Aztec state emerged in the fifteenth century not simply as a result of the governing regime's developing bureaucratic structures and military force but also because of the competing interests of multiple actors within the political society of the Aztecs and their neighbours. She noted the activities, priorities and loyalties of a series of regionally powerful figures who bear strong resemblance to the mediators identified in this chapter.[67]

Brumfiel's analysis drew on Aztec oral and pictorial historiographical traditions, some of which were recorded in written narrative form after the Spanish conquests of the early sixteenth century.[68] Of course, not all historical contexts have archival or historiographical traditions from which to recover forms of mediation or political communication. But this need not be an insuperable problem. Certainly, without such documentation it may be difficult to produce the sorts of chronological histories of the dynasties, institutional forms

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[66] Van Steenbergen, Wing and D'hulster, 'Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?' pp. 560-69.

[67] Elizabeth M. Brumfiel , 'Aztec State Making: Ecology, Structure, and the Origin of the State'
American Anthropologist, New Series, 85 (1983), pp. 261-284.

[68] Brumfiel, 'Aztec State Making', p. 266. On pictorial books pre- and post-Spanish conquest see E.Hill Boone, 'Pictorial Documents and Visual Thinking in Postconquest Mexico', in Elizabeth Hill Boone and Tom Cummins, *Native Traditions in the Post-Conquest World* (Washington, DC, 1998), pp. 149-199; see also Whittow in this volume, pp. XX.

and state-like outcomes that were once considered synonymous and co-terminous with the study of politics, but shifts in research interests in recent decades among scholars working on pre-modern contexts open the prospect of collaboration on the history of medieval politics at a planetary level. This optimism springs from the fact that archaeologists and historians of regions with few written records now advance strongly processual arguments about the social production of power on the basis of an overwhelmingly or exclusively material record, including the human use of landscape.[69] Such research often highlights the collective, consensual, and creative rather than the coercive and imposed nature of power, stressing the significance of ritual practices and alliance-building for the benefit of whole communities rather than of rulers alone. Of particular significance are recent attempts by African archaeologists to integrate practice-based perspectives on social power together with a focus on the 'operations of the state', an enterprise akin to the approach in this chapter. According to this research, the crucial element in the integration of social power and the state in the African case was the frequency of publicly performed collective ritual actions, both sacred and secular, from which legitimate authority might be 'granted by subjects rather than imposed or created by a particular regime'. [70] Clearly it is important not to overdraw parallels, and it may be that scholars of some Eurasian societies with particularly extensive extant archives of written documents or substantial historical narratives will more frequently be able to drill down into a more detailed examination of a particular example of political

[69] For arguments about the use of landscape for ritual and memorialising purposess in the Great Lakes region of East Africa see Matthew I.J. Davies, 'Stone Cairns across Eastern Africa: a Critical Review', *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 48 (2013) 218-240.

[70] Jeffrey B. Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, 'Authorisation and the Process of Power: The View from African Archaeology', *Journal of World Prehistory* 23(2010), pp. 177-193.

process in action at a particular moment. But, to argue that politics was about process, mediation, and multi-participant and multi-directional communication does not necessarily require minute-by-minute, year-by-year or even decade-by-decade written testimony. Just as important, perhaps even more so, are the wider interpretative frameworks within which that intensity of written detail makes sense. In that sense interpretations from societies in which the material evidence is pre-eminent may be immensely valuable to historians of all medieval contexts. With reference to the themes in this chapter, it is particularly striking that Africanists interested in creative, collective power refer to the ruler's principal role as that of 'symbolic mediator' whom contemporaries expected to regenerate society. We hint at this contemporary understanding of mediation in our comments on kings and popes in western Europe, but clearly this is an insight which could be taken much further in the study of mediation and communication across the three settings that we have described and further afield as well.[71]

There is, therefore, collaborative work to do if we wish to move towards a global history of politics in the medieval centuries. We would certainly not wish to exclude the study of institutions, outcomes and even civilisations from that global history. But we would argue on the basis of the materials presented here that there is room for a politics-as-practice dimension. Although our materials have been drawn primarily from reasonably intensively governed parts of Eurasia with strong traditions of the production of written evidence, our focus on a processual forms of politics in which connection, mediation and communication

[71] For some introductory remarks about the inseparable nature of the political and social in Chinese political culture and the traditional role of king as intermediary see the review article by Pamela Kyle Crossley, 'The Rulerships of China', *AMH* 97 (1992), p. 1477.

were characteristic features has the potential to include contexts from outside Eurasia, and to be driven, shaped and challenged by non-Eurasian-centred scholarship. And it is that historiographical dimension that we stress at the end. A rich and textured global history of medieval politics can emerge if regional specialists work together, picking up resonances between their historiographies and evidence bases as well as detecting significant differences.