



University of  
Zurich<sup>UZH</sup>

University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe  
History Department  
Kompetenzzentrum "Zürcher Mediävistik"



# The Gender of Authority

Celibate and Childless Men in Power:  
Ruling Bishops and Ruling Eunuchs, 400–1800

Conference  
Zurich, August 28<sup>th</sup>–30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

# Conference Outline

From antiquity to modernity, pre-modern ruling systems in different parts of the world often shared a common feature: the participation of men who were either physically unable or normatively forbidden to father children. On the one hand, there were the childless eunuchs who fulfilled a variety of functions at courts in the Middle East, Byzantium and China; they were much more than simply guardians of the harem. Due to their specific “gender”, the eunuchs formed an integral part of the different ruling systems; indeed, they held a central position in court politics, and their loyalty towards the reigning dynasty was not conditional on nepotism or favouritism towards their family, since they were childless. On the other hand, we have the ruling priests: the celibate bishops both in the Byzantine Empire and Latin Europe. Whereas the Eastern Church tolerated eunuchs as priests, the Western Church demanded that a priest was not castrated, and that instead he needed to have the willpower and resolve to remain celibate. Although this rule of celibacy was far from being followed thoroughly by men of the cloth, celibacy was a central feature of the ideal priest long before the reform movements of the eleventh and twelfth century. Bishops, who formed an integral part of the ruling elites in both the Western and Eastern Church were subject to the same rules surrounding celibacy, and were prevented from fathering legitimate children. It is also noteworthy that not just bishops but eunuchs were also linked to specific forms of sacredness: for example, the eunuchs guarding the prophet’s grave in Medina from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, or the involvement of eunuchs in the sacred imamate in Fatimid history.

Despite some fundamental differences between ruling bishops and eunuchs (nobility versus slavery, church versus military, non-castration versus castration etc.) it is a striking feature of pre-modern ruling systems that such men, including those who were childless or fathered illegitimate offspring, were often integrated into the elite. Without aiming at a strict comparison between the two, this conference wants to take this phenomenon as a starting point in order to address the following questions:

- (1) What were the political and economical consequences of integrating men who were childless or without any legitimate children into the ruling elites and the respective networks of family and kinship?
- (2) If we take the definition of gender by R. Connell in her classic study on *Masculinities* (Gender as a social practice in relation to the “reproductive arena”), we can expect specific gender conceptions for both priests and eunuchs. How should we view these men: as a third gender; a hybrid gender; or as an asexual gender? Were they always gendered in a specific way or only in certain contexts or environments? And how did the actors perceive their own role in this respect? Is gender still “a useful tool of historical analysis” (Joan Scott) even, or should we adopt different approaches?
- (3) What was the relationship between these men and a divinely legitimized rule in respect to sacredness?

In asking these questions, this conference aims to shed light on the culture of political rule in a period before a strict biological dichotomy of the sexes might be said to have existed. We hope that the ensuing discussion and debate will open up new perspectives on the connections, parallels and peculiarities that can be discovered between politics and gender on a pre-modern global level. The papers will explore these themes within the Middle East, the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity and Byzantium, Latin Europe, China, and Southern Asia.

*Almut Höfert, Matthew Mesley, and Serena Tolino*

# Program

Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2013

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14:00–14:30 Coffee/Registration

14:30–14:40 Welcome

14:40–16:10 **Eunuchs in Late Antiquity and Byzantium**

Chair: Almut Höfert

Mathew Kuefler (San Diego State University)

*Eunuchs by Will, not Necessity: Symbolic Castration in Late Antiquity*

Shaun Tougher (University of Cardiff)

*Eunuchs of the Byzantine Court: Family, Gender and Power*

16:10–16:40 Coffee

16:40–18:10 **Eunuchs in the Middle East (1)**

Chair: Almut Höfert

Nadia el-Cheikh (American University in Beirut)

*Guarding the Harem, Protecting the State: The Roles of Eunuchs in a Fourth/Tenth Century Abbasid Court*

Serena Tolino (University of Zürich)

*Eunuchs in the Fatimid Empire: an Account of their Role and the Construction of their Masculinities*

19:30 Dinner at Palmenhof (by invitation)

# Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2013

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9:00–10:30 **Eunuchs in the Middle East (2)**

Chair: Bettina Dennerlein (University of Zürich)

Hugh Kennedy (SOAS London)

*Eunuchs as Military and Political Actors in the Islamic Middle East  
c. 800–1000 CE: “the case of Mu’nis al-Muzaffar”*

Hans Peter Pökel (FU Berlin)

*Eunuchs as Mixed Gender in the Middle East?*

10:30–11:00 Coffee

11:00–12:30 **Ottoman Eunuchs**

Chair: Bettina Dennerlein

Metin Kunt (Sabanci University)

*Households of Ottoman Palace Eunuchs*

Ezgi Dikici (Independent Scholar)

*Shades of Gender: The Construction of White Eunuch and Black Eunuch  
Identities at the Ottoman Court*

12:30–14:00 Lunch

14:00–15:30 **Bishops in Medieval Europe: Family and Networks**

Chair: Simon Teuscher (University of Zürich)

Julia Barrow (University of Leeds)

*The Bishop as Uncle, 600–1100*

Stephen Marritt (University of Glasgow)

*Favourite Uncles: Celibacy, Bishops and Archdeacons and Regional and  
Local Property and Power in Twelfth-Century England*

15:30–16:00 Coffee

16:00–16:50 Chair: Simon Teuscher

Rachel Stone (King's College, London)

*Spiritual Heirs and Families: Episcopal Relatives in Early Medieval Francia*

17:30 Transfer to Lake Zürich

18:00–18:15 Transfer by boat from Zürich Bürkliplatz to Wollishofen

An opportunity to swim in the Lake at Wollishofen (weather permitting)

19:15 Dinner at the Rote Fabrik (by invitation)

## Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> August 2013

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9:30–11:00 **Bishops in Medieval Europe: The Practice of Celibacy**

Chair: N.N.

Matthew Mesley (University of Zürich)

*Between Tradition and Novelty: Bishops, Celibacy and the Boundaries of Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe*

Christof Rolker (University of Konstanz)

*Most Manly Men: Clerical Masculinities in Medieval Law and Medicine (12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*

11:00–11:30 Coffee

11:30–13:00 **Eunuchs in Premodern China**

Chair: Angelika Malinar (University of Zürich)

Jennifer Jay (University of Alberta)

*Competing Masculinities and Gender Shift: Eunuchs Against Officials in Confucian China*

Michael Höckelmann (University of Münster)

*Celibate, but not Childless – Eunuch Dynasticism in Medieval China*

13:00–14:30    Lunch

14:30–16:00    **Gender and Authority in Early Modern and Modern South Asia**

Chair: Angelika Malinar

Ruby Lal (Emory University, Atlanta)

*Eunuchs and an Empress in Mughal India: Liminality and Networks of Authority*

Jessica Hinchy (Australian National University)

*Masculinity, Kinship-Making and Slavery: Explaining the Political Power of the Khwajasarai of North India*

16:00–16:30    Coffee

16:30–17:20    Shane Gannon (Mont Royal University, Calgary)

*Sliding from Authority to Marginality: Tracking the Transition from Pre-Modern 'Eunuchs' to Modern Hijras in South Asia*

17:20–17:30    Short Break

17:30–18:30    Conclusion

Concluding Remarks: Antje Flüchter (University of Heidelberg/Oslo)

Final Discussion

20:00            Dinner at Zum Alten Löwen (by invitation)

# General Information

<b>Location</b>	University of Zurich Room KO2 F-152 Karl Schmid-Strasse 4 CH-8006 Zurich  Same entrance as “Zoologisches/Paläontologisches Museum”
<b>Organizers</b>	Prof. Dr. Almut Höfert, Dr. Matthew Mesley, and Dr. Serena Tolino
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<b>Internet</b>	For further information and any last minute changes please refer to: <a href="http://tiny.uzh.ch/37">http://tiny.uzh.ch/37</a>

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