

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. 662pp. \$45.00. ISBN 0-226-10921-6.

William Clark's *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* is a history of the university from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century; it also serves as a stimulating reflection on modern academia and the nature, role and purpose of academics and their institutions. Consider some features of contemporary (British) academia: the importance of administration; the 'publish or perish' mentality; the prominence of forms, tables and lists in the close monitoring of students, academics and institutions; modular degree structures; the importance of the doctoral thesis for entrance into academic careers; RAEs and QAAs. How far can they be regarded as recent developments owing much to the specific social, cultural and political context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? And how do they relate to enduring traditions, such as degree titles, academic titles, academic dress, ceremonies and rites? As Clark demonstrates, the modern research university, underpinned by rationality and a strong bureaucratic apparatus, is not a recent phenomenon, but rather has its origins in the Enlightenment and more particularly in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany (or the 'Germanies' as Clark labels them). And Clark also offers insights into how and why various traditional features of academia survived the modernizing process.

Clark's overall thesis is that the traditional university as it had existed since the medieval period came under increasing scrutiny and pressure to change from the bureaucratizing impulses of the Protestant German lands of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The traditional university was characterized by, among other things, an oral rather than written culture (notably in the form of the disputation), by a suspicion of originality and a conservative pedagogy, by appointments depending on patronage and social and family connections rather than on meritocracy, and by an institutional culture that (to modern eyes) resembles monasticism. In Germany, Enlightenment cameralism (as expounded most notably by Johan Justi), with its accompanying bureaucratic and administrative initiatives, sought to transform the role of universities. Clark's thorough analysis of archive material demonstrates the success of the cameralist ideal ('the well-ordered police state' as it has been dubbed) in this endeavour. Ministries increasingly oversaw academic matters, gathering detailed reports on professors, fellows, and lecture programmes, instituting policy to reform teaching, and scrutinizing and often interfering in academic appointments. The changing nature of academic appointments is especially telling: ministries began

to insist on a minimum number of publications as a prerequisite for appointment, came to demand that these publications were peer-reviewed, and kept dossiers recording an individual's abilities and reputation as a teacher and scholar. This was a major overhaul of the traditional system in which the rationale behind appointments and career progression was determined by hierarchies based on longevity, family connection, and patronage. In the traditional system, an individual's private persona mattered: by the late eighteenth century, only his public persona as an academic mattered, at least in theory. As Clark notes, this separation of public and private was one of the distinguishing features of bureaucratization. Academic appointments are but one instance of the rationalizing process stemming both from ministries and markets, and which had the effect of commodifying academics.

Perhaps the most interesting area of Clark's book is his account of how academics responded to this commodifying trend. Far from simply becoming cogs in the machine of rationality and obedient servants of the ministries and the bureaucrats, academics managed to shape the new reality in a way that generated what Clark terms academic charisma and which frequently consisted of reshaping traditional academic elements. Perhaps the best example (and one that Clark himself regards as exemplary) concerns the doctoral dissertation. He traces the emergence of the doctoral dissertation in Enlightenment Germany: its replacement of the published disputation (which was as likely to have been written by the teacher as the student), its standardization of academic achievement that avoided the complex (and fiercely fought over) hierarchies of the traditional academic faculties, and its status as a fundamental basis for the academic career. The doctorate became one of the bedrocks of rationality. But it also created the space for originality, for the forging of reputation and fame; and in the culture of nineteenth-century Romanticism and its celebration of the individual genius, this aspect of the doctoral thesis became pronounced. The doctoral dissertation combined both the process of rationalization and the emerging importance attached to originality and reputation.

Charisma is, nevertheless, a slippery notion. While such things as originality, pedagogical reputation, publications, and so on, contributed to it, it is not always clear how it was generated. Clark adopts a Weberian analysis of charisma, while acknowledging that scholarly disagreement persists over exactly what Weber meant on the subject. This may partly explain why *Academic Charisma* loses focus in an account of academic fame, reputation, rumour and gossip that encompasses discussion of Plato, Nietzsche, Freud, Madame de Staël, and Marshall McLuhan, among others. Much of this section of the book appears somewhat fragmentary, though a promising starting-point for further work. Gossip, for example, is clearly significant for any account of the generation of academic charisma, but, as Clark notes, we are lacking a proper history of the topic.

In other ways too, *Academic Charisma* invites extensive further research. A series of microhistories make up the overall argument – on such things as the published lecture programme, the examination, the library catalogue, ministerial visitations to universities, and the already mentioned doctoral thesis – which taken together provide a compelling account of the importance of cameralism in transforming the university in Protestant Germany. In addition, various counterpoints to the thesis are presented, though few among the Protestant German universities themselves; rather,

Austrian universities, Jesuit colleges, and, most prominently, Oxbridge, provide contrasting stories. Ultimately, in Clark's view, German cameralism succeeded in establishing the modern research university, and extensively influenced academic developments elsewhere. A brief survey of the history of British, French and American universities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries hints at this influence, which either stemmed from the desire to imitate (in the case of American universities) or the fear of being surpassed by Germany militarily, intellectually and technologically (in the cases of France and Britain). Plausible as this argument is, further research is required to assess the centrality of cameralist influences in the history of the modern university.

Similarly, Clark's thesis may well provide a fruitful basis for the earlier history of the university. For the student of the Renaissance university, for example, there is little new here; Italian and Dutch universities are barely mentioned at all, and the brief treatment of the Renaissance simply outlines various features of university life that place the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century university firmly within traditional academia. Clark recognizes, however, that the humanists, although working outside academia, in some ways prefigured the nineteenth-century academic, in their embodiment of charisma and their service to rulers and the powerful. It would clearly be an interesting exercise exploring Renaissance humanism more thoroughly in light of the central role charisma plays in Clark's argument.

Academic Charisma provides, therefore, a fascinating and persuasive (and often witty) assessment of the central role of German cameralism in the emergence of the modern research university, within an account based less on intellectual than on political, economic and bureaucratic developments. Moreover, it offers a fresh perspective for future research on the early modern university, and it is a history of considerable relevance for our understanding of contemporary academia.

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Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong et al., *Bellini and The East*. London: National Gallery Company Limited (distributed by Yale University Press), 2005. v + 144pp. 9 black and white illustrations, 78 colour plates. £16.95. ISBN 1-85709-376-3.

This exhibition brought together the works believed to have been executed by Gentile Bellini after his arrival in Constantinople in late 1479, following the declaration of peace between the Ottoman Empire and Venice. The beautifully produced catalogue, the result of an inspired collaboration between The National Gallery, London, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, exemplifies how instructive a precise and sensitive mapping of cross-cultural exchange can be. In both longer essays and shorter catalogue entries, the eight contributors address the various identities of Venetian art's 'east' – Byzantine Greece, Ottoman Turkey, Mamluk Egypt, and Syria – and they allude at the same time, too, to the larger picture of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures in the eastern Mediterranean and their relations with Venice's trade routes to North Africa and the Levant.