



BOOK REVIEWS

## Richard Ansell, *Complete gentlemen: Educational travel and family strategy 1650–1750*

(The British Academy, Oxford University Press, 2022). Pages viii + 294 + illustration 9. £75.00 hardback.

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If the ‘Grand Tour’ did not exist, has it been necessary for historians to invent it? Richard Ansell’s incisive and persuasive study of education and elite travel does not quite go that far, but it does suggest that historians have been too quick to parcel up the diversity of experiences and motives for travel into a concept that is now coming apart at the seams. The prevailing historical orthodoxy, as established in works such as Jeremy Black’s eponymous study, has been that between c. 1660 and c. 1790 young male elite travellers took several different defined routes through France and Savoy or down the Rhine and over the Alps, but with the common intent of reaching Italy. Once there, they toured sites of Classical antiquity, acquired works of Baroque art and sculpture, and engaged in sexual adventures as a kind of ‘rite of passage’. Such travel provided a cultural and social ‘finishing school’, as well as a source of long-term financial distress and doctor’s bills, but it was a brief ‘life-episode’, self-contained between the end of institutional education and the start of a public career or inheritance of an estate.

Ansell interrogates this interpretative archetype in a number of ways. He notes that destinations varied enormously, and Italy was by no means the ultimate destination for elite travellers. France, Lorraine, the Low Countries, Germany, Switzerland, or Spain might serve equally well in the eighteenth century. He argues that this was because the purposes of elite travel were much more diverse than the archetype suggests. Ambitious young men might gain a place within ambassadorial entourages, to get to Paris, Amsterdam, Rome, or Madrid. They might use institutions such as the army or the navy as means to further their education overseas, acquire Classical knowledge, social graces, and experience of contemporary politics and military technology. They might engage in formal education within institutions, most notably universities at Leiden and Padua but in many other centres as well, not just the sex-and-sightseeing of the peripatetic ‘Grand Tourist’. Above all, Ansell emphasises that knowledge of European languages, continental politics, and immersion in expatriate and European social networks, were crucial to securing subsequent career advantages back in Britain. This was why families were prepared to invest so much, particularly (but not exclusively) in their eldest sons, and to

accept the risks that travel brought, of debt, disease, and accident. Ansell demonstrates that European travel was not a brief interlude within or holiday from the social, political, or cultural ambitions of the British elite, but rather an essential means of gaining a purchase on the greasy pole.

The study is based on the experiences of a series of interrelated English and Irish families: a collection of Yorkshire gentry and nobility; the enormously wealthy Brydges family, Dukes of Chandos; and the Cork gentry families of Southwells, Percevals and Brodricks. Adding an Anglo-Irish dimension to accounts that are often Anglo-Scottish is very revealing because Ansell demonstrates that ambitious, but often cash-poor Irish landowners exploited their contacts with English families or relatives to secure foreign travel opportunities, and then used these as a way of (re-)establishing themselves as English parliamentarians and landowners. For them, as for the Yorkshire gentry, travel was an essential mechanism through which to acquire the linguistic, cultural, and political experiences and contacts that enabled them to leapfrog their duller, or less ambitious, peers in the scramble for offices, appointments and patronage. In this respect, for the eighteenth-century gentry family, time spent scraping together funds and agonising over the merits of European travel was equivalent to the efforts and concerns that their forebears had expressed about risk and rewards of the Jacobean court, or their successors had about colonial service.

However, this raises some questions about the sample and the subject. Inevitably, the surviving sources direct attention towards families who took travel seriously – seriously enough to prepare for it, agonise over it, report back on it, and ruminate about it afterwards. This might have been particularly true of ambitious families, for whom travel became a tried-and-tested route to patronage and status over several generations. Ansell points out that the experience of continental travel was much more widespread than existing accounts of The Grand Tour suggest, but its very ubiquity might have undermined its significance for some families, where it seems to have been treated as a glorified ‘gap year’. Secondly, it is worth reading this study alongside Sarah Goldsmith’s *Masculinity and Danger of the Eighteenth-Century Grand Tour* (RHS New Historical Perspectives series, 2020), because that restates the importance of travel as a physical, psychological, and emotional test for elite masculine identities, as well as a school and proving ground for military knowledge and skills. Ansell’s account rightly restates the importance of education and learning of all kinds over the hedonistic focus of some other studies, but Goldsmith’s study adds another physical/moral dimension, as well as confirming why we should take elite travel seriously as a formative experience. The other aspect missing from both these accounts, and from most others since Brian Dolan’s *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (2002), is the experiences of women, who tended to travel with family, but whose educational, cultural, and social aspirations may have been very similar to the young men studied by Ansell.


Historical archetypes are difficult things to undo, and the ‘Grand Tour’ will probably continue its stubborn existence. Ansell’s study makes a very good case for replacing this concept with the idea of ‘educational travel’, which embraces a much wider set of aspirations, preparations, outcomes, and destinations than the Tour. Crucially, it emphasises the *seriousness* of the endeavour for elite families, as a vital component not just of the cultural reproduction of their status and

identity, but also as a vehicle for their ambitions and mobility. The emphasis in this volume on the educational dimension of travel is probably sufficient to preserve its role as a distinct 'life stage' within the upbringing of elite men (and women), but it is evident that European travel was not necessarily a once-and-for-all rite of passage performed only by young adults. In this sense, if gentility was constantly in the making, travel could be regarded as something that contributed to this endeavour across the life course, rather than at one specific moment.

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## A. Winroth and J. Wei (eds.), *The Cambridge history of medieval canon law*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Pages xx + 617 + figures 12 + maps 2 + tables 1. £140 hardback. \$180.00 eBook.

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This long-awaited volume bears the fruits of research by twenty-eight scholars of medieval canon law, three of whom are now deceased but made significant contributions to the field over the years (Peter Landau, Andreas Meyer, and Elizabeth Makowski). Anders Winroth and his student, John Wei, reconceived what a history of medieval canon law should contain, including chapters devoted to key sources, canonical collections, and canonistic thinkers (the usual subject matter of past histories) but also including topical chapters oriented to themes within canon law (e.g., procedure, benefices, penance, crimes, just war, excommunication) as well as other key aspects of medieval legal culture (e.g., manuscripts, legal education). The first part treats the history of canon law chronologically, giving overviews of late antiquity, the early Middle Ages, the tenth century and reform era, and the high and then later Middle Ages. Also included are chapters on canon law in the eastern churches and the Roman law revival of the twelfth century.

Winroth and Wei express two main aims for the volume: (1) to provide historians with an introduction to 'the basic history, sources, and doctrines of canon law so that they can appreciate how canon law relates to their own interests and include canon law in their scholarly repertoire' (p. 6); and (2) to indicate, even to experts, some new trends in the field by scholars who have made new discoveries or engaged in a reevaluation of the material. The volume is largely successful on both fronts and contains some absolute gems of scholarship and interpretation. This review can in no way survey all of the contents of each of the thirty chapters, plus bibliography and index, but I will highlight some of the excellent features, especially