Abstract

Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling, a hitherto quite unknown figure of the early Enlightenment in Germany, held a chair of Ius Publicum at the University of Halle, whose foundation had been inspired by the ideas of Enlightenment. Like many other scholars of his time Gundling was in charge of the education of civil servants, who were to deal with the administration of the territorial states originating after 1648. At the end of the 17th century these specifically educated civil servants formed a new social class which took part in the building of the modern state - not merely in practical terms: They also passed their theoretical conception of society onto the following generations, which then would form the "Bildungsbürgertum" in the 19 th century.

Considering his educational aim Gundling created a close connection between theories and facts. While alive he was known as an unconventional thinker, and his scholars collected and edited his lessons so that his thoughts would be still noticed in the later 18th century. So he can be considered to be one of the initiators of an important changing process in social theories. The following paper primarily deals with Gundlings view of contemporary society and power and also wants to show in how far nonconformism was possible in the public discourse of the 18th century:

How did Gundling judge the relation between religion and politics, how did he explain the legitimacy of power, how did he advise the rulers to keep their people living in peace with each other, how important were economics and Kameralistik to him? And last but not least: How does he describe the ideal civil servants? No doubt, he attributed to them a key position in public life based on their competences. But did this make him conclude that his educated contemporaries also should take a political responsibility? Did he, who seems to be a quite "revolutionary" thinker, really want the ancestors of the "Bildungsbürger" to give priority to public wealth, even if this meant acting against the will of the ruler?