

The historians morton and hill

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A major debate which has developed amongst historians is whether Ranters shared a coherent ideology. As a result of this two arguments have developed. One in which ranters is seen as nothing more than a diffuse group, which shared little if any coherent ideologies. The second argues that the Ranters as a small, core group, with reasonably shared ideas. Davis chooses to acknowledge the first argument in his studies and claimed that they had no consistent or coherent ideology.

The historian Capp says that in order to decide which social category the Ranters belonged to there must be evidence of shared ideas and attitudes among the so called core Ranters. Gibbons claimed that while differences among Ranters existed there were far more similarities between them. One factor, which has caused contention among historians, is whether they could be labelled as antinomians and whether they practiced antinomian behaviour. While Davis argued that Ranters did not exist as a sect, movement or even as a group of pantheistic or antinomian persuasion.

Historians have bitterly disagreed with this notion. Some Historians like Ian Hampshire-Monk have even gone as far to suggest that Davis has mis-read sources involving Coppe who is argued to have been an identifiable antinomian. Capp claims to have examples of antinomian behaviour such as swearing and visiting gypsies. Coppe also describe dancing and kissing with Gypsies, according to Capp and Smith this an example of textual and if it occurred behavioural antinomianism. Another area of debate, which has caused disagreements amongst historians, is to what social category Ranters can be best described as.

The groups upon which different Historians have placed Ranters are Sects, Movements and milieus. The concept of the ranters as a sect was most popular among historians such as A. L Morton and more recently through the writings of Jerome Friedman and the commentary of John Carey.

Contemporaries believed that the ranters were a sect according to historian Hill who suggests and intentional outrages behaviour had begun to be printed, and the authorities began to call those involved a sect. However Davis claims that the Ranters were not a sect and that the term had been used somewhat inappropriately.

The concept of a Ranter movement supports the traditional framework, supported by historians such as Morton and Hill. Morton claims that while the Ranter movement shared no formal organisation or doctrine, the movement had central features such as a " materialist pantheism, an extreme antinomianism and a naive communism" (Morton, world of the Ranters). Morton suggests that the Ranters rose within 1649 and enjoyed a large following until it was surpassed by the people in power through laws such as, the blasphemy act.

The concept of Ranters as a milieu has caused a dispute among historians. Davis has questioned the definition of a milieu and what it means to some historians, he suggested that it was individuals charged with being Ranters after social disorder and Ranter myth was a way in which to constrain and check. However other historians like Hill do not believe the " milieu" to mean this. He saw the Ranters as individuals who personified certain attributes including hostility to organised churches and others that would be considered to be rejecting the protestant ethic.

Davis claimed that the problems arose from the vagueness and broadness of Hills list, for example how many of the listed attributes must an individual display to be considered a Ranter. The traditional frameworks claims that the Ranters had suffered repression from the government through laws such as the blasphemy act. Davis however argues that the courts were indifferent when it came to the Ranters, he claims that the courts did often not convict some of the leading individuals who were charged

McGregor disagrees with Davis notion of the courts being indifferent towards Ranters, he claims that there were those who were severely punished but the indifference was a result of not having suitable legislation to convict them until the 1650 ordinance The debate about the Ranters phenomenon is one which has been extremely contentious amongst historians, although most of the Historians disagree with Davis's work, the debate has brought new ideas and perspectives concerning the Ranters.