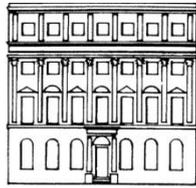


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Medieval History Seminar, organized by the German Historical Institute London and the German Historical Institute Washington and held at the GHIL, 8–11 Oct. 2009.

The sixth meeting of the Medieval History Seminar, the second such tri-national seminar, was opened by Frank Rexroth comparing ‘Three Doctoral Students’ – John of Salisbury, Hermann Heimpel, and Kerstin Seidel – and how their work was influenced by the discipline of their time. Papers were given by seven German, one Swiss, four American, one Latvian, and three British Ph.D. candidates and recent Ph.D.s, and then discussed with mentors Michael Borgolte, Patrick J. Geary, Dame Janet Nelson, Frank Rexroth, Barbara H. Rosenwein, and Miri Rubin. The seminar organizers considered proposals from all areas of medieval studies, and the projects selected covered a broad range of thematic perspectives, methodological approaches, and periods of medieval history. Papers were distributed ahead of time, so the eight panels could be spent on discussion. Each panel featured two papers introduced by fellow students acting as commentators rather than the authors themselves. The intriguing papers opened a window on to current research in medieval history in Germany, Britain, and North America, and the resulting discussion was constructive and lively.

The opening panel started with a presentation of Immo Wartnjes’s dissertation ‘The Munich Computus: Text and Translation. Irish Alternatives to Bede’s Computistics’. Wartnjes stressed the importance of the study of computistical texts not only for historians of science, but also, and especially, for linguists and cultural historians. Using hitherto unknown source material, he argued that Bede’s scientific work can only be understood as the culmination of an Irish tradition, thereby deconstructing the myth of Bede as the only outstanding scientist of his age. Daniel Föllner’s dissertation ‘Verflochtenes Denken: Kognitive Strategien in der Runenschriftlichkeit der Wikingerzeit’ focused on how information was conveyed on rune stones in order to analyse the intellectual basis of Scandinavians’ acculturation to other European cultures from the ninth to the eleventh century. He stressed that an entire network of semantic significations indicated by different media (content, form of the text, presentation, ornamentation, pictures, topography) and methods of presentation (making it mysterious, strengthening the main idea, or

Conference Reports

completing it) all had to be taken into consideration together by those reading them to be understood correctly. He maintained that the complexity and dynamic of such mental processes allows us to draw conclusions about the cognitive flexibility expressed within them. This flexibility has to be regarded as the basis of the Vikings' skill at acculturation.

The second panel began with a discussion of Gustavs Strenga's dissertation, which focused on the role of elites in memoria of two non-elite guilds—beer carters and carters—in late medieval Riga. He looked at the impact elites had on the remembrance of the two guilds and put forward the hypothesis that the elite members joined these guilds because they perceived them as guilds of the 'poor', which could be relied on to take good care of commemorating the elite. After that, S. Adam Hindin presented his work on the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague (founded in 1391), which has been considered unique in Central European Gothic architecture. He suggested that its atypical appearance is best understood as wilful participation in an ongoing architectural and social dialogue about ethnic identity and minority status between the Czech and German populations of Prague rather than as a conscious effort at church reform.

In the third panel, Jan-Hendryk de Boer presented his work on doctrinal condemnation at universities in the High Middle Ages. He analysed this not as an 'occupational accident' but as a constructive part of scholastic scholarship that established the banned texts as speech acts on the edge of the system of scholasticism. By banning books, the scholastic system of thought defined the difference between an author and his work, between right and wrong, and between belief and knowledge. Joshua Burson's dissertation dealt with one of the more 'disreputable' topics in the history of Constance—drunken brawls in brothels—and used them as a key to understanding the relationship between the city and the surrounding countryside.

In the fourth panel, Jamie McCandless discussed how different groups competed for control of ecclesiastical property in late medieval Germany, and justified their competition. Dominican reformers often relied on secular authorities (the territorial lord or the free city) to complete reform projects, yet those authorities often used reforms as a means of enhancing their own authority against each other. Reforms, therefore, brought many houses under the con-

trol of the same secular authorities. McCandless suggested that the mendicant orders supported lay and prayer confraternities to offset the loss of power and prestige to the secular authorities, on whom they relied for the success of their reforms.

In the fifth panel, Tanja Skambraks presented her studies of the *Kinderbischofsfest* as exemplified by the English cathedral town of Exeter. Using liturgical, pragmatic, and regulatory sources from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, she examined the ritual and secular character of the festival, and attempts by the church authorities to regulate violations of the rules. She showed that the *Kinderbischofsfest* was important in reducing tensions caused by age and hierarchy, and that it could be interpreted as a substitute ritual sustained by performative magic. Finally, it had an important function in building community. Katharina Mersch unlocked the value of late medieval pictorial sources for the religious and social history of women's convents. Against the grain of common assumptions in the field of gender studies and art history, she showed that Eucharistic piety in women's convents was specific neither to gender nor certain orders. Instead, it resulted from exchange processes between the women's convents and diverse outside influences.

In the sixth panel, Jan Hildebrandt examined the reception of ancient myths in the early Middle Ages. He stressed the diversity of approaches towards these pagan narratives, ranging from scholarly explanation and euhemeristic interpretation to allegorical explication and a method of observation that demonized them. Moreover, he pointed out that the assessment of ancient myths in medieval commentaries ranged from strong scepticism to integration into the Christian worldview. Astrid Lembke studied the ways in which the protagonist of the Jewish narrative *Ma'aseh Yerushalmi* needs to prove himself in the world with its divine and paternal system of rules. The narrative, with its hero conceived of as a literary character and in contrast to the similarly saintly protagonist of another text in which he appears, opens up a discourse on the possibility of masterfully dealing with the law.

In the seventh panel, Alison Creber's study of imperial models for the seals of Beatrice of Tuscany and Matilda of Tuscany was discussed. The seal depictions of Beatrice of Tuscany (c.1020–76) and Matilda of Tuscany (1046–1115) have been interpreted in terms of typically 'feminine' priorities. This gendered approach obscures the

Conference Reports

role of seals as *Herrschaftszeichen*, or signs of rule. Against this, Creber argued that Beatrice and Matilda were princely women whose seals expressed their political ambitions. Their seals therefore made use of different imperial models to claim and secure political legitimacy against the Salian emperors. After that, the panel discussed Sandra Müller-Wiesner's dissertation interpreting the common side of Konrad Wirz's Genevan altar constructed in 1444. It depicts the 'Wonderful Catch' and the 'Liberation of St Peter' as an expression of the struggle for city rule fought out between the Bishop of Geneva and the Savoyan (anti-)Pope Felix V.

In the eighth panel, Steven Robbie presented his work on the evolution of the duchies of Burgundy and Alemannia during the period 887 to 940. Early tenth-century aristocrats were routinely characterized as players in a contest to claim the dukedom of Alemannia, even though no such office existed. His paper questioned this conventional framing device and suggested that senses of Alemannian identity did not play a significant part in the actual politics of the region, which were driven by magnates competing for resources and access to royal patronage. Leanne Good investigated the terms used in the Freising charters to describe land during the time of the Carolingian takeover in Bavaria. Although the property descriptions in the charters became increasingly more detailed, they did not represent a developed system of ecclesiastical land administration. Rather, she found a variety of competing 'vocabularies' of land possession, foremost among which was the Episcopal thrust to establish canonical jurisdiction over proprietary churches. Levi Roach discussed hitherto unexplored possibilities for using theories developed by German historians of the Ottonian Empire to understand the performative aspects of tenth-century English diplomas. He argued that there were notable similarities between the rituals of charter-granting in both kingdoms, but that we must also be careful not to lose sight of the important differences.

The final discussion focused on differences and similarities between medieval study and scholarship in Germany, Britain, and the United States, and the institutional possibilities and limits of the different university systems were compared.

The seventh Medieval History Seminar for German, British, and American doctoral students and recent Ph.D. recipients will take place at the German Historical Institute Washington, DC in October

Medieval History Seminar

2011. If you are interested in participating, please look at the GHIW website for further information and requirements.

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