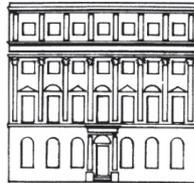


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Philipp Meller:  
*Medieval History Seminar*  
Conference Report  
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*Medieval History Seminar*, organized by the German Historical Institute London and the German Historical Institute Washington, and held at the GHIL, 12–14 October 2017.

All historians need their own take-home message. This only seemingly banal finding came out of the Medieval History Seminar (MHS) 2017, which brought together young medievalists from the three participating countries (Germany, the UK, and the USA). Fifteen junior researchers were selected and invited to send in a draft, chapter, or summary of their completed or advanced doctoral dissertations for discussion with their peers as well as established scholars. For this purpose, Ruth Mazo Karras (Minnesota), Paul Freedman (Yale), Dorothea Weltecke and Bernhard Jussen (both Frankfurt/M.), Len Scales (Durham), and, for the last time, Stuart Airlie (Glasgow) went to London as conveners. Cornelia Linde (GHI London) organized the seminar, attended the discussions, and supplemented the programme by arranging a gripping public lecture by Ruth Karras entitled ‘Thou Art the Man: King David and Masculinity’ and a useful introduction to the *Repertorium Germanicum* by Andreas Rehberg (GHI Rome).

But true to the MHS’s accustomed format, the focus was on the papers. The procedure was the same as in previous years: each paper was submitted one month in advance. In London, the shared papers were first commented on by participants before being discussed in the plenum. Only then did the conveners offer criticism, suggestions, and further advice. The concentrated atmosphere and intense discussions, which often went beyond the parameters of the sessions, showed that the MHS 2017 was a three-day-meeting of passionate historians.

As always, the open remit of the seminar resulted in a wide range of recent research approaches being represented, from traditional history of the Empire and the Papacy, to the history of emotions, subaltern studies, and transcultural interactions, with a small focal point on Jewish history. Despite this variety of topics, unfortunately no paper was presented that went beyond Latin–Greek Europe to focus on Asia and Africa. It is regrettable that important recent discussions in these fields were missing from the seminar. Chronologically, the

The full conference programme can be found under ‘Events and Conferences’ on the GHIL’s website <[www.ghil.ac.uk](http://www.ghil.ac.uk)>.

papers covered the spectrum from Carolingian times, specifically the ninth century, to the sixteenth century, not without occasionally questioning the common habit of defining historical periods chronologically.

The MHS 2017 opened with two papers on late medieval Italy. Giuseppe Cusa (Frankfurt/M.) analysed specific forms of local historiography. In his profound investigation of partly non-edited sources, he connected the meaning of clerical works with municipal political developments in Verona–Treviso from *comune* to *signoria*. Sarina Kuersteiner (New York) literally read between the lines of her texts, the Bologna *Memoriali* lists. What role did the variety of poems, poetic rhymes, and sometimes even drawings play in these notarial records? Is it possible to connect the motives of love and desire with new moralities created by the monetization of Italy in the late Middle Ages? The possible meanings of these images show how important it is also to consider visual sources in research. Contemporary images should not be an object of research only for art historians.

It was fitting that the seminar continued with Aaron Jochim's (Heidelberg) study of imagined coats of arms. Via Portolan charts, Jochim argued, motifs of Mamluk origin were transmitted to Western Europe and found their way into Latin–Christian heraldry. Finn Schulze-Feldmann (London), in his project, analyses the role played by the medieval legend of the Tiburtine Sibyl in the lay devotion of late fifteenth and sixteenth-century Europe. He argued that the medieval veneration of the Sybil was disrupted neither by contemporary humanist impulses nor by the new devotional practices introduced by the Reformation.

At the beginning of the third panel, Veit Groß's (Freiburg) paper explored the subject of social mobilization in the late Middle Ages. Taking the pilgrimage of Niklashausen in 1476 as an example, he explained this social movement as a form of rationally acting collective and connected it with new thoughts about subaltern protest. Christoph Haack (Tübingen) focused on more basic considerations about military organization in the Carolingian Empire. He confronted the previous literature about feudal systems (Bernard Bachrach, Timothy Reuter) with a new concept of personal networks. These networks provided the public contingents in Carolingian warfare and, in addition to their military meaning, also played a special role in the socio-political organization of the imperial structures.

Benedict Wiedemann (London) studied the papacy's financial administration at the end of the twelfth century and argued that papal revenue was discretionary and therefore both unpredictable and non-prescriptive. Leonie Exarchos (Göttingen) was the only participant in the MHS 2017 whose investigation focused on Constantinople. In her study she analysed Latin-Greek relations as shaped by individual actors whom she classified as experts in particular fields. Exarchos showed that these experts had not one, but several loyalties going in different directions, both to the Latin West and to the Greek East.

The fifth panel was dedicated to Jewish history in the Middle Ages. Building on Jeremy Cohen's concept of the 'hermeneutic Jew', Amélie Sagasser (Heidelberg) developed the concept of 'historical Judaism' that can also be expanded to include 'politicized Judaism'. Sagasser described the concrete treatment of Jews in Carolingian legislative texts in these terms. Franziska Klein (Duisburg-Essen) examined a specific case of welfare in England. In the thirteenth century the English kings undertook to care for Jewish converts, who were distributed between numerous religious houses. This practice, Klein argued, illustrates the multi-dimensional challenges facing conversion in general during the Late Middle Ages.

The penultimate panel of MHS 2017 dealt with kings and kingship in three completely different ways. Vedran Sulovsky's (Cambridge) paper was an attempt to ascertain the true meaning of the term *sacrum imperium*. He connected it with Charlemagne's memory programme in Aachen and argued that the Empire was already regarded as holy even while its name was still just Roman Empire. Marie-Astrid Hugel (Heidelberg/Paris) discussed the idea of *rex* and *sacerdos* based on the figure of the priest king Melchisedech. For this purpose, she drew on general theoretical concepts of priest kings in the Late Middle Ages as well as concrete references to Melchisedech in contemporary sources, where she found about 150 images of him. Unsurprisingly she, too, underlined the significance of images in historical research. Finally, in Manuel Kamenzin's (Bochum) paper, a real king was the focus. No certainty is possible about the circumstances of King Henry (VII) of Germany's death in the thirteenth century. The contemporary suicide theories of Emperor Frederick's II oldest son as well as new research by recent paleopathologists, who diagnosed death by leprosy, can both be refuted. Kamenzin advocat-

ed increased discussion of the various contemporary interpretations of the royal death—in written sources as well as in images—rather than looking for a true medical diagnosis.

The two papers in the final session dealt with monastic structures in early and late medieval Germany. Philipp Meller (Berlin) identified tenth-century monasteries as important spaces for conducting East Frankish foreign affairs with Muslims, Slavs, and Hungarians. His transcultural micro-approach showed that these diverse contacts, from Bavaria to Lorraine, were, for the most part, perceived not as a chance to discover or evaluate foreign parts and regions, but rather as an opportunity for a cohesive and confident community to present itself. Katja Mouris (Washington DC) looked at whether specific characteristics of female adherents of monastic rule in convents in late medieval Germany can be connected to the new impulses of Lutheran Reformation. The example of St Klara in Nuremberg shows that an insistence on the local observance under the dominant abbess Caritas Pirckheimer led to the slow but inevitable downfall of the convent in the Protestant sixteenth century.

In the final discussion, Stuart Airlie as the senior convener gave a detailed summary of the last three days, and commented on the diversity of the submitted papers. All participants appreciated the concentrated and passionate discussions throughout the whole seminar. For young medievalists, the MHS provides a unique opportunity to present their research in such a small group with an intense workshop atmosphere, which produces precise and fruitful comments on each paper. Especially for those who have not already finished their theses, these remarks are very relevant. In order to extend the range of submitted papers, the MHS in future will be opened up to junior researchers from Canada and Ireland. Although submissions from more historians working on non-European topics are encouraged, the basic principles of the format will be retained in future seminars.

Finally, the conveners drew attention to the general importance of historical research, especially in such uncertain times as the present, in each of the three participating countries. They argued that the participants of the MHS came to London not just as historians, but also as citizens representing their respective countries. Every historian bears a special responsibility with his or her work and research. The MHS 2017 ended with this more general take-home message. May its

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

success, irrespective of any external troubles, continue at the next seminar, which will take place in 2019, again in London.

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