

Medieval History Seminar 2009

Veranstalter: German Historical Institute London; German Historical Institute Washington D.C.

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The sixth meeting of the Medieval History Seminar took place in London on October 8-11, 2009. The second such trinational seminar, it was held jointly by the German Historical Institute London and the German Historical Institute Washington D.C. FRANK REXROTH (Universität Göttingen) gave the opening lecture, comparing „Three Doctoral Students“ – John of Salisbury, Hermann Heimpel, and Kerstin Seidel – and the way 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.Ds and then discussed with mentors Michael Borgolte, Patrick J. Geary, Dame Janet Nelson, Frank Rexroth, Barbara H. Rosenwein, and Miri Rubin. The seminar 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 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 WARNTJES's (Universität Greifswald) dissertation „The Munich Computus: Text and Translation: Irish Alternatives to Bede's Computistics.“ Warntjes 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 a culmination point

on a line of Irish tradition, with this deconstructing the myth of Bede as the only outstanding scientist of his age. DANIEL FÖLLER's (Universität Frankfurt am Main) dissertation „Verflochtenes Denken. Kognitive Strategien in der Runenschriftlichkeit der Wikingerzeit“ focuses on the way information was conveyed on rune stones in order to analyze the intellectual basis of Scandinavians' acculturation to other European cultures in the ninth to eleventh centuries. 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 completing it) had to be taken into consideration together by those reading them to understand them 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 for the Vikings' skill at acculturation.

The second panel began with a discussion of GUSTAVS STRENGA's (Queen Mary, University of London) dissertation, which focuses on the role of elites in memoria of two non-elite guilds – beer carters and carters – in late medieval Riga. He analyzed the impact elites had on the remembrance of the two guilds and put forth the hypothesis that the elite members joined these guilds because they perceived them as guilds of the „poor,“ which would take good care of the elite's commemoration. After that, S. ADAM HINDIN (Harvard University) presented his work on the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague (founded in 1391), which has been considered unique in Central European Gothic architecture. He proposed that its atypical appearance is best understood as willful 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 (Universität Göttingen) presented his work on doctrinal condemnation at universities in the High Middle Ages. He analyzes

these not as an „occupational accident“ but as a constructive part of scholastic scholarship that establishes the banned texts as speech acts on the edge of the system of scholasticism. By banning books, the scholastic system of thought generated determines the difference between an author and his work, between right and wrong, and between belief and knowledge. JOSHUA BURSON's (Yale University) dissertation deals with one of the more „disreputable“ topics in the history of Constance – drunken brawls in brothels – and uses them as a key to understanding the relationship between the city and the surrounding countryside.

In the fourth panel, JAMIE McCANDLESS (University of Western Michigan) analyzed how different groups competed, and justified their competition, for the control of ecclesiastical property in late medieval Germany. 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 control of the same secular authorities. McCandless suggests that the mendicant order supported lay and prayer confraternities to offset the loss of power and prestige to the secular authorities, whom they had to rely on to ensure the success of their reforms.

In the fifth panel, TANJA SKAMBRAKS (Universität Mannheim) presented her studies on the Kinderbischofsfest exemplified by the English cathedral town Exeter. Using liturgical, pragmatic, and regulatory sources from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, she analyzed the ritual and secular character of the festival, and church authorities' attempts to regulate violations against the rules. She showed that the Kinderbischofsfest was important in reducing tensions caused by age and hierarchy, and that it can, moreover, be interpreted as a substitute ritual sustained by performative magic. Finally, it had an important function in building community. KATHARINA MERSCH (Universität Göttingen) 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 (Universität Münster) analyzed 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 range from strong skepticism to integration into the Christian worldview. ASTRID LEMBKE (Universität Frankfurt am Main) studies 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 discourse on the possibility of masterfully dealing with the law.

In the seventh panel, ALISON CREBER's (King's College, University of London) 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. 1020-1076) and Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115) have been interpreted in terms of typically 'feminine' priorities. This gendered approach obscures the seals' role as *Herrschaftszeichen*, or signs of rule. Against this, Creber argued that Beatrice and Matilda were princely women whose seals expressed their political ambitions. Therefore, their seals 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 (Universität Zürich) dissertation, interpreting the common side of the Genevan altar of Konrad Wirz constructed in 1444. It depicts the „Wonderful Catch“ and the „Liberation of St Peter“ as an expression of the struggle for city rule fought between the Bishop of Geneva and the Savoyan (anti-)Pope Felix V.

In the eighth panel, STEVEN ROBBIE (University of St. Andrews) presented his work on the evolution of the duchies of Burgundy and Alemannia over the period of 887-940. Early tenth-century aristocrats are 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 played no significant role in the actual politics of the region, which were driven by magnates competing for resources and access to royal patronage. LEANNE GOOD (University of California, Los Angeles) 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 become increasingly more detailed, they do not represent a developed system of ecclesiastical land administration. Rather, she finds a variety of competing 'vocabularies' of land possession, of which the Episcopal thrust to establish canonical jurisdiction over proprietary churches stands foremost. LEVI ROACH (Cambridge University) 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 argues that there are 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. Moreover, 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 2011. If you are interested in participating, please take a look at the web site of the GHI Washington for further information and requirements.

Conference Overview:

Welcome by the director of the GHI London,

Andreas Gestrich

Opening lecture by Frank Rexroth

First Panel

Chair: Patrick Geary

Immo Warntjes (Universität Greifswald):
Early Medieval Irish Computistics in its Scientific, Historical, Cultural, Linguistic, and Editorial Context

Daniel Föllner (Universität Frankfurt am Main):

Verflochtenes Denken. Kognitive Strategien in der Runenschriftlichkeit der Wikingerzeit

Comments: Hindin, Roach

Second Panel

Chair: Barbara Rosenwein

Gustavs Strengha (Queen Mary, University of London):

Memoria of non-elite groups in late medieval Riga

S. Adam Hindin (Harvard University):
Rethinking Hus's Bethlehem Chapel: Identity, Archaeology, and the Written Record

Comments: Lembke, Robbie

Third Panel

Chair: Jochen Schenk

Jan-Hendryk de Boer (Universität Göttingen):
Glauben und Wissen in universitären Lehrverurteilungen des Spätmittelalters

Joshua Burson (Yale University):
Drunken Brawls in Brothels: Cheap wine, court records, and other disreputable aspects of the economic history of Constance and its region

Comments: Strengha, Warntjes

Fourth Panel

Chair: Frank Rexroth

Jamie McCandless (University of Western Michigan):
Authoritative Reforms: Contested Memories and Lay Patronage in Late Medieval Germany

Comment: Müller-Wiesner

Fifth Panel

Chair: Miri Rubin

Tanja Skambraks (Universität Mannheim):
Der Kinderbischof im Mittelalter. Ein europäisches Klerikerfest zwischen Spiel und Ritual

Katharina Mersch (Universität Göttingen):
Geschlecht und Ordenszugehörigkeit – Zwei diskussionswürdige Deutungskategorien der Frauenklosterforschung am Beispiel der spätmittelalterlichen Eucharistiedevotion

Comments: Burson, Good

Sixth Panel

Chair: Carola Dietze

Jan Hildebrandt (Universität Münster):
Götter, Dichter und Dämonen - Mythendiskurse in der karolingischen Gesellschaft

Astrid Lembke (Universität Frankfurt am Main):

Down by law. Überschreitung und Strafe im frühneuzeitlichen 'Ma'aseh Yerushalmi

Comments: de Boer, Creber

Seventh Panel

Chair: Michael Borgolte

Alison Creber (King's College, University of London):

Imperial models for the seals of Beatrice of Tuscany and Matilda of Tuscany

Sandra Müller-Wiesner (Universität Zürich):
Ästhetische Innovation oder politisches Kalkül? Der Genfer Altar des Konrad Witz als Ausdruck des Ringens um die Stadtherrschaft zwischen dem Bischof von Genf und dem savoyischen (Gegen-) Papst Felix V.

Comments: McCandless, Mersch

Eighth Panel

Steven Robbie (University of St. Andrews):
Stammeshäupte or brilliant improvisors? Reflections on some would-be dukes of Alemannia at the turn of the tenth century

Leanne Good (University of California, Los Angeles):

Land and Legitimacy: The Political Use of Land Resources and the Representation of Environmental Space in Eighth Century Bavaria

Levi Roach (Cambridge University):
Continental Theories, English Realities: Ritu-

al Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Diplomas, c. 924-1066

Comments: Hildebrandt, Föllner

Final Discussion

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