

Medieval History Seminar

Conference at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Germany), October 24 – 27, 2002

Conveners: Michael Borgolte (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Caroline W. Bynum (Columbia University, New York/ American Academy, Berlin), Johannes Fried (Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt), Patrick J. Geary (University of California, Los Angeles), Christof Mauch (German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.), Christoph Strupp (German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.).

In 2002, the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., successfully continued its new program for junior scholars in medieval history. For the second time, the Medieval History Seminar brought together sixteen German and American doctoral students and recent Ph.D. recipients to discuss their projects. Once again, proposals from all areas of medieval studies had been taken into consideration. The selected projects covered the broadest possible range of thematic perspectives, methodological approaches, and periods of medieval history. The papers provided fascinating insight into current research in medieval history in Germany and North America, and the discussions benefited greatly from the enthusiasm and expertise of everybody involved. This year's seminar took place at the Humboldt-University in the heart of Berlin, where it was graciously hosted by Professor Borgolte and his staff.

The opening panel featured two projects dealing with medieval diplomas and their value for historical research. **Jennifer Davis** (Harvard University) presented the results of her research on the diplomas Charlemagne granted for Italian recipients. They went to Italian monasteries, episcopal sees, and individuals. Even though there was already a strong tradition of Lombard royal grants, Charlemagne developed his own pattern. Ms. Davis interpreted this as an indication for the deliberate integration of Italy into the Carolingian realm and for Charlemagne's persistent claim to rule in Italy. Participants discussed the meaning of integration in the Early Middle Ages, and Ms. Davis's elaborate statistical analysis of her material led to a debate on the problems of quantification in medieval research arising from the random preservation of sources.

Jochen Johrendt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) focused on the relationship between the papacy and church organisations in Germany, France, Italy, and Catalonia, as reflected in the papal diploma's of the ninth and tenth centuries. The requests for papal grants shed light on the general function of the papacy and the way the papacy was shaped by the expectations and wishes of the petitioners. Until 1046, the legal institution of "papal protection" was open to a variety of interpretations by the recipients. Based on the diplomas granting papal protection in Germany and France, Johrendt concluded that in Germany there was a close connection between the monasteries receiving those grants and the Ottonian royal dynasty. Papal protection almost always supplemented royal protection in Germany, while in a politically fragmented France the situation was more complex.

The second and third panels continued the discussion of politics and culture in the eight to tenth centuries. **Dmitri Starostine** (University of Michigan) dealt with the medieval measurement of time. Using sources such as the Salzburg calendar of 818 and the poems of Wandalbert of Prüm, he examined the failed attempts of Charlemagne to introduce a new calendar, that was based on the rhythm of agricultural activities and assigned cosmological significance to these activities. The new calendar was supposed to be more closely linked to the everyday life of the people than the traditional Roman calendar and to have a unifying effect on the empire. Once again, the discussion concentrated on the scarcity of sources for this particular difficult subject and the resulting problems of interpretation.

Harold Siegel (University of Notre Dame) focused on the often neglected court of Emperor Lothar I and his patronage of learning and culture in the Middle Kingdom from 840 to 855. Based on the exchange of letters between Lothar and two leading intellectual figures of the period, Hrabanus

Maurus and Angelomus of Luxeuil, who provided Lothar with extensive biblical commentaries, Siegel demonstrated how Lothar used the resources of the time to create an intellectual court with a broader appeal. His network of intellectual contacts extended beyond the political boundaries of his empire. However, it is still open to question whether Lothar really stood out among his contemporaries or whether his court was a spiritual and cultural center such as others at the time.

Kerstin Schulmeyer (Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt) shed new light on one of the most important sources of Ottonian history of the ninth and early tenth centuries: the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg. Medieval historiography has a strong teleological dimension, a point of reference which enabled its authors to sort out the important facts and make sense of the events of the past. Thietmar wrote his chronicle of the history of the Saxonian kings after 1013. With Henry II's ascent to power in 1002, the presentation changes noticeably from a historical tale to a chronicle of current events. The historiographical concept of an "Ottonian" epoch ending with the childless Henry II, which is taken for granted today, was in fact Thietmar's answer to the politically motivated call for a change of ruling dynasty. But the chronicle and the historiographical message it sends also reveal how important the influence of subconscious "images of the past" (*Vergangenheitsbilder*) was for its structure. Separating the intentional from the subconscious level, is the major challenge of Ms. Schulmeyer's project.

Jenny Oesterle (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster) presented her dissertation project on the liturgical dimension of royal representation under the Ottonians and early Salians. Drawing on a historiographical tradition established by Gerd Althoff and Hagen Keller, she interpreted the ceremonial coronations on Easter and Christmas and the official court meetings (*Hoftage*) as a "chain of rituals." They enabled all present to participate in the representation of power. Ms. Oesterle stressed the multiple character of ceremonial coronations and coronation processions as an opportunity to publicly show royal power in all its dimensions. It also reminded the viewers of the king's first coronation and his future as a heavenly co-ruler. The discussion revolved around problems of inclusion and exclusion inherent to all rituals, their constant adjustment to new situations, and the inevitable discrepancy between the descriptions of rituals historians work with today and the actual events of the past.

The papers of the fourth panel took a close look at the conditions of military action in the High Middle Ages. **Holger Berwinkel** (Universität Marburg) analyzed Friedrich Barbarossa's campaign against Milan in 1158, and **David Bachrach** (University of Notre Dame) dealt with the military administration of King Henry III of England in the thirteenth century. Berwinkel concentrated on the logistical challenges of moving an army of tens of thousands through the country, supplying the troops, and organizing a siege. Bachrach focused on the building, transportation and storage of siege engines, for which Henry III developed a complex administration that generated an extensive parchment trail. Both authors attempted to write military history as social history by dealing with broader problems of cartography, royal finances, and – at least for Germany – a lack of sources resulting from the oral character of medieval society.

The fifth panel took the seminar to medieval Paris with two papers on the abbey of Saint-Victor. This reformist abbey, formally founded in 1113, gained great intellectual and political influence in twelfth-century France. From an art historian's perspective, **Martina Schilling** (University of Warwick) looked into the connection between the architecture of the building and the canonical identity of its inhabitants. By combining information on the internal structure of the Victorine order with an analysis of other contemporary reformist abbeys, she challenged the common assumption that there were no distinctive traditions for the architecture of regular canonical houses. Unfortunately, little is known about the original building of Saint-Victor: the oldest views date from the fifteenth century, and it did not survive the French Revolution.

Todd Upton (University of Colorado) discussed perceptions of Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the sermons of Richard of Saint-Victor during the first crusades. He examined their liturgical topoi, compared the sermons to the explicit crusade homilies and letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and speculated on possible Victorine attitudes about the Levant in general. The sermons can be viewed as a serious contribution to crusade ideology in the High Middle Ages, but at the same time mention of "Jerusalem" or "Israel" was part of the strong allegorical tradition of the Victorines. This double dimension calls for a careful reading of the texts and the consideration of aspects such as

the character of the genre of sermons in general, their function at the abbey, and the audience Richard was writing for.

The sixth panel continued the series of papers dealing with questions of intellectual history. **Markus Schürer** (Technische Universität Dresden) concentrated on the genre of exemplum literature, as it was used by the orders of the Dominicans and Franciscans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Exempla – short stories of a (sometimes fictional) historical deed with an argumentative or educational character – had a tradition going back to antiquity. In the Late Middle Ages, they preserved and institutionalized the knowledge of the founding generation of the order and revealed much about its self-conception. Exempla ensured that daily life went according to the rules and had a strong normative dimension.

Pavel Blazek (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena) discussed the medieval reception of the views of Aristotle on marriage as presented in the “Nicomachean Ethics,” the “Politics,” and the (Pseudo-Aristotelian) “Economics.” Leading scholars such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and other members of the Parisian art faculty used the texts of Aristotle to prove the natural character of marriage. They enhanced the Christian understanding of the special relationship between man and woman and the divine command for reproduction and thereby created a unique link between Christian theology and ancient philosophy. This makes marriage one of the most interesting examples of medieval reception of Aristotle.

Benjamin Scheller (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) presented his research on the housing complex Jakob Fugger the Rich built for poor people in Augsburg in the early sixteenth century. Scheller discussed the concept of social welfare in the Late Middle Ages in general and the concept of the “worthy poor” – often whole families, who alone were eligible for help – as opposed to ordinary beggars. The still operating “Fuggerei” is a unique example of this concept because of its size and architectural structure, which, on the one hand, allowed the inhabitants a maximum of privacy and, on the other, had a strong disciplinary function. Since the “Fuggerei” was a foundation, inhabitants were supposed to maintain the “memoria” of Jakob through certain well-regulated actions.

A paper by **John Eldevik** (Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, Toronto) on the Thuringian dispute of the 1050’s and 1060’s concluded Saturday’s meeting. The ecclesiastical tithe, a ten-percent levy on all gross income and produce, was a key source of income for any church in the Middle Ages, and a significant link to the community it served. Eldevik’s research shed light on the tension between a normative understanding of medieval institutions and local traditions. Tithe conflicts not only were a matter of legal theory but that they can reveal important information on the character of episcopal lordship in general.

In the last panel **Robert Fajen** (Universität Würzburg), who specializes in medieval literary studies, and **Amy Morris** (Wittenberg University, Ohio), an art historian, demonstrated the value of including medievalists beyond the scope of traditional historical studies in this program. Their presentations – on the 1396 “Livre du Chevalier Errant” (The Book of the Knight Errant), written by the Piemontesian count Thomas III of Saluzzo, and on Lucas Moser’s 1432 St. Magdalene Altarpiece of the parish church at Tiefenbronn near Pforzheim, respectively – led to a lively discussion on historical contextualization and the function of art in the Middle Ages in general. Fajen emphasized that literary texts should not be reduced to their political or social context, but rather viewed as a mediator between reality and imagination. The “Chevalier Errant,” a combination of knight’s tale, literary allegory and encyclopedia, reveals the self-perception of its author, but at the same time differs widely from modern autobiographies through its complex relationship between real life and literary fictionalization. Fajen interpreted these fictional elements of the book as an elaborate reflection on problems of noble identity in general.

Little is known about Lucas Moser, the painter of the St. Magdalene Altarpiece, a German counterpart to the famous Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck, and little work has been done so far on its historical context. Amy Morris’ dissertation combines an iconographical analysis of the five scenes from the life of Mary Magdalene depicted in the painting, with a comparison to other Magdalene cycles both in Germany and Europe, and research on the medieval function of the cult of Mary Magdalene, patronage and pilgrimage practices.

The final discussion of the GHI's Medieval History Seminar 2002, moderated by Professor Borgolte, summed up and offered general observations. Most of the projects presented could be characterized as intellectual history with a touch of social history. They dealt with the mentality and culture of an elite – ecclesiastical or noble – rather than with problems of economies or material culture. Substantial differences between the German and American approaches were less noticeable than expected. Participants discussed the problems of inter- or transdisciplinary projects, which often require language skills, extensive background knowledge from other disciplines and familiarity with methodologies beyond the scope of the individual historian. Everybody agreed upon the value of collaborative and cooperative work to overcome tendencies of fragmentarization and self-referentiality. Without a doubt, the Medieval History Seminar made a contribution in this direction by enabling its participants to establish fruitful international contacts at an early stage of their career.

For the GHI, the value of its graduate conferences comes not so much from the fine-tuning of specialized research. Consequently, there will be no publication of the conference proceedings. It is rather the atmosphere of open discussion and the participants' engagement with approaches and methodologies unrelated at first glance to their own projects that often proves to be the most important aspect. This year's Medieval History Seminar, with its contributions ranging from Charlemagne to the dawn of the Reformation and covering political, ecclesiastical, and cultural history as well as Medieval architecture, art, and literature, offered ample opportunity for this and encourages us to continue this unique program in medieval history.

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