MEDIEVAL HISTORY SEMINAR 2015

Joint seminar of the German Historical Institutes in London and Washington, held at the GHI Washington, October 15-17, 2015. Organized by Cornelia Linde (GHI London) and Jan C. Jansen (GHI Washington). Conveners: Stuart Airlie (University of Glasgow), Paul Freedman (Yale University), Bernhard Jussen (University of Frankfurt), Ruth Mazo Karras (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis), Frank Rexroth (University of Göttingen), Miri Rubin (Queen Mary University of London). Participants: Natalie Anderson (University of Leeds), Lucy Barnhouse (Fordham University), Stephan Bruhn (University of Kiel), Marcel Bubert (University of Göttingen), John Burden (Yale University), Anne Diekjobst (University of Konstanz), Richard Engl (University of Mainz), Brigit Ferguson (UC Santa Barbara), Christian Hoffarth (University of Duisburg-Essen), Theresa Jäckh (University of Heidelberg), Johanna Jebe (University of Tübingen), Stefan de Jong (Cambridge University), Hailey LaVoy (University of Notre Dame), Kevin Lord (Yale University), Jason Ralph (Northwestern University), Agnieszka Rec (Yale University), Joachim Rother (University of Bamberg), Benjamin Savill (Oxford University), Michael Schonhardt (University of Freiburg), Philipp Winterhager (Humboldt University of Berlin).

Following the format of previous years, the ninth biennial Medieval History Seminar, held at the German Historical Institute in Washington, allowed current and recently completed doctoral students to come together to discuss their research. The twenty participants in attendance came from ten German universities, three British universities, and five American universities. Over the course of the seminar, during nine sessions, two or three papers at a time were discussed in-depth. Each paper was subject to a brief, prepared commentary by two or three fellow participants, before the conversation was then opened up to the entire group, allowing for a rich and interesting dialogue and a drawing-out of common themes and relationships.

The first session of the seminar dealt with the theme of cities’ relationships with their minority communities. In her paper, Theresa Jäckh examined the lives of the Muslim minority in Norman Palermo. Jäckh illustrated the marginalization of Muslims at the time, based on topographical shifts. Muslims’ spatial, temporal, and personal connections to the city allowed them occasionally to participate in the government, but also at times to be excluded from the city and
the community. Jason Ralph looked at the relationship of the city of Freiburg with its university. This exploration of “town-gown” relations used a series of lawsuits to reveal tensions between the university stakeholders and the local community. Ralph demonstrated how the lines between the ecclesiastical and civil sphere, and between local and territorial administration, were being redrawn in the decades before the Protestant Reformation.

In the second session, Benjamin Savill took a comparative look at *Papsturkunden* in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England and continental Europe. Using these sources as a form of documentation common to both sides of the English Channel, Savill claimed, allows scholars to put tenth-century English political and religious developments in context. He argued that Ottonian “imperial” attitudes to papal authority would have been more familiar in contemporary England than developments on the Continent and may, at some level, have been imitated; particularly in the case of Archbishop Oswald of York’s journey to Rome. Michael Schonhardt also dealt with the transmission of texts in his paper, which scrutinized the transfer and function of cosmological texts in twelfth-century Regensburg. This study was based on surviving manuscripts and catalogues from the monasteries of Saint Emmeram and Prüfening. Schonhardt used these texts to demonstrate a fragmentation of cosmological knowledge during this time which, in his view, ought not to be regarded as a unit but must be differentiated with a view to its various functions and roles.

That evening, Bernhard Jussen gave a fascinating public lecture titled “Toward an Iconology of Medieval Studies: Approaches to Visual Narratives in Modern Scholarship,” in which he highlighted the significant role images play in how the Middle Ages are viewed and studied. Starting from a case study of images of Charlemagne in French and German history textbooks since the nineteenth century, Jussen explored how images representing the medieval world vary widely across time periods and geographic regions and reminded his audience of the important lesson that such imagery can often represent just as much about the time and place in which it is used as it can of the era it is meant to be depicting.

The second day of the seminar began with a discussion of papers by Lucy Barnhouse and Anne Diekjobst. Barnhouse made a case for the importance of hospitals’ legal status as religious institutions through a study of lepers who were hospital residents in late medieval Mainz. She argued that, collectively, as hospital residents, the
lepers of Mainz acted to ensure the continuity of their legal privileges and of their relationships with those outside the hospital. This case study offered a glimpse into these institutions’ late medieval development. Diekjobst examined legal communications as well, this time in the context of late medieval nunneries in the Bodensee area. This paper used a systematic, theoretical approach grounded in the social context of the time while also dealing with the concept of the “addressability” of people contributing to the social differentiation of the late Middle Ages.

The fourth session focused on a pair of unique religious texts. Christian Hoffarth looked at the writings of Franciscan theologian Peter Olivi, specifically, his exegesis of the Acts of the Apostles. This text, according to Hoffarth, brought the lifestyle of the Minorite Order into harmony with early Christian society in relation to the concept of property ownership. John Burden, on the other hand, examined ecclesiastical justice in early twelfth-century Bavaria through the Collectio Augustana, a local canon law collection compiled in Augsburg between 1108 and 1123. In doing so, he shed light on the practice of episcopal justice and the relationship between medieval canon law and penance, concluding that it is difficult to separate public and private penance, as well as penance and canon law, in the Augustana.

In the fifth session, images of Christ associated with the Knights Templar were at the center of Joachim Rother’s paper. The dominant representation of Christ favored by the Templars, Rother argued, was one marked by suffering and death, based on the Templars’ constructed identity as armed and war-waging monks. This, according to Rother, connected them to the early Christian concept of martyrdom. Kevin Lord, in his paper, re-examined King Ludwig IV’s fourteenth-century “Nürnberg Appellation.” Rather than viewing this document as purely a piece of propaganda or, alternatively, an earnest Romano-Canonical appeal to the Apostolic See, Lord’s paper proposed a third alternative: that the Appellation was a legal text, but one that drew both from Romano-Canonical law as well as imperial legal traditions.

The three papers of the sixth session explored the place of outsiders in certain medieval societies. Philipp Winterhager explored the place of Greek monks in Rome in the early Middle Ages. By looking at three hagiographic texts from Greek-speaking monasteries, ranging from the seventh to the ninth centuries, Winterhager showed the ways in which the Greek immigrants integrated themselves into
Roman society. Brigit Ferguson’s paper examined the interaction of religious, gendered, and emotional identities in the late thirteenth-century sculpture, the Stoning of St. Stephen. Ferguson argued that the relief’s designers condemned the secular, sexual masculinity of the Jewish men attacking Stephen, while also emphasizing that the martyr’s spiritual and emotional strength overcame his attackers, despite his greater physical vulnerability. Finally, Richard Engl analyzed cooperation and conflict between Christians and Muslims in southern Italy in the thirteenth century. In Engl’s view, relations between these two large medieval religious factions were less influenced by religious differences than by political and social interests within their communities.

The third day commenced with a look at some previously understudied written sources. Hailey LaVoy’s paper provided a survey of the letters of early medieval noblewomen as evidence of their administrative responsibilities. It highlighted in particular women’s use of letters as tools for managing these various concerns while also considering whether the ongoing question of early medieval women’s empowerment versus oppression is a useful dichotomy for evaluating women’s roles and experiences in the early medieval economy. Stephan Bruhn, for his part, brought to light the discursive formation process behind the monastic reform movement in late Anglo-Saxon England. Using two hagiographic works by Byrhtferths of Ramsey, Bruhn showed that the ideological construction of the movement demonstrated not only monastic values but those applicable to the laity as well.

The theme of education was at the center of the eighth session. This session began with a discussion of Stefan de Jong’s paper, which illuminated the role of Adelman of Liège in the eleventh-century Eucharistic controversy using the theme of scholarly genealogy. De Jong studied the endangerment of Adelman’s reputation, and the value of his education, through outside threats to the legacy of Adelman’s past teacher. Marcel Bubert focused in his paper on the University of Paris in the thirteenth century, looking at the construction of a “philosophical identity” within that space. Bubert claimed that a tension between a university philosophy and social usefulness was, in fact, culturally productive, as it provoked useful philosophical concepts outside the university which were demarcated from that institution.

In the final session, Agnieszka Rec explored a collection of recipes from Central European alchemists of the fifteenth and sixteenth
centuries. Rec showed that, from their manuscripts, a network of alchemists far wider, both socially and geographically, than previously understood emerges, which demonstrates the necessity and benefit of incorporating understudied regions in scholarship on intellectual exchange in late medieval and early modern Europe. Johanna Jebe, in her paper, studied the example of the St. Gall manuscripts of the Rule of St. Benedict and the discussion of godly monasticism in the ninth century. Looking at the work of a Carolingian scriptorium, and determining patterns of interpretation, along with internal and external factors, Jebe’s work pushed for a more nuanced understanding of processes of Carolingian orders. Finally, Natalie Anderson examined the role of the German Turnierbuch in helping to build a greater understanding of the tournament during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. Through these unique literary works, Anderson stated that more may be learned about the practical realities of the tournaments and their significance to the late medieval Empire.

The seminar concluded with a final discussion, during which the participants also had a chance to ask questions of the faculty conveners. Conversation focused on how early-career researchers might articulate their work to each other and to the wider world, as well as what the best directions to move in modern research might be. The impossibility of knowing what the next “research bandwagon” might be was freely admitted by the conveners, who recommended resisting the temptation to narrow one’s knowledge too much. Applied research, or “getting one’s hands dirty,” was emphasized as a necessity, however, along with the importance of inter-connected relevance, or making one’s research applicable to many different areas, in order to make an impact. Most significantly, perhaps, the participants were advised to be proud of what they do and to remember the importance of lifelong learning. The value of collaboration among the academic community was put forward as another key element of success, and, of course, never being afraid to question.

Natalie Anderson (University of Leeds)