

BORDERLINES XIV: “CODICES AND CODIFICATION”

EMILY ROZIER and MIKE RUSH



In April 2010 the annual Borderlines postgraduate medievalists' conference once again gave early stage researchers the opportunity to give papers in a welcoming atmosphere.

This year's was the fourteenth conference, and saw a return to Queen's University Belfast, at which Borderlines was founded in 1996 by then

postgraduates Stephen Kelly and Jason O'Rourke. The organisers aimed to bring together postgraduates working on the Middle Ages in Ireland and the United Kingdom and to thereby form the basis of an interdisciplinary peer network which crossed institutional and geographical boundaries. Borderlines has often attracted a strong international element, offering participants an opportunity to gain insight into current medieval research from around the world.

The theme for this year's event was "Codices and Codification," which prompted papers from disciplines as varied as law, linguistics, theology, archaeology, film, history and literature, and discussing periods from the Iron Age to the Early Modern.

The programme opened with a session on transgression, including papers on the legal context of revenge tragedies and some post-watershed murder pamphlets. After lunch and the first of many refreshment-based networking opportunities, the second panel discussed the codification of piety. Topics included female devotional roles, the rhetorical construction of religious communities and Renaissance ideals of motherhood. The day finished with a look at concepts of kingship and twelfth-century judicial politics, followed by a wine reception kindly provided by the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature. All participants were sure to make thorough, prolonged and increasingly convivial use of the networking opportunities afforded therein.

The University of Birmingham took the unusual step of proposing an entire panel (including chair) for consideration by the conference organisers, which was happily accepted. Our session was entitled “Co-Defining Individuality: Identities within Established Traditions” and had the pleasure of opening the second day. The panel consisted of three Ph.D. candidates from the English



department. Sarah Macmillan gave a paper on the asceticism of Henry Suso, Emily Rozier spoke about sumptuary codification of the individual, and Anna Gottschall, who stoically took on the role of organiser, presented on the Pater Noster. The panel was followed by a lively question and answer session, chaired by Mike Rush.

The programme continued with a somewhat heated discussion of the relationship between orality and literacy in medieval Ireland, prompted by stimulating papers on Ogham stones and on oral ‘texts’. After lunch, the conference turned its attention to ‘auditory piety,’ religious space in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, medieval street drama and film representations of Martin Luther. Day two finished with a Bede-fest, considering his use of animals and the natural world, and the liminality of his *Life of St Wilfrid*.

In the evening conference goers reconvened in a private (and rather swanky) function room at a nearby restaurant for the much anticipated conference dinner. In true medievalists’ fashion, no avenue for networking and the heated exchange of ideas was left untraversed, and the evening continued into the early hours.

Despite such revelries, the last day of the conference was well attended and



matched the calibre of the previous panels. It opened with a session on manuscript culture, asking ‘what can a Byzantine manuscript tell?’ and ‘who is listening to MS Junius 11?’ The conference closed with studies of the codification of Chaucer and Lydgate, the marginal glosses of the *Regement of Princes* (by Birmingham Medieval Studies M.Phil. graduate Elisabeth

Kempf) and, finally, medieval domestic religious practice.

Borderlines is a conference that never disappoints, offering an ideal forum for the first-time conference attendee to gain experience and for the more seasoned to try out new material in a friendly and constructive environment. This year's conference was made possible by the tireless efforts of Queen's University Ph.D. student Elizabeth Scarborough, to whom we would like to extend our warmest thanks. We are also grateful for the financial support provided by the College of Arts and Law Research and Travel Support Competition Fund. It is as yet unknown to whom the host's mantle will pass for Borderlines XV in 2011, but we hope to see you there!

THE HILTON SHEPHERD POSTGRADUATE SYMPOSIUM 2010 CORY HAZLEHURST and EMMA SOUTHON

The Hilton Shepherd Postgraduate Centre for Medieval Studies held its annual Postgraduate Symposium on Friday, 19 March 2010. The conference was entitled "What Period Is It Anyway? Negotiating Periodisation in Medieval Studies" and focused on the uses and abuses of rigid periodisation across disciplines. This year the conference was shorter than usual, consisting of two sessions during the afternoon, so that delegates could attend the excellent preceding lecture by Monty Python's Terry Jones on the Barbarians, which was organised by the Centre for the Study of the Middle Ages (CeSMA).

In the first of the afternoon's two panels, three high-quality twenty-minute papers were presented by students from outside the University of Birmingham and chaired by Carol Southworth. Anna Turnbull from the University of Liverpool gave a paper on the *Wandalgarius Codex*, a Carolingian manuscript of a collection of Merovingian works compiled by the eighth-century scribe Wandalgarius. She demonstrated that this manuscript, despite its mainly legal content, privileges the measuring of time by a Christian, Biblical chronology over the secular chronology of kings' reigns which modern scholars tend to prefer. Janice Musson from the University of Nottingham argued that the legal reforms introduced by Henry II in 1166 could have made an even greater impact on ordinary people than the Norman Conquest. In particular, she focused on the concept of *novel disseisin* (i.e. the recent dispossession of property) and on the reforms which made it possible for victims to challenge it in the courts. She argued that such reforms made a far greater and further reaching impact on the daily lives of ordinary citizens than the events of 1066.

Special mention should be given to Hicham Boutaleb from the University of Warwick who approached the topic of periodisation from the perspective of the global historian, with a special interest in the medieval Islamic world. Hicham argued that the concept of ‘the Middle Ages’ is inherently euro-centric and heavily oriented on Western and Northern Europe. He further demonstrated that viewing early-medieval Western Europe from the outside, rather than from the inside, resulted in a wholly different perspective both on world history and the place of the European ‘Middle Ages’ within that wider scope.

After a break for tea and biscuits, we reconvened for the second panel of the afternoon. This was a round-table discussion headed by three University of Birmingham postgraduates, Emily Rozier, Mike Rush and Helen Hunter, which touched on a number of issues. The three panellists gave a brief presentation on the merits or otherwise of periodisation in their particular research, and then we opened to contributions from the floor. It was a spirited debate, which covered a number of topics, including the notion of self-identification in discreet periods, the uses and abuses of popular history in fiction and non-fiction, and the effects of reliance on government and external funding sources on the parameters of the academic study of history and literature. The discussion was lively – and at times rather heated – and consequently overran by a considerable time, which we, as organisers, took as a sign of great success!

Around 25 delegates attended from all over the UK (and beyond) and the Hilton Shepherd Symposium once again achieved an interdisciplinary atmosphere and included postgraduates working in medieval history and medieval English. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the attendees for their participation and especially to our speakers for their fascinating and illuminating papers. We are further grateful to Hicham for flying over to Birmingham from Prague just so that he could present his paper at the University. Particular thanks are also due to the Roberts Training Fund for their financial support which allowed us to ensure that the day was free to attend, to the EMREM forum committee and to Deborah Kerr whose help was invaluable on the day.