

Cultural Encounters

The theme of “cultural exchange” and “cultural encounter” represents one of the most popular politically-fostered and integration-oriented research topics of humanities - as the current call by European HERA Network scheme demonstrates. Recently, the interest in cultural encounters shifted from “seeing the other” towards studying social and cultural structures of “otherness”, as well as unveiling functional relations among different cultural, religious and social groups. At the same time, the research questions have come to focus more on “intra-societal” cultural friction (for example in urban space or in particular regions) and the role of corporations in the construction of cultural narratives. Across the European funding environment, historical perspectives on cultural heterogeneity (or homogeneity), communication and interaction are being generously supported by both national and supranational funding bodies.

The historical study of cultural encounters has therefore good potential for the development of collaborative research projects that require multidisciplinary and comparative approaches, including comparisons along spatial and temporal lines, the study of social, religious, economic and political dimensions of cultural encounters, and of practices of preservation, translation, interpretation and mediation of cultural goods. The studies include historical cultural communication of minority and dissent groups in urban and rural space, constructing “the other”, exchange of (cultural) goods, cross-border encounters and imagery, travels, etc.

The CARMEN meeting will discuss questions, such as how the political perspectives on cultural encounters can be made to work for medievalists, how to place medieval research on cultural encounters within cultural studies in general and within large historical perspectives? Other key questions will include: what challenges face us when studying cultural differences and group communication in the Middle Ages (e.g. preservation, representation, unique vs. general patterns, transformations of cultural codes as well as the objects themselves up to now, different and conflicting canonical narratives, etc.), to what extent cultural encounters support development of new collective identities, and last but not least, how to cooperate with social and cultural studies, and how to go beyond the contemporary optics on cultural encounters set by the EU policy agenda?

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