

Leeds IMC, Wed 3/7/2013, CARMEN Round Table *Globalising Medieval Studies*

Interest in the European Middle Ages can be found around the Globe. The reasons are many, ranging from tracing the roots of one's own society to the imperatives of comparative history. These issues were productively discussed in an open session at the CARMEN meeting in Budapest in September 2012.

These are decisive times for Europe, internally and globally. What is Europe and what is its place, seemingly ever smaller, in a globalized world? The 1000 years of history spanning the Fall of Rome and the Modern period are critical to these basic questions. The Middle Ages when "Europe was born" saw mass migrations, the arrival and diversification of exclusive religions (Jewish, Muslim, Christian), and the establishment of minority communities, divisions between East and West, South and North, the development of a money economy and diverse economic mentalities, emergence of polities who as nation-states continue to shape political experience, and the beginning of colonialism. All of these defining experiences of the Middle Ages are equally relevant to the present and future of Europe within a global community.

The Global Middle Ages has two sets of meanings. First and perhaps most simply it can be refer to the study, by scholars anywhere in the world, of the European Middle Ages. This first set of meaning might seem to be simple interest in Europe's past from outside of the West but has the potential to radically transform many fields of study, including Medieval Studies. In our view, these non-Eurocentric perceptions of Europe's past are to be enthusiastically embraced.

The notion of the Global Middle Ages has also come to encompass the study of any culture which coincided chronologically with the medieval Europe and/or any culture which appears to share features with medieval Europe. This approach brings us to the possibility of Entangled History and cultural comparison. Neither Entangled History nor cultural comparison are the same thing as the study of the European Middle Ages by scholars from around the world.

The problem which comes so obviously to the fore is this: can we actually transfer the term "medieval" (a term with its own history and burdens) to other cultures and can we do this to the phase of any global culture that happened, by chance, to be chronologically parallel to the European Middle Ages? If we try to do better than that and find the epoch of the other global cultures that is most comparable to the European Middle Ages, what would our criteria be? In what ways are these approaches profoundly eurocentric? Do they involve a counterbalancing studying back of European history from a periodization developed for other societies?

To put the problem that seems to be behind it all even more polemically: what is more eurocentric? To give others our Middle Ages as measure for what they should consider medieval (chronologically, typologically) or "to keep the Middle Ages all to ourselves"? Having said this we are fully aware that we can do neither, and we shouldn't want to, for purely scholarly reasons (not out of superficial political correctness, or in order simply not to miss a train). Since we also do not want to lose ourselves in "our" Middle Ages, without sight of what surrounded Europe in that period, the question is: What is the best way to globalize the Middle Ages?"

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