

CALL FOR PAPERS:

Comparative approaches to power and dependency in the High Middle Ages: A workshop in honour of Alheydis Plassmann and Björn Weiler

7th-8th January 2025

Comparative approaches to political culture, and the nature of dependency, have a particular importance for the High Middle Ages. Compared to earlier centuries, historians tend to remain in their own national academic ‘sub-tribes’ for this part of the medieval period, a consequence of the sheer variety and amount of evidence that scholars have access to from the turn of the millennium, but also of a legacy of national historical narratives, inherited from the nineteenth century, concerned with the development of the nation state. Systematic comparisons between the kingdoms of high medieval Europe remain rare, with regional or local case studies continuing to dominate.

This workshop is therefore organised in honour of two medieval historians who recognised the neglect of comparative studies all too well and spent their careers correcting that neglect. Alheydis Plassmann’s research interests spanned multiple regions during nearly three decades at the *Institut für Geschichtswissenschaft* in Bonn before she passed away in 2022. In particular, she conducted comparative studies between high medieval England and Germany, demonstrating how political practice, and portrayals of it, could differ profoundly between the two kingdoms, especially in the unequal power dynamics between kings and those dependent on their favour. This workshop also seeks to take forward the legacy of Björn Weiler whose latest book, *Paths to Kingship* (2022), embodied a career spent examining how the subjects of kings, across the Latin West, sought to constrain royal power while remaining fundamentally dependent upon a monarch’s favour, grace, and protection. As he argued, our predominantly national approach to high medieval political culture owes more to the political traditions of the nineteenth century, than to the more complex and interlinked medieval reality. As the book, and the many other studies by Weiler and Plassmann have made clear, political values shared across the Latin West could find very different local and regional manifestations.

The workshop will include two keynote lectures.

The first keynote lecture will be given by Levi Roach, Professor of Medieval History and Diplomatic at the University of Exeter on ‘Constructing Kingship in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: The Example of Otto I’.

The second keynote lecture will be given by Emily Joan Ward, Lecturer in Medieval Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh, on ‘Comparing “Scotland” and “Germany” in the High Middle Ages’.

Our aim is to honour the legacy of Alheydis and Björn by bringing together a range of established and early-career scholars to consider how we can further our understanding of the relationship between power and dependency in medieval politics beyond a national framework. Here, the work already being undertaken at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) raises important themes and questions for the workshop to pursue.

- How was the relationship between the powerful, and their dependents, viewed differently in different parts of high medieval Europe?
- How did the capacity of the powerful to restrain criticism and resistance to their rule differ across the Latin West? What causes can be deduced for these regional contrasts?
- How did class and social status empower or restrict the freedom of dependents to offer resistance, criticism, or counsel to those in power? How did the perception of that social background, and its role in political discourse, differ between kingdoms?
- What role did gendered archetypes play in the dynamics of dependency found in individual kingdoms and how do these compare? How did norms and gendered discourse, around fatherhood and motherhood for example, serve to justify acts of resistance to the powerful?
- What contrasts can be detected in the behaviour dependents undertook in the presence of the powerful? What ‘socially shared bundles of physical and mental actions. . . more or less explicit rules and knowledge about how to act in specific social situations’ were common across the Latin West and which were peculiar to particular regions? How, in other words, did ‘skilful performances of asymmetrical dependency’ differ in line with the unique circumstances of each kingdom?
- How do portrayals of medieval power and dependency vary in line with the very different patterns of evidence bequeathed by each region? How does the predominance of particular types of source material - Latin and vernacular historiography, letter collections, dynastic histories, or lives of bishops for example – both illuminate and constrain our understanding of how dynamics of political dependency compared?
- How has the analytical vocabulary we use to understand the political culture of the Latin West been shaped by our own very distinct national academic traditions? What key concepts, terminologies, and categories shape our view of the relationship between the powerful, and their dependents, and how might comparison help us to question, or at least contextualise, that legacy?

Proposals for thirty-minute papers are invited from speakers to explore the political culture of high medieval Europe from a comparative perspective.

Proposals of no more than 300 words and a CV should be emailed to ryankemp@outlook.com by 28th October 2024.

The workshop will take place in person and online (hybrid format). Speakers will have their travel costs to Bonn reimbursed and will be provided with accommodation.

Attendance online is also welcome including for non-speakers. Please email ryankemp92@outlook.com to register interest to attend (online or in person) by 15th November 2024.

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