

## **North and South, East and West: Movements in the Medieval World**

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### **Introduction**

Judith Mills and Marjolein Stern, University of Nottingham

The Institute for Medieval Research is a leading centre for the study of the Medieval world which draws together academics and students from departments and schools across the University of Nottingham. One of its aims is to promote interdisciplinary approaches within its postgraduate community through a variety of means including and, perhaps most importantly, its annual Postgraduate Conference. The papers published here were originally given at the second of these conferences, held over two days in May 2009.

The multidisciplinary nature of the Institute is exemplified not just by the range of papers given at the Conference, but also by the conference organising team which comprised postgraduate students from Archaeology, English Studies and History. It was also demonstrated in the range of conference participants, who included research students and post-doctoral fellows from Archaeology, History, Linguistics and Geography working in institutions in Europe, Scandinavia and the USA as well as the UK, on themes ranging from sagas to medieval medicine.

The title of the conference 'North, South, East and West: Movements in the Medieval World' also reflects this interdisciplinarity. Originally derived from the Institute's research theme for 2008-9, 'North and South; East and West', the conference gave greater emphasis to the concept of movement. This movement, however, was not simply the movement of people, although this is implicit, but also the movement of ideas and artefacts. As an interdisciplinary conference, however, a second focus was to show how similar topics are identified and interpreted by different academic disciplines. These foci are represented in the papers published here and were also realised in the two keynote lectures of the Conference. The first, by Dr James Barrett (McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge), discussed the movement of people and objects in the Viking Age, looking at theoretical approaches to movement and the archaeological evidence that supports or challenges these theories. The second, by Dr Mary Cunningham (Department of Theology, University of Nottingham), examined the concepts and devotional practices connected with the veneration of the Virgin Mary as they moved from the Byzantine East to the European West. Both encapsulate the

interdisciplinarity and variety in approach to the study of the medieval period which underlay the Conference programme.

Selecting papers for the programme for the Conferences was both a challenging and enjoyable task for the organising team, from which five themes for sessions eventually emerged. The first of these, 'Reasons for movement', dealt with sagas, Jewish travellers and cross-Channel trade from both a literary and a historical perspective. History and geography met in papers on the theme of 'Practicalities of physical movement' which discussed movements across the sea, the river Thames and the Alps. 'Change in communities as a result of incoming movement' looked from archaeological and historical viewpoints at how communities in Denmark and York reacted to the influx of new cultures. Language and linguistic changes as evidence of cultural movements was explored under the theme of 'Movement in (and of) language'. Finally, the movement of manuscripts, whether these were literary, hagiographical or medical, and the ideas contained in them, were traced under the theme of 'Movement of ideas'. As a parallel activity, there were also posters on a range of topics from the locations of runic graffiti to the flows of money in medieval credit systems.

Despite the diversity of topic and discipline, there were many connections, cross-overs and commonalities between these papers, typified by the selection of papers published here as the *Proceedings* of the Conference.

John Shafer (Viking Travellers of the Sagas) examines the representation of the motivations for Viking-Age movement out of the Scandinavian peninsula in Medieval Scandinavian literature, reconstructing the mind-set and world-view that led to this. Specific reasons are presented for travels to the North, South, East and West, varying from what the new region had to offer materially and practically, to how the undertaking would affect the traveller spiritually and ideologically. Whereas Shafer's paper presents the travellers through the eyes of their fellow countrymen several centuries later, Thorir Hraundal (When and How Did the *Rūs/Rhos* Enter Written Sources?) examines written sources that mention the movement of a group of people, the *Rūs/Rhos*, contemporaneously. These ninth- and tenth-century Frankish, Byzantine, and Arabic records show the perception of these people and their movements from the perspective of the eastern cultures they travelled into and their relationships with the people they met.

While Martin Findell's paper (East Germanic and West Germanic in Contact: *n*-stem personal names in the Continental runic inscriptions) is also concerned with the movement of people, his topic is the effect such movement had on linguistic developments. He examines the evidence for contact and movement in the early medieval Germanic regions of the upper Danube and the upper and middle Rhine found in personal names. This study combines a thorough review of particular inscriptions with

a discussion of the theoretical and methodological difficulties of studying linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and political identities in a historical reality of vast population movements.

Taking up a more practical theme, Kevin Sheehan's work (*The Appearance of Lighthouses on Portolan Charts: 1300-1600 AD*) is a study of the physical aids to movement in the late-medieval Mediterranean seascape and how they were recorded on charts, maps and in historical documents. His paper opens up a discussion about how the geographic, onomastic and historical sources reflect the function of the medieval lighthouse and its role in medieval movement. Also concerned with the practicalities of movements over water, Clare Atfield's paper (*Crossing the River: of Whores and Watermen*) examines the local, almost domestic, movement of people in one small area of London. In contrast to the vast distances discussed by Shafer, Hraundal, Findell and Sheehan, this paper describes the means of transport over the Thames in late-medieval London, focussing on the various groups of people that used them, from villains and prostitutes to honest visitors, the reasons for their movement to and from the Southbank and the attempts made by different authorities to control such movement.

The final paper published here adds the theme of the movement of objects and ideas to some of the themes discussed above. Theresa Tyers's discussion of medieval medicinal texts (*New 'Medicine' for Old? Recipes, remedies and treatments in vernacular manuscripts*) looks at the transmission and absorption of knowledge from both classical and 'folk' sources into vernacular medical manuscripts, through both eastern and western routes. In doing so, it also identifies the movement of not just medical treatises but also medicinal plants from East to West, and the application of both theoretical and practical medicine in the medieval world.

As organisers and editors, we would like to thank the authors for their contributions to this publication and all those who participated in the Conference. We would also like to thank the Institute for Medieval Research for their support and the Graduate School for granting Roberts Money which made the Conference possible.

The third Institute for Medieval Studies Post-Graduate Conference will be held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2010 with the theme of 'Constructing and Transmitting Identities in the Medieval World: Textual and Material Perspectives'.

Judith Mills and Marjolein Stern

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