Titles and Abstracts of Speakers’ Papers

Dr Lindsay Diggleman (University of Auckland)


Here I examine several chronicle descriptions of urban crowd behaviour at times of civil and political unrest. All take place in the chief cities of the Norman world; the crowds whose activities I focus upon are thus close to the centres of political power and their actions both reflect and are constitutive of important moments of crisis and uncertainty. Our knowledge of the views and actions of these urban populations comes from a relatively limited number of sources, meaning that our impressions are shaped by the rhetorical techniques of authors whose opinions on crowd involvement in the affairs of state range from the sympathetic and supportive to the horrified and outraged. Crowds are often described as behaving with a single political will – they are cast as rational, if sometimes violent, actors in the theatre of the various Norman states they inhabit. Conversely, on occasions where crowds are split and factions are fighting against one another, their fratricidal mayhem mirrors the uncertainty of disputed successions and civil conflicts among ruling elites. In all these cases, chronicle authors in Sicily, Normandy and England invest urban populations with emotional personae and dramatic gestures, transforming the diversity of countless individuals into striking portraits of collective urban protagonists.

Prof. Constant J. Mews (Monash University)

The Ambiguities of Christian Hebraism in the Twelfth-Century Schools

This paper explores the movement by certain Christian scholars in both France and England to incorporate Hebrew learning in their exposition of Christian thought, as well as the ambiguous attitude towards the Jewish community that they represent. It considers texts such as the Isagoge in theologiam, often attributed to the school of Peter Abelard, and the Contra Salomitas of Maurice of Kirkham, a treatise that promotes knowledge of Hebrew grammar as a way of correcting misunderstanding about the identity of Maria Salome. Did twelfth-century scholasticism have the capacity to moderate more extreme anti-Jewish attitudes, or did it share in a wider movement of Christian desire to assert hegemony over the Jewish communities of England and northern France? Particular attention will be given to various strands of thought present in scholars shaped by teaching at the school of St Victor in Paris.

Dr. Chris Jones (University of Canterbury)

Connecting the Urban Environment with Political Ideas in Late Capetian France

In 1300, the lawyer Pierre Dubois set out to convince the Capetian king Philip IV to put himself forward as a candidate for western emperor. Among Dubois’s arguments was the bold statement that French kings were particularly suited to universal rule because Paris benefitted from a favourable astronomical alignment. He was not alone in this view. According to John of Jandun, a close friend of the notorious Marsilius of Padua, ‘environment’ was one of the key factors that made the Capetian dynasty ideally suited to universal rulership. Such was John’s enthusiasm for Paris that he wrote an entire book dedicated to praising it. The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between the
political conceptions of men such as John and Dubois and the urban environment in late medieval France. While the paper will examine the importance of the link between Paris and the French ruling dynasty, it will also seek to paint a broader picture by moving beyond the Capetian capital. Sens offers a notable case study. By the reign of Philip IV, Sens was a provincial centre whose influence was in decline. Yet the 1290s witnessed attempts by the monk Geoffroi de Courlon to reinvigorate the city’s historiographical tradition. As a consequence, Geoffroi’s universal history offered a Sens-centred model of political organisation that appears to have dominated the thought-world of the city and its environs for several decades. Philip IV’s reign is a period that is traditionally regarded as witnessing the birth of the concept of the ‘nation-state’ and the emergence of a new ‘national’ sentiment in France. Both these developments are frequently linked to a revival in Aristotelian learning in the Parisian schools. This paper will suggest that the urban environment may have played a more important role in shaping political conceptions than has been hitherto suspected. It will propose that the urban experience was one of several factors that contributed to producing a more varied French ‘political thought’ in this period than is sometimes assumed.

Chris Jones is a Senior Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Canterbury, where he has taught since 2006. His main publications, on aspects of political thought and chronicles in late medieval France, include Eclipse of Empire? Perceptions of the Western Empire and Its Rulers in Late Medieval France (Brepols, 2007). He co-edited the award winning Treasures of the University of Canterbury Library (Canterbury University Press) in 2011, the first serious study of one of New Zealand’s most eclectic and under-explored collections; and initiated a number of online projects and exhibitions connected with holdings in New Zealand libraries, including the creation of a digital version of the Southern Hemisphere’s only medieval genealogical roll. His edited volume John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power will be published by Brepols in 2014.

Amanda McVitty (Massey University)

‘Give me my name of a true man’: Treason, manhood, and political subjecthood in fifteenth-century London

Recent scholarship on English state formation has argued that from the later fourteenth century, identity as an English subject was increasingly aligned, politically and legally, with a cultural conception of nationality that was located in birth and language. In this paper, I investigate one aspect of this process by examining the records of a series of treason trials held in London between 1400-22. Using trial documents from King’s Bench alongside ‘popular’ forms of political expression such as bills and circulated letters, I consider the interplay of language, speech, and agency in the construction of political subjecthood, with particular attention to the way discourses of true and false manhood interacted with concepts of ‘tongue’ in the construction of and resistance to charges of treason.

Amanda McVitty is a doctoral candidate in history at Massey University. Her doctoral research focuses on identity, political subjecthood, and the state in late medieval England. She has presented on topics relating to treason and identity at the ANZAMEMS and Leeds IMC conferences. Her article, "False knights and true men: Contesting chivalric masculinity in English treason trials, 1388-1415" will be published in the December 2014 issue of the Journal of Medieval History.
Jenny Smith (University of Melbourne)

Constant Higgling: Urbanity and Civility from the Medieval to the Early Modern

'Urbanity' in the sense of refined manners as appropriate to city life has been attested in English from the mid-fifteenth century, at the same time as an increase in the population of towns and the founding of new ones. This has suggested to some scholars a shift from medieval 'courtesy' (of the court) to an early modern 'civility' or 'urbanity' (of the city). The medieval court and its attendant behaviour is thus differentiated from the civic or urban, based not necessarily on location so much as on historiographical understandings of polity. Recent scholarship has questioned this reading, particularly when considering sources in Latin and Anglo-Norman.

However, some questions remain unanswered. Although 'civility' and 'urbanity' have different meanings etymologically, both words (and their variants) were used in similar contexts in late medieval English texts. What might have been considerations that led authors and translators to use one word over another? Did the political senses of 'civility' as being connected with citizenship (as distinct from simply habitation) have currency in medieval and early modern good conduct manuals? This paper attempts to chart some of the main texts and points necessary to circumscribe the semantic field of urbanity and civility in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in texts printed or circulated in England.

Jenny Smith holds an MA in History from the University of Melbourne, with a thesis on the history of irony in England from the 1470s to 1530s. She is interested in the history of ideas in this period, particularly in changes in common metaphors, and is exploring ideas and methods for possible PhD topics.

Prof. Dr. Jan Dumoly (Ghent University)

Guild Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders

My paper will focus on guild ideologies and their performances in later medieval Flanders. The guild structure and its accompanying ideology served as guiding principles for the social organization of the majority of the urban population in the medieval Low Countries. On a European level, towns in this region display evidence for a corporatist ideology in its most ideal, typical and durable form; and which before the fifteenth century is matched only in some towns in German regions or in Italy. In the county of Flanders, the century between 1280 and 1380 was a significant period in the genesis of a set of corporatist discourses and practices, a crucial moment being the victory of 1302 and the period of consolidation of the political guilds that followed. But the transformation of the communal sphere of the city into a veritable corporatist space was not the result of guilds triumphantly imposing their will on the civic landscape; it was instead a precarious process that involved setbacks, alliances and compromise with other social and political forces, interplay and dialogue with other systems of thought and ideas. The guild ideology that emerged may be viewed as a paradigmatic chain of signifiers, the most important of which were labour, charity, brotherly love, unity, harmony, privileges, economic justice, and the right to live a decent life based on honest work. It was never theoretically formulated in learned treatises but can be encountered in charters and ordinances regulating guild life, in petitions to the city government and the prince, chronicle accounts of their collective action, and in urban literary sources such as songs, poems, and plays. It was also performed in visual languages, in architecture and in religious practices. In medieval Flanders, processions dominated by craft guilds, passion plays, common meals and masses had a cohesive ideological effect. During the later middle
ages and the early modern period, the guilds also invested more and more in buildings, chapels, almshouses, material culture, banners, uniforms, heraldic symbols and devices. Guild houses became prominent features of the urban landscape as in no other European region, symbolizing the autonomy and the privileged status of the corporations.

Jan Dumolyn (1974) is senior lecturer in medieval history at Ghent University. He has published widely on the social and political history of the medieval Low Countries and especially on the later medieval metropolis of Bruges. His recent publications include (with Jelle Haemers): “‘A Bad Chicken was Brooding.’ Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders”, Past and Present, 214 (2012), pp. 45-86.

Prof. Johan Oosterman (Radboud University, Nijmegen)

Discovering New Media. Anthonis de Roovere and the Early Printing Press

The emergence of the printing press in the urban environment and its impact on poetics and the way texts were published still remain subjects of debate. A dearth of evidence contributes to uncertainty on these subjects, onto which some scholars have imposed strongly-held convictions. This paper re-examines previous scholarship in the field by exploring the ways in which the poet and playwright Anthonis de Roovere in Bruges, ca. 1430 – 1482, played an active role in exploiting the opportunities of the new medium.

Johan Oosterman is a full professor of medieval and early modern Dutch literature at Radboud University Nijmegen. His research concentrates on early rhetoricians (De Roovere, Excellent Chronicle of Flanders), Historical Libraries and Collections, and Medieval and Early Modern Literature from the German-Dutch Border Regions.

Dr. Kim Phillips (University of Auckland)

‘Europe Looks East: Chinese Cities and the European Urban Gaze, c. 1298 – c. 1440’

Marco Polo’s description of Khubilai Khân’s palace and summer capital at Shangdu, his imperial capital at Khanbaliq, and the great trading centre of Hangzhou introduced medieval readers to the splendours of China. Many parts of Europe were entering a new era of urbanization and ceremonial complexity from the thirteenth century. Elite urban and genteel readers were interested in reading about novel technologies, modes of communication, forms of currency, and social organization, as well as the size and design of urban centres and higher forms of luxury and court ceremony. While reading about such things in the East, they were implementing more advanced modes of civility in the courts and cities of late medieval Europe. This is not to propose cause and effect; rather, the themes of civility and technology in accounts of the distant East are congruent with developments at home. Travellers’ tales of China, particularly those that became most popular with European urban readers, lingered over such descriptions because they were of great contemporary interest. This paper explores accounts of Chinese cities by Marco Polo, Franciscan missionaries, Niccolo dei Conti, and other medieval travellers and asks what features of Chinese cities most captured their imagination and why.
Dr. Tania M. Colwell (Australian National University)

Approaching the City: Images of the Foreign and the Familiar in Late Medieval Parisian Manuscripts

From the mid-thirteenth century onwards, European interest in the world beyond the Mediterranean stimulated a wealth of literary production embracing historical and imagined reports of intercultural encounter. Striking for their luxurious illumination of distant places and peoples are a selection of Parisian manuscripts containing anthologies of travel narratives which typically included intriguing portraits of far-flung cities. Produced for the Valois court in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, these manuscripts and their urban iconography offer a colourful point of departure from which to explore representations of encounter abroad and constructions of identity at home. This paper will examine how Parisian illuminators visually interpreted reports of cities and juxtapose these images with both the texts in which they appear and representations of Paris produced by these artists in a range of other works. Depictions of foreign cities not only illustrated narratives of intercultural experiences but also constituted a mode of intercultural encounter for the courtly audiences of those narratives. Through a comparative analysis of the imagined urban environments created by Parisian artists, this paper will reflect on how those images of the foreign city shaped audiences’ encounters with new worlds. It will also consider the implications of the iconography of the foreign and familiar city for conceptions of self and other in the late medieval West.

Tania M. Colwell is a visiting scholar in the School of History at the Australian National University, Canberra, and a 2014 Associate Investigator with the ARC Centre for the History of Emotions. While developing a new project exploring representations of intercultural encounter in the pre-modern world, she is also revising her doctoral thesis on the manuscripts and audience reception of the late medieval French Mélusine romance for monograph publication.

Prof. Carole M. Cusack (University of Sydney)

Medieval Detective Fiction and the Reality of Urban Crime Oxford University: Ian Morson’s William Falconer Novels

The medieval detective novel as a popular literary phenomenon dates from the 1977 publication of A Morbid Taste For Bones by Ellis Peters (Edith Pargeter). However, detective fiction is a modern genre that reflects the expectations of the contemporary West: individualism, the detective as a dispenser of order and righter of wrongs (in a post-religious manner), and a liberal understanding of society that has little to do with the reality of life in the Middle Ages. From the origins of the genre in the nineteenth century, the cosy ‘country-house’ mystery (the classic exponent of which was Agatha Christie) vied with the harder-edged urban crime novel, in which the city plays a major role as setting. The city is generally presented as a site of anonymity, violence, and religious heterodoxy. This paper focuses on Ian Morson’s detective series featuring William Falconer, Regent Master at the University of Oxford in the later thirteenth century. Late medieval Oxford was a byword for lawlessness, with the disorder of the university being especially prominent. Motifs of the urban that feature in Morson’s novels— including cultural diversity, issues of science vs. religion, street gangs, and the sex industry – are compared to accounts of late medieval crime and punishment, with a view to establishing the particular character of Oxford as a hotbed of sin and crime, and by extension the university town and both students and dons as subversive,
anti-establishment individualists (and, potentially, social undesirables, malcontents, and criminals).

Carole M. Cusack is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney. She trained as a medievalist and her doctorate was published as Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples (Cassell, 1998). Since the late 1990s she has taught in contemporary religious trends, publishing on pilgrimage and tourism, modern Pagan religions, new religious movements, and religion and popular culture. She is the author of The Essence of Buddhism (Lansdowne, 2001), Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith (Ashgate, 2010), and The Sacred Tree: Ancient and Medieval Manifestations (Cambridge Scholars Publishing), 2011. She is co-editor of the Journal of Religious History and of the International Journal for the Study of New Religions.

Titles and Abstracts to follow:

Dr Peter Howard (Monash University)
Dr Mark Amsler (University of Auckland)
Prof. Jim Murray (Western Michigan University)
Dr. Roger Nicholson (University of Auckland)
Barbara Rouse (Massey University)
Prof. Peter Arnade (University of Hawaii)