



# Urbanity and Society in the Middle Ages

An Interdisciplinary Conference on Urban Society and Life across the  
Medieval Period c. 600-1500

## **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May**

Afternoon – 1700 onwards: Arrival and Registration.

18.15-19.30: **A Tale of Three Cities: Architecture and Spectacle in Prague, Krakow and Vienna** - Public Keynote Lecture by Dr Zoë Opačić (Birkbeck) followed by a wine reception at the King's Manor.

In the evolution of the European city, the late Middle Ages represent one of the most innovative periods, and one with a lasting impact on urban form and experience. As well as being a time of rapid expansion of the urban fabric, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were also an era of great sophistication in the use of architectural language not only to shape space but also to convey certain meanings that could shift according to function. Although many of these ideas were pioneered in Italy and on the increasingly urbanised courts of western Europe, they were simultaneously developed on a much more ambitious scale in Prague, Vienna and Krakow, cities that are historically and culturally strongly related. All three were seats of powerful courts, of emancipated civic authorities, guilds and confraternities and new universities, and as well as being important artistic centres, they developed impressive new districts, built bridges, gates, palaces, town halls and cathedrals. This ambitious urban renewal was articulated through innovative architectural language, one sensitive to decorum, performance and spectacle. The examination of the relationship between form, function and symbolic interpretation, expanded over the three-dimensional canvas of a medieval city is at the heart of this paper.

20.00: Dinner – At a Restaurant in York. If you are interested in attending with the Keynote Speakers and Organising Committee please let us know.

## **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May**

9.30-10.00: Arrival.

### **10.00-12.00: Urban Élites and Community in Medieval Europe**

**Civic Commensality in Late-Medieval England – Dr. Dave Postles, University of Hertfordshire**

The symbolic aspects of civic feasts in late-medieval England have mainly been explored in terms of cohesion, 'community', reciprocity (in external relationships), and harmony. In the case of the common feasts of guilds, the emphasis has been placed on the regular, if

intermittent, occasion of 'community' (Rosser). The mayor's feast(s) has/have been interpreted as the symbolic acceptance and transfer of authority (Phythian-Adams, Sacks), although it should be remarked that not all boroughs had established mayors (e.g. Ipswich). In these approaches, the potential for exclusion and hierarchy has been recognized, without diminishing the cohesion advanced for those in attendance. There remain, however, other possibilities, particularly in the instance of the mayor's feast. The advent of the mayor's feast was an invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger). More than that, however, the office of the mayor expanded in practical and symbolic authority, represented through seating as well as ceremony (Tittler), an accrual of status responding to external as well as internal pressures and influences. The mayor's feasts may thus have tended to become competitive events like the potlatch (Mauss et al.) or 'expenditure' (Bataille). The prescriptions of allowances for the mayor's feast might thus have been an attempt to limit the symbolic aggression/violence of the mayor's feast, to rein in the mayor's power and to impart a civic ethic of parsimony, as much as to subsidize the mayor's expenses.

### **Nuremberg's Urbanity and the Rural Nobility in the Fifteenth Century - Ben Pope, Durham University**

Compared to many other European cities of the late Middle Ages, Nuremberg exhibits a relatively marked social separation between the urban population of all ranks and the nobility of the surrounding countryside. This meant that nobles who entered the city generally did so as 'outsiders' to some extent, certainly as non-residents and as guests in the city council's jurisdiction. Yet Nuremberg was very much the regional nobility's city too, as a social and economic centre that provided the nobility with goods and services, meeting places and liturgical space for noble confraternities, and with both a stage for self-representation and a setting for political and social life at major princely and imperial occasions. This paper will ask how the experience of Nuremberg's urbanity, to which the nobility was so closely bound, influenced nobles' relationships with and perceptions of the civic authorities, from whom the rural nobility were becoming increasingly distinct. It will focus on the ways in which the economic and social centrality of the town for the nobility could lead to tensions with the city council, and ask whether the council's attempts to eliminate those tensions were a significant factor in a growing animosity between the city and its noble neighbours over the course of the fifteenth century.

### **Strangers in Town: A Trade Facility for Muslims in Twelfth-Century Constantinople – Dr Jacopo Turchetto, University of Padova**

The Saracens' mitaton of Constantinople, mentioned by the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates, has already stimulated interesting reflections of a philological and historical character. However, less attention has been paid to the topographical aspects related to that official hostelry where Muslim merchants (and in particular silk Syrian traders) could handle their economic activities.

The aim of this talk is to try and determine the possible localisation of this important commercial structure in relation to the urban context of Constantinople. All this will be carried out through the analysis of other passages by Niketas, of the details given by two medieval travellers, of historical cartography and through targeted comparisons with similar buildings which are traceable in other Mediterranean cities.

In this sense, it will be possible to better perceive the relationship established between the civic authorities of the Byzantine capital and its foreign merchants, as well as to determine to which extent the latter were integrated in or secluded from the medieval Constantinopolitan society.

### **12.00-14.00: Lunch (Not Provided)**

There are many places available for lunch around the King's Manor area including pubs, cafes and sandwich shops. The time will be yours, so if the weather is nice and you want to go for a wander, feel free!

### **14.00-16.00: Growth, Spatial Changes and Representations of Medieval Towns**

#### **Stairs, Gates and Money: The Settlement of Monastic Orders near Bridges in Imperial Cities – Dr. Jana Gajdošová, Birkbeck, University of London**

The building of stone bridges had profound effects on the development and prosperity of medieval cities. This included changes to the topography of the city, the appeal for travellers and tradesmen wishing a safe journey, and the movement of certain institutions within the city. This paper will focus specifically on the settlement of monastic orders and hospitals to the proximity of bridges, and it will consider as primary examples the Order of St. John and the Order of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star in Prague and the Hospital of St. Catherine in Regensburg. The settlement and function of these orders will be compared to the bridge-building brotherhoods in France. I aim to discuss the reasons for such a close relationship between the building of bridges and the migration of monastic orders to their proximity, how this relationship affected other parts of the medieval town, and the benefits that such proximity offered the monastic orders.

#### **Medieval Society and Urban Space: An Archaeological and Historical Approach Through a French Example: Troyes (Champagne-Ardenne) - Claire Bourguignon, University of Burgundy**

In 1982, the French historian R. Fossier (p. 980) defined the early medieval city as “an unknown body, a cyst, a malformation in the medieval society”. Historical studies and archaeological research focusing particularly on the cities of Paris (Cammass et al., 1995) or Tours (Noizet, 2007) since provided numerous and varied clues enabling a renewal of the analyze of the urban phenomenon during the medieval period. Recent archaeological surveys in Strasbourg (Blaizot et al., 2005) or Lyon (Reynaud, 1998) enabled to improve the characterization of early medieval urban spaces by emphasizing an important restructuring of suburban spaces, the forms of ground occupation and architecture changing (Burnouf, 2009). However, there still remains lots of questions on the way the inhabitants perceived

the presence of new political and religious authorities in the city and their spatial consequences and the way these changes contributed to the building of the society of the medieval city.

This paper aims at highlighting the relationships between the medieval urban society and the spatial changes occurring in the city through the example of the cathedral town of Troyes (Champagne-Ardenne, north-eastern France) during the 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is a multidisciplinary approach based on a re-evaluation and a cross-checking of archaeological and historical data and the study of artefacts. It demonstrates the way the dwellers played an important part in the spatial layout of the urban space and in parallel the way they reacted spatially to the introduction of new authorities in the city, to the new occupation of suburban spaces. It demonstrates how important it is to confront the topography of the city and the forms of ground occupation to help understanding the urban building during the Middle Ages. Therefore, this paper sheds light on a new case of study allowing rethinking about French urbanity and society.

#### **City and Nation in Anglo-Norman England – Dr Daniel Gerrard, University of Oxford**

It has long been recognised that Anglo-Norman writers of the twelfth century understood the economic development of England, including urban development, as representing superior cultural and even moral progress that could be used to justify England's political supremacy within the British Isles. Nevertheless, and in spite of continued scholarly interest in the origins and progress of both British national identities and Anglo-Norman historical writing, the place of urban development within medieval concepts of nationhood has not been much considered. It is the argument of this paper that descriptions of foundation, reform and destruction of cities were of great significance in both historical and legendary narratives concerned with the development of nations from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to the Arthurian mythology. In consequence, the city ought to be understood by social and cultural historians as not merely an economic or architectural phenomenon but as an important symbol of nationhood and civilisation.

**4.00-4.30: Break.**

#### **4.30- 6.00: Financing trade in the fifteenth century: provincial towns and the role of London**

Final Keynote from Dr Richard Goddard, University of Nottingham

Medieval trade was made easier and more efficient by the virtually iniquitous use of credit. Merchants and others generally bought goods and services by paying a small down payment, taking the goods away – on credit – whilst promising to pay the remaining balance at a later date. One of the central features of large towns - their essential 'urbanity' - meant that large numbers of buyers and sellers congregated at markets and shops along with (often wealthy) merchant middlemen ready to buy and sell a wide range of goods. This urban

milieu made credit easy to obtain in later medieval towns, making them centres, not just of trade and manufacture, but also of trade finance.

In the fifteenth century however, things began to change. Whereas previously high-value credit – known as Staple credit - could be obtained with ease in the major provincial towns and ports of England, like York, Coventry, Newcastle or Boston, by the middle of the fifteenth century obtaining trade finance or credit in these places was becoming increasingly difficult. Merchants instead turned to London and London merchants to obtain Staple credit and other forms of finance. By the end of the fifteenth century London had become the preeminent centre for Staple credit in the kingdom, echoing its rise as England's foremost port and as its centre of government.

This paper will examine the shifts that took place in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and look at how we might interpret these in terms of urban transformations.

### **6.00: Finish**

Anyone wishing to stay for drinks and food is welcome to join us afterwards!

