Speaking in Tongues: Language, Communication and Power in the Middle Ages

14th of June 2013

Communication in the Middle Ages could take place within a wide spectrum of languages, dialects, and tongues. This conference, planned for the 14th of June 2013, will explore how the use and manipulation of language can contribute to our understanding of ‘real-world’ medieval cultural interaction, and investigate how complex ideas and societal *mores* were communicated and translated between languages.

How did people overcome the governmental and administrative challenges in multilingual environments, such as diplomatic missions to the Mongols, knightly organizations, courts, and trading entrepôts? How were concepts and theories transmitted through cultures, across borders, or within the peripheries of Christendom, even within large institutions such as the Church or multi-ethnic polities, such as the Holy Roman or Byzantine empires? What kind of problems presented themselves in the realms of East-West relations, synods, and church councils, where complex doctrine and beliefs were discussed, debated and translated?

This interdisciplinary conference, bringing together the linguistic, cultural, and historical, will be held at the IHR in central London. It will comprise of four broad thematic strands, interspersed with refreshments, a catered lunch, and a keynote lecture, delivered by Dr Alan V. Murray (University of Leeds):

* **Cultural and political interaction in central and eastern Europe.** Lines of inquiry could include the imposition of German settlement and law in Slavic lands, how legal problems and grievances were resolved in multi-lingual communities and the difficulties which French and German European noble houses, such as the Angevins or the Luxemburgs, had in ruling their polyglot Eastern domains.
* **Ecclesiastical administration and theory:** the practicalities of synods and councils, managing conflict within ecclesiastical communities, translation of documents involved in papal government, and the problems the papacy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy faced in transmitting its ideas and organization on a ‘global’ scale.
* **Byzantium and the gateway to Europe:** Possible areas of interest may include the transfer of scientific principles into and out of Christian Europe; the Byzantine state’s government of a wide array of different ethnic, and hence linguistic, groups; and the role of language in trading networks in the Aegean and beyond.
* **The Latin East, crusader states, and knightly orders**: Potential areas of investigation would be the role of language in the administration and diplomacy of multi-lingual and multi-cultural states in the Holy Land, whether Christian or Muslim; the challenges knightly orders faced when dealing with a ‘worldwide’ membership; and how ideas on religious warfare permeated across cultures.

Proposals (max. 300 words) for papers of 20 minutes, fitting broadly within one of the above thematic strands, are welcomed both from early career scholars, and from postgraduate students, before the 22nd of March 2013. Further enquiries and proposals for papers should be sent to the organisers, Simon Parsons and Mark Whelan, at speakingintonguesconference@gmail.com.

Attendance at the conference is free but registration is necessary. To register please email the organisers at speakingintonguesconference@gmail.com In order that candidates from outside London are able to attend, we hope to be able to provide limited travel expenses to speakers from outside London. Postgraduates should therefore make their status and their institution clear when submitting their proposal to achieve the best use of funds.

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