



Conventus

Workshop

The Performance of Change: Symbolic enactments of reform and renewal in Medieval Western Monasticism

Dresden, 9/1/2014

This workshop will contribute a new field in the study of medieval Western monasticism by focussing on the role of symbolic enactments of change in the context of reform. The notion of reform occupied a central place in medieval Western monasticism, as its members were encouraged to strive continuously for a more 'authentic' experience of the cenobitic ideal. Promoters of reform or renewal of the *vita monastica* or *religiosa* strived for change either within pre-existing institutional contexts (for instance a monastery or an order), or in newly-conceived forms of religious life (monastic, canonic, eremitical) initially driven by charismatic leadership or ideals, and ultimately evolving into new institutional realities. So far, these phenomena have been studied primarily from ideological and institutional points of view.

Given the current interest in historical scholarship for the study of symbolic acts as a lever for political change, it is surprising to find that specialists of monasticism have so far

shown little interest in the role of symbolic behavior in these aforementioned reformprocesses. As various studies have shown, social and institutional change in secular society was effectuated not primarily through juridical acts of transition, but through a series of public actions (acts) charged with symbolic meanings, enabling the participants to enact change and establish a consensus over its spiritual and practical implications. Symbolic enactments of change expressed reformers' ambitions for change, but also by means of a system of action and counter-action created opportunities for adjustment resulting from negotiation. Thus, symbolic behavior was not a side effect of actual, deeper-laying processes of reform and renewal, but an essential instrument to these processes.

The organizers of this workshop aim to verify to what extent these observations are equally valid for medieval monasticism, and identify methodological and conceptual opportunities for studying the performative aspects of reform processes. In order to reach this goal, the organisers will gather a group of specialists to discuss the possibilities for further research in this exciting new area of investigation. The aim is to look at a wide range of reforms and renewals of the *vita religiosa* in Western society, ranging from the ninth century until the fifteenth, and including the broadest possible selection of movements (the monastic reform by Cluny, Gorze etc., the religious renewals of the 11th and 12th centuries, Cîteaux, the Mendicant orders, the reform of observances in the late Middle Ages). To systematize discussion and exchange, participants will be asked to consider four points that are fundamental to this field of study:

1. Reform/renewal as embodied transformation, in other words behavioral aspects of reformist thought. Central to the discussion will be the question how reformist thinkers conceived the way in which reformed monasticism was behaviorally different from its non- or pre-reformed counterpart.
2. 'Performed' reform/renewal: this part of the workshop will look at how reform itself was initiated and negotiated through enactments of ideals and symbols charged with reformist meaning. Particular attention will be paid to the call-and-response mechanisms of these enactments and their negotiative character.
3. Breakdowns of symbolic enactments: this part of the workshop will investigate the relation between the enactment of change and the relevancy of a particular reformed/rebooted form of monasticism. In other words, is the end of enactments of change a signal of the end of change itself?
4. Perceptions of reform: this part of the workshop will investigate how contemporary accounts of reform have impacted on the representation of the symbolic aspects of reform and renewal in Western monasticism.

Programme

10.00-10.15 Prof. Steven Vanderputten (Universiteit Gent), Reform as performance: conceptual and methodological questions

Session 1: Performing and 'unperforming' reform

10.15-10.45 Drs. Koen Vanheule (Universiteit Gent), Introducing the abbot: the performance of power at the offset of 'reformist' leadership (Lotharingia, first half of the eleventh century)

10.45-11.30 Prof. Brigitte Meijns (KULeuven), Performing reform in canonical and monastic milieus in Flanders and the North of France (c. 1070-c.1150)

11.30-12.15 Dr. Cristina Andenna (TUDresden), Wie lehnt man eine Reform ab? Ausgewählte Beispiele performativen Widerstands

12.15-13.00 Dr. Tjamke Snijders (Universiteit Gent), The performance of communal identities and reform: what we can learn from the manuscript evidence

13.00-14:00 Lunch

Session 2: Symbolic performances of reform and reformist agency

14.00-14.45 Prof. Nicolangelo d'Acunto (Università Cattolica del Sacre Cuore, Milano), Mostrare e/o nascondere il cambiamento? Continuità e fratture nelle rappresentazioni simboliche della vita religiosa (secc. XI-XIII)

14.45-15.30 Drs. Pieter Byttebier (Universiteit Gent), Pastoring the flock: episcopal presence and performance in the process of a monastic reform in Lotharingia (10th-12th century)

15.30-15.45 Break

15.45-16.30 Prof. Ludovic Viallet (Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand), La question de la quête chez les Franciscains, à l'âge des réformes de l'Observance

16.30-16.45 Prof. Gert Melville (FOVOG, TUDresden): Conclusions

Organizers

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