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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Conference Review: EXARC at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan (USA)

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The International Congress on Medieval Studies is held at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo each May.

Now in its 52nd year, ICMS draws around 3,000 people attending approximately 575 sessions of papers, panel discussions, round tables, workshops and performances. Various societies,

> EXARC was hosting 2 sessions and co-sponsoring a third at ICMS in May 2017.

associations, and institutions also hosted 100+ business meetings and receptions over the course of the 4 day conference. This year EXARC facilitated one session and co-sponsored another one.

Session 155 Archaeology and Experiment: Moving beyond the Artifacts

Symmetry and Asymmetry in Viking Age Dress V. M. Roberts, Independent Scholar
The Growth of Yeast and Mold on Viking Age Flat Bread versus Modern Sliced Bread Marci Lyn Waleff, Independent Scholar
Minimalist Survival Gear: Three Points in Time Stevan E. Waleff, Independent Scholar

Although attendance was slightly lower than in past years due to the session being scheduled in the evening, it was a good session with lots of questions from the audience. No-one simply read a paper. These were people passionate about their topics (even the mold) talking with, rather than at, the audience about those topics. The questions at the end really showed the level of audience engagement we got in return. We could have stayed longer answering questions.

Session 41 Medieval Tools (A Roundtable)

Sponsor: AVISTA: The Association Villard de Honnecourt for the Interdisciplinary Study of Medieval Technology, Science, and Art; DISTAFF (Discussion, Interpretation, and Study of Textile Arts, Fabrics, and Fashion); EXARC; Medica: The Society for the Study of Healing in the Middle Ages; Research Group on Manuscript Evidence; Societas Magica

A roundtable discussion with Constance H. Berman, Univ. of Iowa; Carla Tilghman, Washburn Univ.; Frank Klaassen, Univ. of Saskatchewan; Linda Ehrsam Voigts, Univ. of Missouri–Kansas City; and Darrell Markewitz, Wareham Forge

An unfortunate border crossing problem kept Darrell Markewitz from attending this session. Neil Peterson stepped in for him at the last moment and had a good time speaking to the value of EXARC. There were some wonderful questions from the audience on a number of topics including how museums can use EXARC to engage the public. Frank Klassen spoke very well about the museum exhibit development Magica did and the fun that 3D printers can bring to the work. We also discussed their value in rapidly prototyping and the problems that come because of the materials involved. That also led to a discussion on experiential versus experimental activities; skills versus technologies; and various other topics.

The Dark Ages Re-Creation Company Fibre Team held a "Stitch and Bitch" in Valley I Shilling Lounge over lunch on Friday. Attendance was lighter then Karen Davidson would have liked,

but everyone had a good time. There was a prize raffle, and everyone walked away with something new. Valley I is a bit out of the way to catch the noon hour crowd, but no worries, we have a new plan for next year to catch the eye of the textile geeks at the conference!

An additional experiential session was also planned, but was cancelled due to the previously mentioned border crossing problem.

Session 224 Casting an International Congress on Medieval Studies Pilgrim's Badge (A Workshop)

Sponsor: Dark Ages Recreation Company

A hands-on workshop led by Darrell Markewitz and Wareham Forge allowed attendees to learn the process of casting pewter tokens in a soapstone mold as was done in the Middle Ages, allowing attendees the opportunity to cast a pilgrim's badge they can take away for a cost of $5.00.

The remainder of the conference was dominated by sessions on various and sundry medieval topics. Mixed in with those were a few other sessions with an experiential focus such as Fancy Pincushions Part Two (A Demonstration)

Organizer: Cameron Christian-Weir, Grey Goose Bows/Augsburg College

A demonstration of the findings from an ongoing experimental archaeology study on the ballistics complicity of warbows and arrows of the Hundred Years war. Featured are a warbow (unbraced) as well as two war arrows from the study (a MR livery arrow and a Westminster style shaft) to illustrate the weight and design on the shafts.

Cameron is always an entertaining presenter. Definitely not one to read a paper at you. Frankly he's often quite scattered since there is so much data in his head and it is all banging to be let out. Neil is trying to get him to submit the research to date (even one research cell at a time) to EXARC as it would be a good read. Part of this year's talk was s an interesting experiment to read about although not one I would be interested in repeating. During testing (at full draw) his original 120 pound warbow broke on him. He had copies of the x-rays showing the damage to his spine that was caused by that one incident. He is better now, but still coming back up to form although he is only able to shoot a 60 pound bow right now. Overall his work is a good penetration study being done very rigorously using accelerometers, ballistics gel and different forms of armour. He has years ahead of him still but there are some worthwhile interim findings, including impact force and energy even when there is no penetration.

DISTAFF

Discussion, Interpretation, and Study of Textile Arts, Fabrics and Fashion held a textile exhibition showcasing spinning, dyeing, weaving, and other textile arts.

Karen attended and enjoyed the physical presentations very much this year.

Ale and Mead Tasting

Sponsored by the Medieval Brewers Guild; AVISTA: The Association Villard de Honnecourt for the Interdisciplinary Study of Medieval Technology, Science, and Art; and the Medieval Institute, Western Michigan Univ.

All of the meads were rather sweet for both our tastes. The galengale mead was very interesting – a very strong flavour. The Raspberry mead was also nice. Insanely crowded as you might expect of an event giving away free alcohol. We wound up outside enjoying the great weather talking with a number of people who drifted by while sampling a number of different beers and meads.

"Can These Bones Come to Life?": Politics and Diversity in Re-construction, Re-enactment, and Re-creation

Sponsor: Societas Johannis Higginsis

Due to scheduling conflicts we were unable to attend that session.

Karen and Neil also attended the following sessions which showcase a cross section of the Viking and textile sessions that were available at the conference.

Encounters with the Paranormal in Medieval Iceland I: Definitions and Categories

Doomsday in Medieval Iceland Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir, Háskóli Íslands
Sacramental Showdowns: Catholic Priests versus Icelandic Undead Kent Pettit, St. Louis Univ.
"Cherchez (Pas) la Femme": Defining Fylgjur in Old Icelandic Literature Zuzana Stankovitsová, Háskóli Íslands
Trolling Guðmundr: Paranormal Defamation in Ljósvetninga saga Yoav Tirosh, Háskóli Íslands

Encounters with the Paranormal in Medieval Iceland II: Social Concerns

"Who is Selkolla, what is she?": Disentangling Traditions in the Sagas of Guðmundur Arason and Elsewhere Shaun F. D. Hughes, Purdue Univ.
45 Geocentric Topographies in Barðar Saga Snæfellsáss: Locating the Paranormal from Snæfellsness to Hellalund Daniel Remein, Univ. of Massachusetts–Boston

Cognitive Contingencies: Íslendingasögur's Speculative Realism and the Value of Uncertainty Miriam Mayburd, Háskóli Íslands
Glámr and the Uncanny Valley: A Cognitive-Semiotic Reading of Grettis saga Sarah Bienko Eriksen, Univ. of California–Berkeley
Talking to Death in Alvíssmál Andrew McGillivray, Univ. of Winnipeg

These first two sessions both suffered from overall poor presentations. If your voice doesn't carry well, ensure you make use of available microphones. Letting your presenters sit down also decreases their speaking volume and visible passion. With that said there were some papers in these sessions that were memorable.

Kent's paper was interesting although his bias (or the bias of the saga writers that he was basing the paper on) came through clearly. Zuzana's paper tackled an unusual topic and presented some useful examples to consider. Shaun always has a strong presence in these sessions and his paper was an good look at a class of character that doesn't see too much attention. Daniel's paper was a worthwhile survey that collected some useful information.

Hoards

A New Type of Hoard: Europe's Northernmost Pre-Viking Hacksilver Alice Blackwell, National Museums Scotland
The Private Lives of Hoards Rory Naismith, King's College London

Alice Blackwell's presentation included a delightful PowerPoint presentation, complete with a lot of pictures of various hoards found in Scotland in the pre-Viking Era. Rory Naismith read his paper, and it was entirely an esoteric approach to hoards as they show up in manuscripts – not the most exciting paper. The Respondent was a surprise new feature of these sessions for Karen. I'd been looking forward to the Q & A from the audience to clarify some things, and perhaps bring new life to Rory's paper-reading. The Respondent read from a prepared paper, and droned on forever. I left mid-Respondent, being anxious to get to the DARC fibre stitch and bitch gathering in a timely fashion.

Mappings II- Medieval Maps, Their Makers and Users

Seabirds to Starboard: Notes on Norse Navigational Technique Gaetan Dupont, Cornell Univ.; Oren Falk, Cornell Univ.
The Geography of Devotion in the London Psalter Maps LauraLee Brott, Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison
Russian "Old Drawing": The Problem of Attribution Alexey Frolov, Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Science

Oren's presentation was interesting particularly because his co-author was a first year undergrad when he wrote the original version of the paper. The paper focused on the

different kinds of seabirds, their use in navigation, and blended ornithology in with Norse literary sources. Overall a fascinating paper.

The Russian Old Drawing is one of those places Neil is ready to cut the 'reading my paper' people some slack. English was clearly not his first language. It should also be called out that he wasn't reading his paper at us. He was reading a lecture/presentation about his topic to us. And he had clearly practiced enough so that he knew it well enough that he occasionally came off script. That gets a "Very well done" from Neil. On the topic itself it also gets a 'weird but cool' rating. They are attempting to reconstruct a drawing that was lost in an archive fire using the surviving descriptions of the document.

Medievalism and Immigration II

Medievalism, Brexit, and the Myth of Nations Andrew B. R. Elliott, Univ. of Lincoln
"I'm 20% Viking": Englishness, Immigration, and the Public Reception of Historical DNA Michael Evans, Delta College

Sociological analysis of the appearance of medieval elements in the Brexit campaign, and a look at how people perceive their DNA results and identities. I'm sure that is very interesting to a number of people - just not Neil. This is, however, a normal occurrence at ICMS - you try and judge interest by paper titles not abstracts and sometimes you get it wrong. It is all part of the fun of attending a large conference.

Materiality and Place in the Northern World II

King of the Island(s): Arthur and Glastonbury Abbey Genevieve Pigeon, University du Quebec-Montreal
Sanctus Locus, Santus Corpus: Saints, Relic and Religious Devotion in Tenth-Century England Abigail G. Robertson, University of New Mexico
Magic-Making and Place-Taking: Celtic Women in the Old Norse Sagas Brianna McElrath Panasenco, University of California-Berkeley·

The third paper was a delightful surprise. Brianna read from a paper, but she was engaging and the topic was interesting. She covered the place of Celtic women in Norse society, the assignment of 'magic' to these foreign women and used major Sagas and well known characters in the Sagas to make these associations. She talked about the textile process as a form of magic - in Njal's saga. For example, there is a description of three women using a warp-weighted loom to intercede in a battle. The warps were intestines, and the weights were the skulls of the dead.

Manuscripts to Materials

Sponsor: Research Group on Manuscript Evidence; Societas Magica

Practical Magic: Making Magical Artifacts and Using Them Frank Klaassen, Univ. of Saskatchewan

This session included a display of the museum exhibit mentioned during the roundtable on Thursday morning with more information about the hands-on work the students did to create it, how it is received, and how to form more solid connections to the audience. Look for extensions into virtual reality and Icelandic materials if I can talk them into it. This exhibit will be coming to both the University of Waterloo and the University of Toronto in the near future - watch for it. A very good job both for the session and for the exhibit.

Gender at the Borders of Christendom

How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the King: Synthesis, Paradox, and Cultural Integration in Late Viking Age Kingship, ca. 990–1050 Devon R. Bealke
119 Christian Women as Occupying Forces in the Thirteenth-Century Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon Emma Snowden, Univ. of Minnesota–Twin Cities
Not Transvestite, But Transgender: Early Byzantine Narratives of Transmen Catherine Burris, Univ. of Central Missouri
Morphia's Daughters: Matrilineal Social Ties in Twelfth-Century Jerusalem and Antioch K. A. Tuley, Univ. of Minnesota–Twin Cities

Devon's paper was what brought me to the session. The presenter's opening comment was well delivered - he was a bit optimistic about what would fit in the time allowed. Instead of 60 years he was going to talk about 3 years. The focus was on praise poems about a single king over those three years in the 1020s - in fact just three praise poems. He charted what they chose to praise and how it changed over those years. They went from praising him as a warrior chieftain to a church appointed king. Fascinating.

Catherine's paper was worth attending although less for the topic than for some of the reactions. She reviewed a number of byzantine sources of stories about women who took on male roles setting them in context for us (short, tightly edited tales speaking about Christianity from a distance). She grouped the stories into women who tried male roles but "failed" and wound up back in female roles, and those who 'succeeded' and died as men even when they could have chosen to return to female roles. It was an intriguing overview. The terms succeed and fail really bugged people in the audience. A lot of the Q & A session was around how modern people saw themselves and how they wanted to see elements of themselves in the past. The presider did a good job at one point of asking the presenter now that we saw how the modern mind saw these issues could she speak those how those from the time period saw these issues - which was a very good way of framing the conversation.

Paper 4 gets this year's prize for most useless slide. The speaker attempted to put all of the social ties on a single slide (tree graph) and her comment was that she couldn't read it. No

kidding - about 6 or 8 point font. That's the sort of thing you want to know before you stand up to present. If you can't read it easily on your computer screen it won't project well.

Teaching the Edda and Sagas in the Undergraduate Classroom: Strategies and Approaches (A Roundtable)

Using Tolkien as a Gateway to the Edda and Sagas in the Undergraduate Classroom Lee Templeton, North Carolina Wesleyan College
"I advise you, Loddfafnir, to take this council": Teaching College Writing and Research Using the Eddas Gregory L. Laing, Harding Univ.
Teaching Germanic Mythology 101 Johanna Denzin, Columbia College
Material Culture and Norse Mythology Ilse Schweitzer VanDonkelaar

This was a wonderful roundtable and not just because everyone talked to us about their experiences rather than reading a paper at us. These were people who were interested in the sagas and were working to find ways to use them in another context. Questions from the audience were interesting as well. Exploring strengths and weaknesses of different books on myths (I'd agree with the idea that Gaiman's North Myths would be fine for a second year class but is a bit light for a third year class); different ideas about using the sagas, etc. Good conversations.

The Second Sex: Women and Power in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature

Draumkonur as Dream Anima Suzanne Valentine, Háskóli Íslands
Maðr þóttumk ek mensskr til þessa: Reclaiming Gender and Genealogy in The Waking of Angantyr William Biel, Univ. of Connecticut
Með leynilegri ást: Love, Marriage, and Authorial Agenda in The Saga of Viglund the Fair Andrew M. Pfrenger

Since Neil doesn't know much about Jungian archetypes he took a limited amount out of it but the idea that these roles might be Anima expressing the suppressed side of interior dialog of the main character is something to think about. The second paper, by William Neil, is a fascinating idea. William took a character who changed gender roles. Now he filtered this through a view that this must be 'trans people' rather than just say women who wanted to do things they wouldn't normally be able to do who adopted a 'role' for a time before dropping it when they were done. This involved a very close reading of the text. Figuring out when the author used male or female pronouns, when a name was used instead et cetera. Then trying to judge what the character wanted versus what the author is trying to say versus what the listening culture might be looking for. Frankly I'm not at all sure I agree with his premises, nor his conclusions, but I'm going to call this one 'ground breaking' and look for some similar ideas and papers to come along.

Karen found the second paper remarkably annoying. Just because a woman in the Sagas steps outside of her assigned gender role in order to pick up a sword, this doesn't mean that this is a transgendered person. If we re-conceive women's place in society and give them more freedom of choice, this is feminism. If we re-conceive women's interest in men's gender roles as a tell-tale sign of transgenderism, then we only serve to re-enforce stifling gender roles. This is not feminism, this is not social progress. And for heaven's sake, once we invent a time machine and go back and talk to the women in question, maybe then we can really get answers. Without the time machine, this kind of post-historical re-analysis is just a painful hogwash of trying to find present day justification of social justice issues in history.

Andrew's 'paper' actually came out of an early session on the SagaThing podcast. It was a talk about the concept of consent (particularly around marriage) in the Norse culture. It is an interesting idea and point of change within the culture. Andrew is a very engaging speaker who is passionate about his topic - one of the many reasons that the SagaThing podcast is a good listen.

Link(s)

The conference website

The PDF with the whole schedule

Keywords experimental archaeology
conference
review

Country Canada
USA

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