

Faculty of Arts – University of Ostrava



VIVARIUM – CENTRE FOR RESEARCH
IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY
AND CULTURE

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THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The main research goal of the Centre for Research in Medieval Society and Culture – Vivarium is the versatile and interdisciplinary study of the sociocultural horizons of medieval people from all strata of society. The culture of medieval Europe, which the research aims to describe, is understood in the broader sense of the term as a system of symbols, meanings, values and social norms, expectations and life strategies, but also as an aggregate of all the knowledge and skills. Since the area its study is so wide, the activities of the Centre are based on the cooperation of experts-medievalists from various fields of study, especially from the Departments of History, Art History, Philosophy and the Department of Latin Language and Culture at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava. The study of medieval culture and society has recently become one of the key

research directions at several departments at the Faculty of Arts, which helped this topic to become one of the main lines of research at the University of Ostrava.

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VIVARIUM

The Vivarium Centre was founded in 2013 as a research centre for the interdisciplinary research of European medieval culture. It describes the culture of that time which is understood in the broader sense of the term as a system of symbols, meanings, values and social norms, expectations and life strategies, but also as an aggregate of all the knowledge and skills. The activities of the Centre are connected not only with the Department of History, but for example also with the Department of Art History and the Department of Latin Language and Culture. The study of medieval culture and society has recently become one of the key research directions at the Department of History and other research centres at the Faculty of Arts for whom Vivarium is a fundamental platform for interdisciplinary research. Thanks to the Centre, this topic is nowadays one of the main lines of research at the University of Ostrava.

If we look closer at the meaning of this expression, the “the goal is to study medieval society as a whole. When we take a look at a funeral ceremony, we discover many aspects of life of medieval people connected with it. From the ways of dressing, choice of clothes, behaviour of people and the ceremonies to the rituals which ensured continuity of the society. It resembles a ceremonial arrival of a ruler in a town. Even a funeral ceremony is attended by a gathering of people who function in a certain way, and suddenly we get from a funeral to a describing the whole society. Marcel Mauss called it “total social fact.” One event reveals the structure of the whole society and its inner workings. And that is exactly the approach we are trying to use,” explains doc. Robert Antonín, the guarantor of this main line of research at the University of Ostrava, who was one of the founding members of VIVARIUM.

The director of the Centre doctor Janiš tells us more about the scope of its research.

What was the motivation for founding the Centre?

At the Faculty of Arts, there are many departments which work along each other, but they often do not cooperate. However, the study of the Middle Ages is by its very nature interdisciplinary and requires consultations of experts in various areas. A spontaneous cooperation of medievalists [historians who focus on the Middle Ages – Ed.] of four departments at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava – history, art history Latin and philosophy – eventually resulted in the establishment of a shared umbrella centre for their joint projects.

What is the main goal of the Centre?

The main goal is to deepen the study of selected topics which are related to medieval society and culture. To search for and apply a modern interdisciplinary approach to science. In joint research, different layers of the traditional “written” history may overlap where Latin plays an important role as the dominant literary and official language as well as medieval philosophy and various aspects of

medieval art. All of this can be connected and it can paint a rich three-dimensional picture of medieval culture.

How are the topics of the Centre defined? Is it only the period of the Middle Ages or are there any territorial restrictions?

The topic can be anything related to medieval culture, medieval society, social history, legal history or economic history. As far as the territorial restrictions are concerned, we are trying to study the topics from the perspective of regional history or microhistory (of a town), region, the Czech Republic, Central Europe, Europe. Each of the levels carries its own importance and the University should be able to provide sufficient expertise. Nowadays, the importance of international research is emphasized and that is incontestable. However, we should not forget that humanities are by their own nature focused on the inside of a given society.

What are the factors that shaped medieval society?

There were multiple factors. Medieval

society was to a large extent shaped by environmental conditions. Nowadays, we do not have to be too concerned about those, we can shape the environment around us, both positively and negatively. In the Middle Ages, people were naturally more bound to the place where they lived and depended on the season. They lived in harmony with nature and were forced to adjust to its rhythm. Society was also formed by its history, its past. Talking about the importance of history for society, we should mention that every society was influenced by its older history, its legends, myths, traditions. Religion also played an important part. Among other things, it explained the traditional structure of the society. It provided a spiritual dimension for both an individual and for groups. It explained the older history of humanity – the Bible is among other things a historiographic book. The meaning of the term culture is usually seen in a too narrow way. However, we have to understand it its wider sense. It has several layers. In addition to art, it also includes law, morality, religion and other systems which together shape the society.

What are the differences in getting information about the lowest and highest strata of medieval society?

Naturally, written documents mention rulers and higher classes more often. For example, the Chronicle of the Czechs by Cosmas is a story of the Přemyslid dynasty and the aristocracy emerging around them. Lower social classes appear more slowly. They start to emerge in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. Written documents often do not provide much information, but a lot can be learned for instance from pictures studied by iconography and from tangible culture brought to us by archaeology.

Could the documents distort the character of the ruler? They probably did not want people to write bad things about them...

Naturally, there was historiography which served the rulers. A good example is Charles IV. Rulers were the contracting authorities of such texts. They tried to paint themselves in a good light. However, some authors could not help but make cutting remarks about the actions of certain rulers. There are sources, usually chronicles, which are critical. However, they are usually critical of people

who could no longer punish the writer. In the so-called national chronicles, the author usually praises the ruler of their country, sometimes their employer, but criticises the foreign rulers. Cosmas of Prague, who wrote in the first quarter of the 12th century, paints Poles in a bad light. However, if we look at the Polish chronicle of Gallus Anonymus of the same time period, we find that it praises the Polish rulers and criticises the Czech aristocracy.

You focus on the legal history of the late Middle Ages and early modern period. What was the legal practice like then? Are there any areas where we can find similarities with the present?

People in the Middle Ages, early modern period and even at present have always struggled for justice and its real-world enforceability. This struggle has always been basically the same. Nowadays, the majority of people tend to describe an unjust, wild or violent situation as “the Middle Ages.” However, this very misleading and unfair to the Middle Ages and the society of that time because back then, people also strove for justice and non-violence. The times

were obviously different, they functioned in different dimensions and were rougher than today. People perceived their individual rights differently, there was no concept of universal human rights in the form which appeared in Europe in the 18th century. Medieval society was structured in a different way, people perceived authorities and their position in the society differently, but they always struggled to maintain justice, just like today.

RESEARCH AREAS OF THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY AND CULTURE – VIVARIUM

The research activities of the Centre connect areas which primarily follow the four basic directions corresponding to the specialisations of the cooperating departments (history, philosophy, art history, Latin). Researchers from the Department of History mainly study the changes of Central-European society in the High and Late Middle Ages (12th–15th century) focusing on political, legal, but also church and economic history, the role of the royal power and the aristocracy, by observing the shaping of the medieval society or by identifying the institutional foundations of medieval statehood. Researchers from the Department of philosophy explore the history of philosophy focusing on medieval and renaissance philosophy and they specialise in

various disciplines (metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, natural philosophy, philosophy of history). The researchers from the Department of Art History analyse general history of art, regional art and heritage preservation focusing on medieval art, medieval visual culture and Christian iconography. Researchers from the Department of Latin Language and Culture focus on preparing critical editions and translations of Latin texts and on processing literary, linguistic and auxiliary scientific analyses of documents of medieval literature.



PROJECTS SOLVED IN THE CENTRE

Institutional Development Projects in Science and Research:

- Vivarium, 2013–2014, solvers: doc. Mgr. Marek Otisk, Ph.D., Mgr. Richard Psík, Ph.D., team leader: prof. PhDr. Jana Nechutová, CSc.
The project focused on creating a scientific team which under the leadership of prof. J. Nechutová and in cooperation with foreign experts connected medievalists of various fields of study and helped to form a team of experts, establish the scope of research of the Centre and to integrate it in the existing organisation structure of the Faculty of Arts.
- Collective Identity in the Social Networks of Medieval Europe, 2015–2017, solvers: doc. Mgr. Robert Antonín, Ph.D., team leader: Mgr. Dalibor Janiš, Ph.D.
The project brought together a research team which in cooperation with foreign experts expanded the research of medieval society and culture within the Centre, or more precisely at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava, and supported its staff growth. The project focused on a key issue of forming collective identity on the different levels of reality in medieval Europe (Christian solidarity, attitude towards the foreign and alien, the geopolitical dimension of self-identification, country as a socio-geographic communicating community, identity of social strata and groups, identity of regional communities) following the current trends in European medievalist research.
- The Construction of the Other in Medieval Europe, 2018–2020, solver: PhDr. Daniela Rywиковá, Ph.D., team leaders: PhDr. Daniela Rywиковá, Ph.D., doc. Mgr. Marek Otisk, Ph.D.
In this running project, a new research team has been formed by Czech and foreign experts. The goal of this international project is to advance and enrich the study of medieval society

and culture at the Faculty of Arts by implementing a new interdisciplinary approach focusing on the analyses of how the category of “the other” was shaped in medieval Europe. The project emphasizes the current research trend of the “the other” mainly as a socio-cultural aspect and a natural part of the religious, national and cultural diversity and the mutual interactions and delimitations, cooperation and coexistence. The shaping of the reception of “the other” in medieval society is studied as a dynamic, intellectual and socio-cultural process in the cultural, art-historical and historically-philosophical fields.

Projects within the framework of the Student Grant Competition of specific university research:

The projects reflect selected topics and areas of the study of medieval society and culture and focus on including Master’s degree and doctoral students in scientific and research activities. Students actively publish (studies, articles, cooperate on monographs) and present their findings at conferences, colloquia and workshops. Research trips in the Czech Republic and abroad also take place within these projects.

- Medieval Sources – Difficulties of Interpretation and Accessibility I, 2013, solver: PhDr. Daniela Rywиковá, Ph.D.
- Medieval Sources – Difficulties of Interpretation and Accessibility II, 2014, solver: doc. Mgr. Marek Otisk, Ph.D.
- Medieval Sources – Difficulties of Interpretation and Accessibility III, 2015, solver: doc. Mgr. Robert Antonín, Ph.D.
- Reality and Actuality in Middle Ages, 2016–2017, solver: doc. Mgr. Anna Pumprová, Ph.D.
- Norms and Values in the Medieval Society, 2018–2019, solver: Mgr. Dalibor Janiš, Ph.D.

Projects supported by the Czech Science Foundation:

- Beguines and Preachers. Between the Moral Ideal, Homiletics and Pastoral Care in the Czech Lands in the period of the 14th - 16th Century, 2018–2020, solver: Mgr. Jana Grollová, Ph.D.

CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS, COLLOQUIA

Every year, the Centre organizes international conferences in addition to smaller scientific gathering (conferences, professional colloquia and workshops) which are usually directly linked to current projects solved by the Centre members. The centre organizes the conferences either on its own or in cooperation with the participating departments at the Faculty of Arts or with other Czech or foreign partner research centres. Both Master's degree and doctoral students of all the four participating departments actively take part in solving the Institutional Development Plan (IRP) and the Student Grant Competition (SGS) projects.

SELECTED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES (CO)ORGANIZED BY THE CENTRE:

- Proměny církevní sfragistiky (Changes in Church Sigillography), 10–11 August 2013, Olomouc
- Via viatores quaerit. Mobilność społeczna w dziejach krajów grupy Wyszehradzkiej, 29–30 May 2014, Gdynia
- Collective Identity in Social Networks of the Medieval Europe, 8 October 2015, Ostrava
- Homo Ludens. Daily Entertainment and Holiday Fun in the History of Central European Countries and their Neighbours / Homo ludens. Zabawy i rozrywki na co dzień i od święta w dziejach krajow Europy Środkowej i ich sąsiadow, 21–22 April 2016, Slupsk
- Mongolian Expansion and Its Influence on Development in the Eurasian Area in the 13th and 14th Centuries, 5–8 October 2016, Ostrava
- Issues of Perception between Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy, 6–7 October 2016, Ostrava
- Medieval Art in Central Europe, 20–23 October 2016, Nowy Sącz
- From Quadrivium to Natural Sciences: New Impulses in the Traditional Framework, 15–16 November 2018, Ostrava
- Sigismund von Luxemburg, der deutsche Orden und Polen-Litauen, 5–6 October 2018, Kiel

EDITION SERIES INTERPRETATIONES

In the edition series Interpretationes, the Centre publishes critical editions and bilingual translations of written medieval documents (Series A) and monographs (or monothematic proceedings) dedicated to their interpretation from the point of view of various disciplines (Series B). Indispensable parts of the publications of the first type include – in addition to the text of the presented source and a list of works used – a study which introduces the reader into the published and/or translated text, an abstract in a foreign language and an editorial/translator note which explains the principles and rules under which the critical edition or translation was written. Monographs are accompanied by a summary in a foreign language and an index.

Series A

- 1: Král Karel a papež Lev. De Karolo rege et Leone papa - Epos o Karlu Velikém. Translation and commentary by Jana Nechutová. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2014. 112 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-494-8.
- 2: O sedmi štedrovečerních zvycích / Largum sero Jana z Holešova. Critical edition, translation and commentary by Kamil Harvánek. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2014. 176 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-705-5.
- 3: Flavius Mithridates: Sermo de passione Domini / Řeč o utrpení Páně. Translation and commentary by Jan Herúfek. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2015. 150 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-706-2.
- 4: Otloh ze sv. Jimrama: Liber de temptatione cuiusdam monachi / O pokušení jednoho mnicha. Translation and Commentary by Richard Psík and Anna Pumprová. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2017. 152 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-933-2.

Series B

- 1: Pavel Hruboň – Richard Psík: Kancelářské poznámky na papežských listinách v období 1378-1417 na příkladu listin dochovaných v moravských archivech. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2014. 200 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-256-2.
- 2: Jan Herúfek et al.: Pojetí důstojnosti člověka od antiky po současnost. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2015. 216 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-781-9.
- 3: Michaela Antonín Malániková – Robert Antonín et al.: Collective Identity in the Context of Medieval Studies. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2016. 200 s. ISBN 978-80-7464-882-3.
- 4: Pavel Hruboň: Incipity papežských listin a jejich význam pro papežskou diplomatiku. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2017. 222 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-970-7.
- 5: Jan Herúfek: Scientia prohibita G. Pica della Mirandola. Ostrava: Vivarium FF OU 2017. 208 p. ISBN 978-80-7464-883-0.

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