



Panel

6.5. Conflict and Negotiating Conflict in Pre-Modern Rural Societies. Part I

Panel organiser: Muller, Miriam, University of Birmingham, UK

This panel will examine questions regarding the nature of different types of conflicts rural societies experienced in their communities, and how they dealt with, negotiated and resolved these conflicts. Traditionally conflict in rural communities in medieval society in particular has typically been associated with conflict between lords and peasants. While the papers in this panel will explore conflict between communities and authorities, like lordship, they will also consider intra-communal strife. There is a strong theme in some of the papers in this panel of communal relationships to water, including the exploitation of the sea, and the communal maintenance of drainage and embankments, as well as conflicts over common land. A main purpose of this panel is to examine issues of communal dispute comparatively. To this end the papers in this panel will span from the medieval into the early modern. Since communities located in such marshland or coastal areas might have faced similar topographical circumstances, which required comparable economic solutions, including drainage work and the exploitation of similar local natural resources, such comparative explorations can be particularly fruitful.

Chair: Muller, Miriam, University of Birmingham, UK

Tuesday, 20 August 2013 // 1515 – 1645 // Session 6 – Room A 027

6.5.1. Fighting Drainage: local resistance to wetland drainage across the North Sea Area

Paper

Soens, Tim, University of Antwerp, Belgium

Starting in the later Middle Ages thousands of hectares of coastal and inland wetland marshes have been drained and reclaimed by non-local investors increasingly backed by state power. One of the characteristics shared by many of these projects, is the fierce resistance by local communities they seem to provoke. This resistance, ranging from law suits to physical violence, has been alternatively interpreted as reflecting backwardness and conservatism of the rural population resisting land improvement. With the exception of the work of Salvatore Ciriaco, comparative research on pre-modern drainage remains scarce. In this paper we aim to explore regional divergences in the occurrence, motivations, instruments and success-rate of local resistance against drainage projects.

6.5.2. The common denominator: Institutions of collective action as the result of continuous negotiation between various stakeholders within the Campine area (Southern Low Countries, 14th to 16th centuries)

Paper

De Keyzer, Maika, University of Antwerp, Belgium

Commons are often portrayed as a product of the emergence of institutions for corporate collective action, which tried to cope with exogenous factors such as population growth and commercial threats. During this so called 'Silent revolution' individuals grouped together and formed collective institutions which emerged during the high Middle Ages. These individuals decided to act together and therefore fend off harmful evolutions (De Moor, 2011). Normative sources often tend to hide tensions and conflicts behind a discourse of unity and continuity, while economic sources depict a completely dehumanised society. Discord and tensions were omnipresent in medieval communities. Conflicts are expressions of communities evolving, negotiating and expressing their particular interests. By analysing the court records of the Council of Brabant, the sovereign court of Brabant, it will be stated that the institutions and regulations for collective action were not the result of a constant harmony and converging interests within society. Stakeholders within one community or between communities often had conflicting interests and tried to change the local practices or even the entire normative blue print of the common pool institutions. However, none of the stakeholders was powerful enough to wipe the slate clean and impose their claims or interests on the other members of the Campine societies. This way the institutions and regulations for collective action were a negotiated compromise which was the best option for all parties involved.

6.5.3. Conflict Correspondence and the medial structure of late medieval rural lordship

Paper

Schuerch, Isabelle, University of Zurich, Switzerland

This paper aims to look at the way conflicts were negotiated through the use of letters. The letters in question are missives, official letters that formed part of late medieval lordship communication. A closer look at these missives shows that rural conflicts over mills, fishing, grazing and custom rights were regularly treated in these documents. The main purpose of these letters was to structure conflict; they organised who had to meet whom, when and where. The disputes were then settled at arbitration dates appointed by the parties involved. These missives were often written replies to requests from locals, whereas the bishop's role in these conflicts consisted less in enforcing particular lordship rights but rather in channelling and processing local disputes, which aimed at mutual agreement and de-escalation.

Participants

De Keyzer, Maika

Maika de Keyzer is currently completing her PhD project entitled 'The struggle for the commons in the late medieval Campine area: an unexplored field'.

Muller, Miriam

Miriam Muller is a lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Birmingham. She teaches on a range of subjects relating to social and economic history of later Medieval Europe, including the impact of the Black Death. Her research interests centre around peasant communities, primarily of later medieval England. She has a particular interest in social structures, and developments in the lord-peasant relationship. She is also very interested in gender, and the position of women in the medieval village.

Schuerch, Isabelle

Isabelle Schuerch was employed as an assistant at the Department of History (Chair of Prof. Dr. Simon Teuscher, Medieval History) in Zurich until 2010. Since 2008 she has

been working on a PhD thesis on Power and Information. Missives as Media of Lordship in the Late Middle Ages which now forms part of the interdisciplinary National Centre of Competence in Research 'Mediality' at the University of Zurich. Her research interests include media history, social practices of lordship and new approaches to regional and rural history.

Soens, Tim

Tim Soens is Associate Professor of Medieval and Environmental History at the University of Antwerp. He has studied Medieval History at the University of Ghent, where he has obtained his PhD in 2006, investigating water management and the interaction of man and nature in coastal Flanders in the medieval and early modern period. At Antwerp Tim has developed a new research line 'Environment and Power', concentrating on the historical relationship between human societies and their natural environment.