

Receiving, Importing, or Producing Culture? Research Plan for the CoE on Periphery and Centre in Medieval Europe

The CoE aims at tracing some fundamental features of the Europeanisation of Europe by looking at medieval Western Christendom from the periphery, i.e. Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. This will be done by studying cultural transmission and interaction by comparison between centre and periphery as well as within the latter. The overriding theoretical framework is determined by recent developments in the historical, literary, and social sciences where a tight linking of cultural and religious expressions with social behaviour is emphasised through analyses of discourse, power and social praxis. The programme will be divided into four major projects, dealing respectively with (1) The Arrival of Writing, (2) Religion between Unity and Variety, (3) State Formation and Political Culture, and (4) Construction of the Past.

The Europeanisation of Europe

'The Europeanisation of Europe' or 'The Formation of Western Christendom' would seem an appropriate headline for the period between the 9th and the 14th century. While in the beginning of the period, the northern and eastern borders of Western Christendom did not extend much further than the Roman Empire had done, by its end, the region included the whole of Scandinavia, both sides of the Baltic, and the Western Slav region which had now become the kingdoms of Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary. The process has often been described as a spread or a conquest, either in the literal or in the figurative sense. This is largely the perspective of Robert Bartlett's influential book, *The Making of Europe* (1993), which shows how castles, heavy cavalry, and their concomitant institutions, i.e. manorialism and feudalisation, spread from the centre to the periphery. In a similar way, the cultural change of the period is often understood as the spread of Christian elite culture from the centre to the periphery.

The metaphor of cultural 'conquest' or 'spread', however, is not altogether satisfactory. It tends to overemphasise the similarities between the regions of the centre at the beginning of the process as well as those of the periphery at its end. Instead we find it helpful to view the development of the periphery by using an economic metaphor: Did the new regions of Europe receive wholesale 'cultural packages'? Or did they import selected items? Or did they produce their own cultural goods on the basis of a vague and heavily mediated external influence? Questions such as these recognise the general direction of cultural expansion without being prejudiced against a more complex traffic of cultural exchange.

The international character of Western Christendom is striking. The learned elite all over Christendom could communicate through the Latin language, were educated in basically the same mode of thought, and familiar with the same authorities. Appeals, petitions, and legal conflicts reached Rome from all parts of Europe. On the other hand, the elite was numerically very small, and communication over great distances normally depended on prior acquaintance, as most of the means of communication taken for granted by modern intellectuals were lacking: printed books, periodicals, newspapers, etc. Hand-written books might be sent over large distances, while at the same time being unknown in the neighbouring town. Thus, although the intellectual 'means of production' made possible long-distance communication, this did not prevent most intellectual milieux from having mainly local significance. The 'conquest' of the periphery from the centre and the unity of the European elite culture should therefore not be exaggerated.

The same applies to the political and administrative aspect. Admittedly, there is clear evidence of the superiority of the centre in the technological and institutional field. Western military technology was imported largely because of practical experience, as a result of defeats in wars against Western armies. The introduction of bureaucracy, taxation, and written records was necessary to meet competition from Western kingdoms. The countries bordering the German Empire were from the 10th century onwards faced with the alternatives: adapt or perish. Nevertheless, the difference between centre and periphery can hardly be understood in analogy to the later difference between the European colonists and the native countries. First, a Europeanisation took place in the centre as well as the periphery. Western Europe around 1300 was very different from what it had been 300 years earlier, politically as well as culturally. Both the development of a relatively homogenous elite culture and the political centralisation and military specialisation took place at about the same time as the extension of Western Christendom. Second, the contacts between centre and periphery go far back in history, and we are dealing with 'selective adaptation' in the political-administrative as well as in the cultural field. Third, the influence did not always go from the centre to the periphery, but also in the opposite direction. European culture is not only formed by the Mediterranean tradition from Antiquity, but also by the encounter with the Germanic and Slav peoples who were integrated in Western Christendom from the 9th century onwards. Similarly, the Europeanised elite in the periphery made important contributions to the common European culture, notably in the Later Middle Ages, when universities were established all over the area, starting with Prague in 1347/48. In the 16th century, the first decisive steps towards the modern model of the cosmos were taken by a Pole, Kopernik (Copernicus), a Dane, Tycho Brahe, and a German working in Prague, Johannes Kepler.

In addition to Europeanisation in the sense of export from the centre to the periphery, we intend to focus particularly on the process of adaptation and on the specific contributions from the periphery. In this way we hope to avoid both extremes, the nationalistic attitude on the one hand and the idea that everything of importance came from abroad on the other. However, we not only aim at throwing light on the periphery by comparing it to the centre, but also the other way round. What does the centre look like when seen from the periphery? What is actually the relationship between the international, high culture of the Middle Ages and local and regional traditions? In other words, we want to challenge the more or less implicit assumption of most medievalists that medieval Europe for most purposes was confined to the area south of Jutland and west of the Oder.

Four Projects

The size and complexity of the CoE's programme necessitate a careful selection of more manageable themes that can throw light on the main problems with which we want to deal. These can be roughly grouped into four main areas of research, in the following referred to as projects, which address the main challenges in the field, i.e. the tensions between the common Latin culture and indigenous traditions, between political diversity and cultural homogeneity, and between religious and secular thought. We have given them the following headings: (1) The arrival of writing, (2) Religion between unity and variety, (3) State formation and political culture, and (4) The construction of the past (see Enclosure 1). As appears from our CVs and the lists of our publications and partners, we have done extensive research within the fields covered by one or more of these projects, and the group as a whole is well qualified to deal with them.

(1) The first project deals with a phenomenon that is not specifically European, but common to all great civilisations, i.e. *the arrival of writing*. Here we are dealing with perhaps the most important technology imported from the centre, without which the rest of the cultural import would have been impossible. Although some of the pioneers in the study of orality and

literacy may have exaggerated, there can be little doubt about the importance of the introduction of writing to the European periphery from the 11th century onwards. Writing was not a 'neutral' technology; it was accompanied by a religion, a culture, and a language, all regarded as superior.

We shall focus on five aspects, four empirical and one theoretical. The *first* aspect is the relationship between oral and written. Here Scandinavia assumes a particular importance because of the strong marks the oral tradition has left on the extant Old Norse literature. The *second* aspect is the relationship between Latin and the vernacular, in particular the importance of the former as the main literary and administrative language of the periphery and its influence on the latter. The *third* aspect is the symbolic and practical communication made possible by the handwritten book as a medium. A study of this is closely related to the institutionalisation of religion (cf. Project 2 below) and to the general question of cultural encounter, intellectual debate and the gradual rise of an elitist public sphere. The *fourth aspect* is the administrative use of writing, which will be studied in close connection with royal and ecclesiastical government (Projects 2 and 3). And *fifth*, we want to contribute to the further development of theory on the relationship between oral and literate culture.

(2) *The Christian religion* is the main expression of the common European culture in the period. We intend to examine the Christianisation of the periphery in a broad comparative perspective and in close connection with the problem of state formation. *Second*, we shall deal with religious thought and practice, learned as well as popular, during the following period, e.g. religious literature, the cult of the saints, new forms of devotion, and the relationship between local traditions and the new religion imported from the centre. And *third*, we shall do a comparative study of the ecclesiastical organisation in the various parts of the periphery, with particular emphasis on the relationship to the papacy, on which important new material has recently become available and is being edited by one member of our group (Jørgensen).

(3) *State formation* represents a different approach to the relationship between unity and diversity than does Christianisation. On the one hand, the inclusion of the periphery into Western Christendom deepened its political division, on the other, the state itself and its institutions were largely part of the common European culture. We intend to look at the process from a comparative perspective, taking into account the research on state formation within the social sciences as well as recent research on medieval history. *First*, we shall study the establishment of kingdoms and principalities within the northern and eastern periphery from the 9th and 10th centuries onwards in a comparative perspective, rather than as a stage in the formation of each national state. *Second*, we shall examine the further development of these entities, from a political, social, and cultural point of view, notably the transition from personal lordship to bureaucratic kingship and the relationship between two, apparently opposite impulses from the centre: bureaucratisation and feudalisation. *Third*, we shall deal with the interstate unions in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe in the Later Middle Ages and the importance of dynastic and constitutional elements in this process.

(4) One cultural activity will receive particular attention, i.e. *the representation and construction of the past*, which was expressed through a variety of cultural and literary forms. We shall pay particular attention to historiography, because of its importance for the study of ecclesiastical culture and state formation, as well as its potential of focalising some of the main tensions within the culture of Western Christendom, i.e. between the classical heritage and Christianity and between universal and national traditions. Further, a large number of texts have been preserved from all over the periphery, which have only to a limited degree been the subject of scholarly studies.

First, we shall focus on how the various peoples of the periphery treated their distant past, notably how they tried to relate it to the mainstream of universal history, i.e. biblical and classical, particularly Roman history. *Second*, we shall deal with the linguistic and literary

aspects of the texts, their use of Latin or the vernacular, their narrative patterns and rhetorical techniques, and the extent to which they use classical models. Such analyses will draw both on recent trends in manuscript studies and library history as well as discourse theory developed in connection with modern historiography. The importance of this aspect has to be considered in relationship to the *third* one, which is closely connected to our research on state formation, and deals with how politics, society, and human actions are represented in these texts. To what extent can historical writings be understood as the expression of the contemporary understanding of politics and society, and to what extent are they determined by ecclesiastical ideology or influence from the Bible or classical historiography and rhetoric? Our *fourth* subject of study is the relationship between secular and Christian culture, for which historiography forms an important source. Medieval historiography deals with the history as salvation as well as with war heroes and struggle for honour and material gain. A study of these different approaches will help us to understand the tension between religious and secular culture within Western Christendom and the differences and similarities in this respect between centre and periphery.

Main Directions and Problems in the CoE's Programme

The four projects will in various ways throw light on the main theme of the relationship between centre and periphery and the cultural exchange mechanisms at work between the two. Writing, Christianity, new ideas of politics as well as new techniques of government and administration, and the construction of the local past were all received, imported or produced on a pattern set by the central core of Western Christendom from the 9th and 10th centuries onwards: However, they were not introduced in a cultural or social vacuum. They were adopted selectively and mixed with local traditions. Nor were they to be found fully developed in the central core, but contributed to cultural and social transformations there as well as in the periphery. By studying these processes, we therefore hope to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between local traditions and external influence, as well as between cultural expressions on the one hand and political and social praxis on the other. The four projects are sufficiently different to throw light on various aspects of the main problem and sufficiently interrelated for the scholars working within each of them to cooperate and draw comparisons between their respective fields. The introduction of writing is fundamental to all the other projects. The study of Church and religion and of state formation traces main lines of influence from the centre to the periphery and how the periphery reacted to this influence. The construction of the past serves as a further illustration of the importance of writing and the relationship between oral and written and between secular and clerical culture. It also contributes to the understanding of the political culture of the period, which, in turn, is closely related both to the development of the Church and Christianity and to the use of writing for administrative purposes. A CoE with this focus will help to reap the rich crops grown by literacy studies by way of linking them to the entire array of social practices in the northern region of Medieval Europe.

Comparison between cultures and the study of cultural interaction raise fundamental questions about the character and definition of cultures. Cultural studies have gained increasing importance in recent years, in the social sciences as well as in the humanities, and the need for an interdisciplinary approach has become widely recognised. Further, there has been an increasing awareness of the complex relationship between culture, society, and material environment, a development that has brought history and the social sciences on the one hand and philological, aesthetic, and literary studies on the other, more closely together. It has also, however, led to widely different attitudes among scholars in the field, varying from economic and technological determinism to cultural constructivism. These are central problems throughout our programme, e.g. in the relationship between the technology of

writing, social change, and new ideas and mental attitudes in explaining the Europeanisation of the periphery; in the relationship between social, economic, and cultural factors affecting Christianisation, the growth of the ecclesiastical organisation, and state formation; and in the relationship between the historiographical texts as the expression of mentality and society on the one hand, and genre and linguistic structures on the other. The mentality tradition within the French Annales School has made valuable contributions to the understanding of collective attitudes. The heritage from structuralism, in its novel and widely different forms in scholars like Mary Douglas (1973), Clifford Geertz (1973), and Michel Foucault (1966, 1975), has increased our awareness of the constraints inherent in language and social practice. Both, however, may be criticised for underestimating the importance of individual choice and systematic thought and of tension and diversity between groups within a culture. Here the microhistorical orientation (Ginzburg 1976, Geary 1994), Berger's 'plausibility structures' (Berger 1969), and Bourdieu's concepts of social praxis and social fields present valuable new perspectives which we intend to pursue (Bourdieu 1980, 1991, cf. also Mann 1986, Wuthnow 1989). In a similar way, we seek a middle road between radical cultural constructivism (Foucault, Ariès, and the deconstructivists) and the economic and technological determination in Marxism and related traditions.

Outline of Activities

- The four projects will run parallel so as to ensure that the main aim of the programme will be in focus, but some aspects will receive particular attention in the beginning, notably the process of Christianisation, due to the Cambridge-Bergen project. This project has its background in a session at the 19th International Congress of Historical Science in Oslo in 2000, on the Christianisation of Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, organised by Sverre Bagge and Nora Berend. At a meeting in Cambridge in September 2002 it was decided to produce reports on the status of research, sources, special problems etc. in the field for all together seven countries (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, and Russia), plus the Baltic area. The Christianisation of Norway will be the subject of a workshop arranged by our centre during the first half of 2003. The reports produced during the first year will in turn form the basis of comparative research during the next stage in the project, for which we hope to receive additional funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Board (UK) for five more years. The aim of this second stage will be to carry out a full, comparative study of the process of Christianisation and early state formation in the whole eastern and northern periphery. This will in turn form the basis of a further study of political organisation, society, and religion in the same area during the rest of the Middle Ages, i.e. projects 2 and 3.

- Project 2 will also start "from the other end", i.e. from the material on the connection between the papacy and the local churches recently made available through the opening of the penitential archive in the Vatican. An international conference on this material will be held late in 2003 and form the basis of a comparative project on the relationship between the papacy and the northern and eastern periphery, as well as local ecclesiastical organisation, notably the archbishop's role. Next, the results from this project will be used, together with those from the Christianisation project, in the more general study of the periphery during the last 4-5 years of the Centre's existence.

- Research on orality and literacy started with a conference in Reykholt, Iceland, in October 2002 and will be carried further in two other conferences in 2003 and 2004. These conferences mainly deal with Nordic, particularly Old Norse culture. We will therefore arrange parallel conferences here in Bergen, where we bring together scholars from Scandinavia and from eastern and western Europe to study the relationship between orality

and literacy and the penetration of the periphery by the latter throughout the area. As the introduction of books and script was an important part of the process of Christianisation, this project will have close contacts with the one on Christianisation.

- A conference on international models for medieval historiography, bringing together saga scholars and scholars working on other genres of medieval historiography, will be held towards the end of 2003. This will form a starting-point for further research and conferences on Roman models, the representation of politics, human character and the understanding of the distant past in the historical writings from the periphery. During the first 4-5 years, parallel with the project on Christianisation, we shall also pay particular attention to the narrative sources dealing with the conversion, with the particular history of newly converted peoples, and with the struggle between Christianity and paganism.

- A substantial part of the research listed above will be carried out by the master, doctor and post doctor students/scholars who will be attached to the centre during the coming years. As we want to give these younger scholars some liberty in defining their own topics – as long as it is relevant to our programme – we do not know precisely which particular topics will be dealt with in the future. All projects and applications will, however, be evaluated according to the aims stated in the present plan. We shall also try to ensure a reasonable balance between the various projects and disciplines and to some extent to recruit people so as to make them fit in with the various stages in the development of our programme. In the original application we asked for scholarships for 7 Ph.D students and 5 post doctoral fellowships per year. One post doctoral fellow and two Ph.D students are already attached to the project by the opening of the centre. We have invited applications for 3-4 more who will be employed during the first half of 2003. We shall then invite applications for some scholarship each year (cf. budget), so as to be able to recruit scholars successively as soon as they finish their master's degree. We do not want to specify exactly how many scholarships we shall grant each year, as this will depend on the number and quality of the applicants.

- In addition to the conferences and workshops mentioned above, there will be regular seminars for all CoE members and for master and dr. art. students from early in 2003, Scandinavian research courses in 2004 (Scandinavian) and 2005 (international).

The results of our research will be published in journals, books, or as collections of articles, mostly in English. We also plan to publish most of the papers from our conferences. We are discussing the possibility of having our own series and plan to contact some international publishers about this.