

Abstracts

Marco Mostert

New approaches to medieval communication? Communication, literacy and the development of medieval society

The results of recent research make this an appropriate moment to re-examine the question of medieval communication. In particular, reflection on the role of writing is necessary for a better understanding of medieval social history because the Middle Ages represented an important phase in the process by which members of all social groups increasingly turned to writing for purposes that until then had been served by non-verbal and oral forms of communication. Especially important in this regard is the study of 'pragmatic literacy', i.e. all those forms of literacy which either directly supported human actions or were meant to teach people how to undertake an action by making knowledge available to them. Increasingly, historians now study how specific social groups use writing by placing their use of this form of communication within the context of all other forms of communication over which those groups might dispose. The importance of literacy for social development is suggested by means of a flow-chart, where the fields of knowledge, technology, and complexity, together with school education, form a kind of flywheel which, in time, may cause the development of society to accelerate. From the thirteenth century onwards, this flywheel begins to gather speed, as literacy develops in ever more individual regions and towns. As more and more studies of different areas emerge, it is now becoming possible to adopt a comparative approach, in which the 'literatecies' of different times and places are juxtaposed. In turn, this may then enable us to draw wider conclusions about 'medieval literacy' and 'medieval communication' as a whole.

Peter Erhart

The Rotulus of Valerius: writing charters in early medieval Rhaetia

In the ninth and tenth centuries, 51 original charters from Rhaetia were absorbed into the archive of St Gall abbey, which was not only a maker of charters but also a keeper of records. It is significant to note that the conditions for widespread pragmatic literacy were present in Rhaetia, a region of Romance-speakers which had been strongly influenced by the Roman Empire, with a Christian church implanted in the region long before the Carolingian period. Therefore, we can find here landholders and tenants who habitually used documents. The notaries seem, for the most part, to have been clergymen, producing records for transactions in

which no church interest was involved. But where were these documents preserved before they entered the St Gall archive? Janet Nelson has argued that lay persons who used the services of a local priest as notary may also have used their local church as a repository for their documents. Valerius' *Rotulus* offers new indications as to the preservation and genesis of charters in Rhaetia.

Christoph Dartmann

Writing and political communication in the Italian city commune

The article analyses the significance of writing and public rituals for political communication in the Italian city-commune from the start of the thirteenth century onwards, taking as examples codices of statutes (communal law-books) and the practices followed in municipal courts. The codex of statutes claimed exclusively and completely to preserve in written form the norms followed in a particular town. The simultaneous development of record-keeping in court enabled – and responded to – the splitting of the judicial process into separate individual sessions, which had to be summoned, carried out, and documented in the correct form and at the right time, in order to deliver a valid verdict. These examples of the constitutive importance of writing for communal action did not, however, lead to a diminution of public rituals. The validity of the codex of statutes rested on the oath of office sworn by every new mayor. Through this oath, he acknowledged the communal laws and asserted his position as recipient of oaths by local citizens, under which they in turn were obliged to act in conformity with communal regulations. The quasi-liturgical aspects of the judicial process and the theatricality of public punishments demonstrate that the meaningful presentation of communal action was a fundamental given of public interaction in the city-commune. The complexity of political communication in Italian towns in the high and late middle ages can thus only be grasped by an approach which integrates the intensified use of writing with an understanding of the continuing importance of public rituals.

Ada Grossi

From medieval writing to digital editions. The “Codice Diplomatico digitale della Lombardia Medievale” (CDLM / The Digital Diplomatic Codex of Medieval Lombardy) at the University of Pavia

CDLM constitutes a development of the traditional Codex Diplomaticus, focusing on a specific geographical area (Lombardy) over a fixed period of time (eighth-twelfth centuries). CDLM contains a large number of published and, mainly, unpublished documents. These have been collected together according to archival principles, i.e. by reconstructing the holdings of ancient archives in

institutions such as churches and monasteries. Nevertheless, being a digital edition, it represents much more than simply a large collection of texts and moves substantially beyond the ordinary limitations typically affecting these kinds of works.

CDLM is innovative because it is not a digitalized version of a traditional volume containing transcripts of medieval documents; rather, it is a digital edition of the texts themselves. Moreover, these texts are properly marked up through ‘tagging’, which enables textual structures and individual elements to be identified and recognized. Hence, the texts are not only easily available, but it is also possible to search the body of documents in unprecedented ways, to perform innumerable searches, and to explore the textual data according to each user’s needs. One of the most important features of CDLM is the TReSy (Text Retrieval System), which allows for quick searches and will hopefully lead also to new paths for research.

Toni Pescosta

Porters and the state: the case of barrow-men from the Upper Inn valley

The article illuminates the relationship between the state and members of the carrying trade in nineteenth and twentieth-century Tyrol. The porters were an itinerant group with a strong sense of belonging together, and they earned their living through the carrying trade and handiwork. From the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards, the state pursued a policy of making the travelling porters part of the sedentary population. The compulsory measures enacted by the state aimed above all to restrict the opportunities for exercising this job. As the authorities distributed ever fewer licences for itinerant trade and handiwork, the barrow-men increasingly lost the basis for their existence. Many became sedentary in the 1920s, although they lived in ghetto-like zones on the edges of villages and towns in North Tyrol, where they remained a relatively homogeneous social group until the 1960s-70s.

Andreas Fischnaller

Respected – reviled – rejected: Johann Peter Vollmar, an executioner in Vormärz Tyrol

Drawing on the author’s research on the last public execution to be carried out in the town of Brixen, this article depicts the life and times of the executioner, Johann Peter Vollmar (1793–1842), a figure who has long been neglected by local research. A knacker originally from Bregenz, Vollmar was nominated to the position of executioner for the province of Tyrol and Vorarlberg in September 1818. His twenty-four-year-long career was characterised by constant material hardship, a deplorable state of family affairs, and daily troubles. The executioner’s family was confronted with repeated acts of exclusion from its immediate social environment, resulting from the notorious job of being an executioner, the position’s alleged ‘dishonesty’, and the collective defamation

of Vollmar's person. The article elucidates the significant stages in Johann Peter Vollmar's life, explores his experiences and actions as a person and as an executioner, and seeks to place his personal, familial, and social background within a broader historical context.

Nirvana Martinelli

Doctors, surgeons and barbers in medieval Trentino (1195–1374)

The research presented here demonstrates that the quantitative development of medical personnel in Trentino between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries does not differ from that found in other European regions. The majority of doctors operating within the confines of the ecclesiastical principality of Trento were not of aristocratic origin and this category of individuals began to emerge as an elite class in contemporary society. Significant here was the initial presence of foreign professionals and then the subsequent increase in practitioners of local origin, among whom there was a large component from the episcopal territory's