



The medieval centre-periphery paradigm: dead or alive?

February 5-6, 2024

University of Warsaw, Faculty of History

room A (second floor)

Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, Warsaw



Workshop Programme

The medieval centre-periphery paradigm: dead or alive?

Monday, 5 February

12.00-13.30

LUNCH

13.30-14.00

PRESENTATION OF THE ELITES PROJECT
AND THE WORKSHOP IDEA

Wojtek Jezierski (Universitetet of Oslo), **Hans Jacob Orning**
(Universitetet of Oslo), **Grzegorz Pac** (University of Warsaw)

14.00-14.15

COFFEE BREAK

14.15-15.15

VISIONS OF PERIPHERIES

(2 papers, 30 minutes of discussion; chair: **Wojtek Jezierski**)

Kurt Villads Jensen (Stockholm University) How do we locate periphery, how do we evaluate it as good or bad, what can we use it for? And how does all this change over time?

Christian Raffensperger (Wittenberg University) The Donut and the Hole: Imagining no Center

15.15-15.45

COFFEE BREAK

15.45-17.15

FLUID CENTRES AND PERIPHERIES

(3 papers, 45 minutes of discussion; chair: **Hans Jacob Orning**)

Daniel Ziemann (Central European University) Fluid Centers and Peripheries – A Comparative Analysis of the Carolingian Empire and the First Bulgarian Realm (7th-9th centuries)

Ian Peter Grohse (University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway) Peripheral participants? – North Atlantic islands and the Norwegian civil wars ca. 1130-1240

Frederik Buylaert (Ghent University) Elites and the Making of the Polities in the Decentralized Low Countries (c. 1350-1650)

19.30

DINNER

Tuesday, 6 February

9.00-10.30

UNIVERSAL CENTRE?

(3 papers, 45 minutes of discussion; chair: Grzegorz Pac)

Len Scales (Durham University) Rome as 'centre' and the making of a many-centred Europe, c.1000-c.1300

Jochen Johrendt (University of Wuppertal) Church in transition – concordare beyond center and periphery?

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (University of Turku) What is "Medieval Europe"?

10.30-11.00

COFFEE BREAK

11.00-12.30

THE LIMITS OF CENTRE-PERIPHERY PARADIGM

(3 papers, 45 minutes of discussion; chair: **Wojtek Jezierski**)

Louisa Taylor (University of the Highlands and Islands/Aberystwyth University) 'Cultural transfer' and the centre-periphery model

Ittai Weinryb (Bard Graduate Center) Art and Frontier: Center and Periphery in medieval Trade Posts

Nora Berend (University of Cambridge) Why we should let go of the centre-periphery paradigm

12.30-12.45

COFFEE BREAK

12.45-13.30

SUM UP

13.30-15.00

LUNCH (after lunch, we invite you for a walk around Warsaw)

VISIONS OF PERIPHERIES

Kurt Villads Jensen (kurt.villads.jensen@historia.su.se)

How do we locate periphery, how do we evaluate it as good or bad, what can we use it for? And how does all this change over time?

Periphery can be felt/imagined, or it can be measured. In the Middle Ages, popes in a religious centre expressed that Scandinavians and the Irish and not least Galicians were peripheral, in modern history writing Scandinavian historians have continued this interpretation of the Middle Ages in spite of Scandinavians during the 20 th century increasingly began to consider their own societies world leading and central in religious, cultural, and economic terms. These are mental constructions, but centre and peripheries can also be measured and located during the Middle Ages according to distribution of coins, languages, educational level etc etc. It can be measured in time of travelling, of individuals or of information of any kind. It can be illustrated on maps. The quality of peripheries is difficult to evaluated because it is so easy to apply modern standards on medieval sources. Frontier studies have been a great help to stress the double nature of medieval peripheries – they were (often) considered wild and dangerous, primitive, but also appealing because they offered freedom, economic possibilities or more sacredness than – maybe not the centres, but the in-between-zones. Discussions on centre and periphery are fundamental for understanding

Christian Raffensperger (craffensperger@wittenberg.edu)

The Donut and the Hole: Imagining no Center

The idea of Medieval Europe is built from the model of England and France. One then progresses outward from those to see whether other areas fit the model, or do not; but the center is always the focus. The donut purposely excises the center and benefits from the lacuna that is created. What happens if we build a Medieval Europe without a center, without England and France? What would that look like? This paper examines this idea and the conceptual ramifications for our understanding of the medieval world.

FLUID CENTRES AND PERIPHERIES

Daniel Ziemann (ziemann@ceu.edu)

Fluid Centers and Peripheries – A Comparative Analysis of the Carolingian Empire and the First Bulgarian Realm (7th-9th centuries)

The exploration of the center-periphery dynamic can be approached from various perspectives. In contemporary contexts, it is often delineated geographically, focusing on a central hub with its corresponding administrative and political functions, while the periphery is characterized by its geographical distance from the center, where local elites wield political influence with varying degrees of autonomy. However, the early medieval scenario was less narrowly defined by geography alone. When examining the concept of center and periphery during this period, it is crucial to perceive places and people as dynamically interconnected. In contrast to the modern emphasis on geography, the early medieval world witnessed a fluidity in the movement of rulers, their entourages, and the highest echelons of society. Itinerant kingship was a pervasive phenomenon in early medieval kingdoms, unlike the relatively rare stable capitals seen, for instance, in Byzantium. Surprisingly, modern scholarship has, for a considerable duration, regarded stable capitals as indicative of a higher developmental stage, neglecting the prevalence of mobile courts in other realms. This paper seeks to shed light on this aspect by employing the Frankish and Bulgarian realms as case studies. By examining some examples, I aim to underscore the nuanced and dynamic nature of political, economic, social, and symbolic significance attached to specific locales, whether chosen for short or long-term residences. This comparative analysis provides a fresh perspective on the intricacies of center-periphery dynamics in the early medieval context.

Ian Peter Grohse (ian.p.grohse@uit.no)

Peripheral participants? – North Atlantic islands and the Norwegian civil wars ca. 1130-1240

The term 'civil war' (borgerkrig) is commonly applied to the various power struggles, particularly succession disputes, that took place in Norway between 1130 and 1240. It is a problematic designation, not least due to its insinuation that conflict transpired in domestic isolation, in other words, within a socially and politically demarked and segregated sphere. This assumption has been challenged by e.g. Birgit Sawyer, Hans Jacob Orning and Ole-Albert Rønning Nordby, who have looked 'beyond borders' and considered the role played by Danish, Swedish, and other foreign actors and influences. My contribution expands on the theme and considering how the outermost frontiers of the Norwegian sphere, those being the Norwegian crown's so-called 'tributary countries' in the North Atlantic, figured into those 'internecine' disputes. More specifically, it considers whether Faroese, Shetlanders, Orcadians and Hebrideans were perceived by contemporaries – and should be regarded by modern historians – as peripheral or

integral participants. I will argue the notional and political dichotomy between the mainland 'centre' and insular 'periphery' developed gradually in the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries and, as such, must be regarded as a consequence of, rather than precondition for, islanders' involvement in Norway's 'civil wars'.

Frederik Buylaert (frederik.buylaert@ugent.be)

Elites and the Making of the Polities in the Decentralized Low Countries (c. 1350-1650)

My presentation proceeds from recent scholarship on governance and political elites in the Netherlandish principalities that were united in a composite union by the Burgundian Valois and their Habsburg successors. Having prioritized the dialogue between urban elites and princes, historians of this part of Europe were relatively late to engage with the lordship of landed elites. Recent research and the preliminary results of ongoing research projects on the role of landed elites in the construction of political communities, however, do not sit well with established concepts of “core and periphery.” My paper aims to explore the strengths and limitations of current perspectives and possible alternatives.

UNIVERSAL CENTRE?

Len Scales (le.scales@durham.ac.uk)

Rome as 'centre' and the making of a many-centred Europe, c. 1000-c. 1300

My presentation concentrates on the role of 'universal' institutions – the Papacy, the medieval western Empire – in the creation and consolidation of a plural medieval Europe of many centres (including 'peripheral' centres). It focuses particularly on Rome (and 'Rome'), as site, destination, memory, authority, and resource, and on Rome's paradoxical centrality (as a city which, e.g., medieval emperors invoked in their titles but rarely visited and where they were often unwelcome), but also its transferability and reproducibility as a foundation for multiple, sometimes competing, local legitimacies. My presentation thus argues for the centrality of Rome to the deeply rooted tensions between centrifugal and centripetal, cosmopolitanism and provincialism, in the medieval 'making of Europe'

Jochen Johrendt (johrendt@uni-wuppertal.de)

Church in transition – concordare beyond center and periphery?

The paper examines the change from the episcopal to the papal church in the High Middle Ages. As a result of changes in the papacy, its meaning, demands and articulated powers of action a new center emerged that not only changed itself to a considerable extent, but was also shaped from outside – personnel, ecclesiological, structural. There was not only a change in the legitimacy and instruments of church government. The new quality of the papacy in its self-interpretation made it stand out from the ranks of bishops. The Pope was no longer a fellow bishop but had become a bishop of a different quality. Legality and the exercise of office were (according to the claim) made dependent on agreement with Rome to an unprecedented extent. At the same time, this led to a structure within the church in which the papacy acted as the center – others as units that were supposed to be oriented towards the center. Only this change gave rise to the center and periphery in the universal church. Against this background, the paper illuminates what *concordare Romane ecclesie* could mean in terms of the further development of the church and the dichotomy of center and periphery, even beyond the required obedience.

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (sari.katajala-peltomaa@utu.fi)

What is "Medieval Europe"?

This talk stems from my recent work on cult of saints and hagiographic material. The talk centers around questions of universalism and particularism both during the Middle Ages and in the context of modern historiography and discusses they ways "central" can actually be "peripheral" and vice versa in the context of hagiography.

THE LIMITS OF CENTRE-PERIPHERY PARADIGM

Louisa Taylor (Louisa.Taylor@uhi.ac.uk)

'Cultural transfer' and the centre-periphery model

Historians often write of processes of cultural transfer in the sense of cultural ideas spreading and being adopted in a new geographical region or within a new community. Scholars writing about processes of 'Europeanisation' often conceive of such transfers in terms of the conveyance of largely unchanged cultural norms to new regions. This paper will argue that the centre-periphery model can lead to a focus on the imposition of

cultural ideas and the visual evidence of cultural change, while the more complex, intangible, and less complete cultural developments which occur from such interactions are given less consideration.

Ittai Weinryb (ittai.weinryb@bgc.bard.edu)

Art and Frontier: Center and Periphery in medieval Trade Posts

In my paper, I would like to revisit the notion of center and periphery as it is played out by Bartlett, and criticized by many others, through the prism of another crucial term in Bartlett's work: colonialism. Differing from his teacher, R. W. Southern, Bartlett has shown us that Europe was not created through geography nor through faith (or conversion) but rather through a process of colonization which included organized violence, the taking over of natural resources, settlement, and the creation of asymmetrical relations between indigenous groups and new incoming settler elites. The term settler colonialism did not exist in the time of Bartlett's writing, and I feel it is useful to focus on the different ways in which colonialism played an active role in the "Making of Europe," and its imagined center and periphery. By focusing on examples from frontier trade posts and on the classical study of Carlo Ginzburg and Enrico Castelnuovo *Centro e periferia nella storia dell'arte italiana* (1979), a foundational text in my field, I will try and reconsider the question of center and periphery.

Nora Berend (nb213@cam.ac.uk)

Why we should let go of the centre-periphery paradigm

I'll argue that the framework, which derives from economic history, is not just misleading but acts as a blinker to understanding medieval realities. Part of the problem is that there is no one centre. In addition, the terminology suggests judgements about development and backwardness.

Notes

Organizers

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Grzegorz Pac (gl.pac@uw.edu.pl)

Practical matters

Karolina Morawska (k.morawska2@uw.edu.pl)



Norway
grants

ELITES Project

The workshop is the part of the project 'Symbolic Resources and Political Structures on the Periphery: Legitimization of the ELITES in Poland and Norway, c. 1000 – 1300'. The project focuses on the forms and means of symbolic power the members of the political elites in the two peripheral areas of Europe (Norway and Poland) employed to manifest their privilege right to rule to their peers and subjects. These claims to rule of the elites, their ideological justification and legitimacy in the eyes of others, were the crucial problem in face-to-face societies inhabiting medieval Europe deprived of formal institutions and lasting state structures. What symbolic means did these elites manifest their entitlement to rule? How did they compete with other members of the elite? How did they assure their dominance over time?

Chronologically, this project focuses on the period 1000-1300, that is, the era between both Poland and Norway formally became Christian polities and the moment both were united as stable monarchies after long periods of civil wars and partitions. Thematically, the project comparatively investigates e.g. dynastic ideologies, cults and veneration of national saints, ruler ideologies, elite graves and symbolic expressions on coins, legitimation of episcopal and abbatial power, ceremonies of coronation and rituals of conviviality, narrations about the past etc.

The project is based on a close cooperation between the Polish and Norwegian medievalists from the University of Warsaw and the University of Oslo. The team consists of historians, archeologists, and numismatists coordinated by researchers with good experience of working on the two peripheral regions.

The project 'Symbolic Resources and Political Structures on the Periphery: Legitimization of the ELITES in Poland and Norway, c. 1000–1300' (2019/34/H/H3/00500) is funded from the Norway grants as a part of the GRIEG call within the Basic Research Programme - Programme Operator: National Science Centre, Poland; Programme Partner: Research Council of Norway.

elites.historia.uw.edu.pl