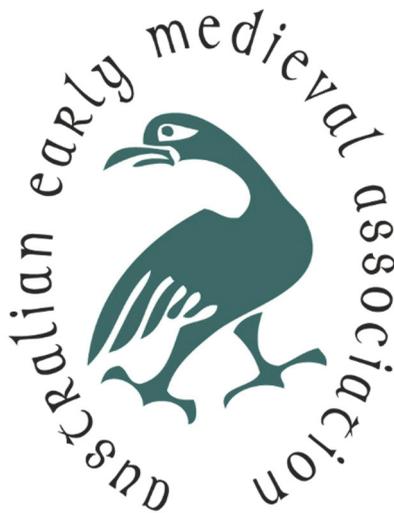


programme

16th international conference
of
the Australian Early
Medieval Association



1–2 October 2021
hosted online
from the university of Melbourne



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the Australian early medieval association

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conference committee

Convenors:

Darius von Güttner Sporzyński
Stephen Joyce

Members:

Daniel Claggett
John D'Alton
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abstracts



Keynote Speakers

Constant J. Mews, Monash University

Plague, injustice, and last things in early medieval Ireland

Reflecting on global catastrophe is a recurring theme in many religious traditions. In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation has provided a particularly powerful evocation, inspired by the books of Daniel and Ezekiel of forthcoming calamity prior to the coming of a new heaven and new earth. Its message had a particular meaning in early medieval Ireland, which did not escape the globally destructive plagues of the sixth and seventh centuries CE. This paper will introduce the *Twelve Abuses of the Age*, from seventh-century Ireland, as a plea for justice, which it saw as being suffocated by the abuses of the age. The *Twelve Abuses* urges moral behaviour on twelve types of bad behaviour in society, climaxing in ‘a people without law’. I shall argue that it is written within an apocalyptic perspective in which the bad behaviour of the king was seen as potentially leading to ecological disaster. As such, it deserves to be connected to other texts of an apocalyptic nature popular in early medieval Ireland that sought to make sense of a world always on the edge of seeming disaster.

Darius von Güttner Sporzyński, University of Melbourne

Violence and Sacred Violence in the *Chronica Polonorum* by Bishop Vincentius of Cracow

Bishop Vincentius of Cracow (c.1150–1223), Poland's first native chronicler, placed his people's history on a continuum with the classical world in order to secure them a place within universal history. In his work, considered a masterpiece in literary erudition grounded in classical training, Vincentius frequently uses violence as one of the key enablers in his explanation of the progress of history and the place of the Poles in the world. This paper will examine the use of coercion, violence, and force sanctified by the Church as a literary device. It will also examine the impact of Vincentius' own eyewitness testimony on his writing of history of the Poles which, as this paper will argue, offer insights into the development of twelfth-century Poland and the ambitions of its dynasty.



Abstracts

Lisa Bailey, University of Auckland

Early Medieval *Servi*: How do we write the history of the voiceless and violated?

This paper takes, as its inspiration, a challenge from Marisa Fuentes in a book on the lives of enslaved women in eighteenth-century Barbados. Fuentes asks us, as historians, to think about the ways in which our evidence for slavery, and therefore the analyses which depend upon it, reproduce the discourses of slave owners and further silence the slaves themselves. To counter this, Fuentes rewrites the events she studies from the standpoint of enslaved women, subverting both the archive and the historian's fetishisation of it. Here, I apply this approach to the study of slavery and service in the early middle ages. I argue that in order to rewrite in this way, it is necessary to disrupt our normal practices as historians and go beyond the archive in ways which we typically find unsettling. In particular, this challenge requires us to craft a contextual stage which enables us to 'imagine' the experiences and perspectives of those without voices, without ever assuming we can fully know and understand them.

Manu Braithwaite-Westoby, University of Sydney

Disruption in *Hárbarðsljóð*

Modern scholarship divides the eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð* (c. 1220) into three parts: a *senna* or *flyting* (1-14), a *mannjafnaðr* 'comparison of men' (15-46) and an 'aftermath' (47-60). It takes place at an unnamed fjord, which separates the opponents, the Old Norse gods Þórr and Óðinn (the latter is disguised as a ferryman). The poem reports that Þórr was returning from an excursion into Giantland when he encounters Óðinn, who refuses to let him cross, despite his awareness of Þórr's identity and thus their consanguinity. For Þórr this is a major disruption: he tries every trick in the book to make it to the other side of the fjord, including both flattery and threats, but in the end is forced to go the long way around where he risks running into evil beings. Even though many of the indictments made against him are demonstrably untrue, it is an intensely embarrassing situation for Þórr as his ability to perform the role of *miðgarðs véor* ('Protector of Miðgarðr') relies heavily on unrestricted access to different spatial realms. In this paper I will examine in greater depth the ways in which Þórr is 'disrupted' on his journey and how this is an unusual portrayal of him compared to other Norse texts.



Penelope Buckley, University of Melbourne

Disruptions and new normals in the Byzantine Macedonian dynasty

A major disruption does not come without a cause, rarely comes without a history of causes and previous disruptions, and is not often conclusive. In 1042, in Byzantium, when Michael V tonsured and exiled the Empress Zoe, who had raised him to the throne, an angry popular rising deposed and blinded him. In Psellos' *Chronographia*, the rising was supported by large numbers of women who came out of the women's quarters and were seen in public for the first time. This unusual double disruption was preceded by a chain of others from the start of the Macedonian dynasty, ambivalently founded on treachery and murder by Basil II who nevertheless stabilized, extended and enriched his empire through a single-minded military discipline. He left a power vacuum filled by periods of stability and upheaval, each linked to previous injustices or bad decisions, until the dynasty was exhausted. My paper will focus on the popular rising but will argue that it responded to and was followed by other disruptions without resolving underlying causes. Each 'new normal' or altered imperial face was a temporary adjustment only. The larger context is the structure of the Roman empire itself.

Bob Di Napoli, Scholar at Large

Wordum Gewrixlan: The Shock of the New - Christianity and the Superannuated Scop

Anyone familiar with early medieval history will know how the pagan Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity. Even as narrated by official sources, most fully by Bede's account in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the event does not lack its piquant aspects: Pope Gregory's questionable puns (*non angli, sed angeli!*) after seeing Anglian slaves on sale in Rome, or the striking metaphor (offered by King Edwin's counsellor as the king's witan ponders the missionaries' proposals) that likens human existence to the brief flight of a sparrow through a mead-hall in winter. Among scholars and students of Old English literature, such anecdotes, whether wry or beautiful in themselves, lend a gloss of familiarity to the notion of the Anglo-Saxons' conversion. Bede's entire narrative depicts it as the fulfilment of God's purpose, on a quasi-biblical scale. One of the collateral benefits of that conversion, for us modern readers, is the wealth of early vernacular texts that would ultimately emerge from the scriptoria established by the missionaries and their successors. So we have little pressing reason to question how that conversion would have landed in different quarters of Anglo-Saxon culture. It happened, and we are reaping the benefits of that advent to this day. Why look a gift-horse in the mouth?

Yet the fundamental beliefs and values first preached by Augustine and his fellow monks were at points so at odds with those of a warrior aristocracy—humility, forgiveness of enemies, a God who willingly takes on an abject death for the salvation of all rather than just a select few—that it's hard to imagine the missionaries didn't face something of an uphill battle making their first pitch. In my talk I would like to review the evidence for native poetry's continuing hold on the Christian Anglo-Saxon imagination, how its diction and vocabulary and its transposition of heroic ideals into a new Christian register involved more than the proselytizers' zeal to exploit elements of local culture to further their own didactic ends. No examples of pre-Christian vernacular verse survive, but from *Beowulf* to *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Advent Lyrics*, selected Exeter-Book riddles, and the verse lives of saints such as Guthlac, Andreas, and Helena, a fascinating mosaic of themes, images, and sensibilities betrays the *scopas'* deeply rooted (and sometimes subliminal) allegiance to the craft of their native forebears.



Geoffrey D. Dunn, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

The Disruption of the Disruptive Huns

Raphael's painting from the second decade of the sixteenth century, *The Meeting between Leo the Great and Attila* in the Room of Heliodorus in the Raphael Stanze in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, depicts Leo encountering the leader of the Huns just outside Rome. Raphael's source was the anonymous medieval *Vita sancti Leonis papae*. However, we know the meeting took place at the Mincio river near Mantua in 452. The presence of the Huns within the empire was a disruptive and destructive episode in the history of the late Roman empire in the West under Valentinian III, just as Alaric and the Goths had been from the end of the fourth century and the crossing of the Rhine by Vandals, Alans, and Suebi had been at the end of 406. They gained a reputation for barbarity and savagery, bringing terror and annihilation wherever they moved across Europe. While Prosper of Aquitaine attributed the success of turning back Attila to Leo I, bishop of Rome from 440–461 (ignoring Gennadius Avienus and Memmius Trigetius, the two other negotiators), other contemporary sources, like Priscus, attributed it to superstition from the Hunnic troops. The efforts of Aetius also need to be considered. Attila and the Huns has become an increasingly attractive topic for publication in recent years, both scholarly and popular. This paper will investigate and evaluate the reasons presented in our sources for the disruption to the Hunnic advance into Italy, suggesting that Attila's own success in the north of Italy in the previous year had interrupted his supply chain, making a move any further south in Italy strategically unwise.

Katrina Edwards, Independent Researcher

Reading Cassian through Ambrose: St Benedict's treatment of humility and the *Rule of the Master*

This paper argues that the way in which Cassian's ten 'signs of humility' are restructured and expanded into the twelve steps of humility found in both the *Rule of St Benedict* and the *Rule of the Master*, provides new evidence for the priority and originality of the *Rule of St Benedict*, thus supporting recent challenges to the previous consensus in favour of the *Rule of the Master*. It suggests that the way in which the steps are grouped and ordered is driven by a previously unidentified connection between St Benedict's particular ordering of the psalms in his form of the Divine Office, and St Ambrose's commentary on Psalm 118. Far from being an 'orphan chapter' perhaps derived from a third now lost rule, as one recent contribution has suggested, St Benedict's chapter on humility is both integral to the structure of his Rule and Office, and a key point of differentiation with other early monastic rules.



Matthew Firth, Flinders University

Pre-Conquest England in Post-Conquest Histories: The Case Study of Æthelflæd of Mercia

October 14 1066 marks a conceptual disruption to England's history that looms large in English cultural memory. The Norman Conquest brought with it new lords, a new language, strange names, and imposing architecture. There is, no doubt, an extent to which this was indeed a disruption. Yet to what degree did those writing the history of pre-Conquest England perceive it as such? Certainly, the replacement of England's kings and their thegns, of archbishops and bishops did not amount to some sort of *damnatio memoriae* of the pre-Conquest political world. Indeed, it became something of an abiding interest for post-Conquest writers. The intellectual culture of twelfth-century England produced an extensive corpus of histories and hagiographies which focused on figures from the pre-Norman past. The pre-eminent historians of the period – William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, John of Worcester – were all keenly aware that England's history stretched back to sub-Roman Britain. Among those they singled out for particular attention was the tenth-century leader, Æthelflæd Lady of the Mercians. This paper will examine the transmission of Æthelflæd's legacy into the Anglo-Norman historical tradition, using her as a case study for a wider discussion of how post-Conquest historians wrote pre-Conquest history.

Stephen Joyce, Monash University

***Collectio Romana?* Martin of Braga and the crossing of the divide**

Embedded within two Carolingian manuscripts of German provenance dated to the early ninth century and preserved in Munich and Vienna, is a collection of canons and patristic sayings, for this paper termed the *Collectio Romana*, notable for its insular and continental content. The late Aidan Breen examined this collection to refine an improved edition of the *Synodus Romana*, a text, unattributed in this collection, which came to be known as the *Synodus II Patricii* or the *Second Synod of Patrick*, perhaps as early as c. 700. Observed by Breen, but not commented on, was the citing of the patristic authority of the fifth or sixth century British moraliser, Gildas, a section taken from the fragments of a letter from Gildas to another opaque sixth century British figure, Finnian, as mentioned by Columbanus in a letter to Pope Gregory the Great c. 600. The combination of pseudo-Patrician canonical material with the authority of Gildas in the *Collectio Romana* is buttressed by a series of canons from early church councils of the fourth, fifth centuries, and early sixth centuries, as well as the authority of Augustine of Hippo, Jerome and Gregory the Great. This paper will argue that the canon collection points to active attempts by the British church to fuse its insular traditions with those of the continental Roman church in the last decades of the sixth century. It will highlight the diocese of Galicia and the legacy of Martin of Braga as influential on the British Isles and, challenging Bede's notion of a rupture in the Insular church prior to the mission of Augustine of Canterbury, will point to an ongoing reciprocal interest and evolution in Christian culture within the British Isles and the continent in the late sixth century.



Emma Knowles, University of Sydney

A Mere Inconvenience? Landscape, Gender and Characterisation in Old English Poetry

Julia Kristeva describes the abject as ‘what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules’, it is a place where the ‘eruption’ of the real enters life, collapsing the distinctions between subject and order. The concept of the abject has often been connected with Grendel’s mother in *Beowulf*, a figure whose ‘eruption’ into the world of Heorot disturbs and destabilises. But what of the mere from which she enters the human space? It too disturbs, threatens, erupts across the borders of human civilization and can be read in the light of Kristeva’s abject. Such a relationship between abject and landscape is not limited to the mere though. I will consider the ways in which we see the concept of the abject present in landscapes in three Old English poems: *Beowulf*, *Christ and Satan* and *The Wife’s Lament*. In each of these texts the disruptive characteristics of the abject shape not only spaces, but the depiction of female figures within them. I will consider the relationship between space, gender and characterisation in these poems, and argue that these disruptive landscapes (the mere, hell, the ‘earth-hall’) provide opportunities to female characters to challenge and subvert gendered structures.

Daniil Kotov, HSE University, Russia

Smoothering the Eruption: Constantine in Eusebius and 5th Century Greek Church Historians

This paper deals with the representation of the emperor Constantine I (306–337) in Greek historiography of Late Antiquity. I will draw on four sources. The first one is Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Life of Constantine* (ca AD 337–341). The other three are church histories by Philostorgius, Socrates and Sozomen, composed between AD 430 and 450. The first of three authors belonged to the sect of Eunomians, while the other two represented Nicene point of view. I will argue that Eusebius positions Constantine as a sacralized figure, who made an eruption by becoming the first Christian emperor and establishing himself as an ideal of piety. Socrates, Sozomen, and Philostorgius, in turn, narrow down this eruption. These historians depict Constantine predominantly as an earthly ruler who sought to establish the doctrinal unity inside the church. Despite being of non-Nicene dogmatical views, Philostorgius represents Constantine similarly with Socrates and Sozomen in many points. This transformation is emblematic of the transition from the struggle between Christianity and other cults in the early fourth century to a clash between different doctrinal versions of Christian faith and practice under Theodosius II.



Adam Krawiec, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

The “eruption” of Sclavania? The birth of the idea of “Slavdom” in medieval Western imaginative geography

The paper addresses the issue of the potential of using the concept of “eruption” in the description and analysis of phenomena in the history of imaginations. There are “eruption-like” situations, when certain notions or names appear in written sources and in a relatively short time radically transform the ways of perception of a specific territory. An example of such an early medieval “eruption” is the appearance of names like Sclavania in the Latin-language sources, and the associated way of defining Central and Eastern Europe as an area inhabited by Slavs. The proposed paper will indicate two main stages of this “eruption” of Sclavania: in the Carolingian Kingdom in the second half of the 8th century, and in the Ottonian Empire at the turn of the 11th century, pointing out at the political context of this situation. The possible influences of the ways of conceptualizing the area in question in Greek and in Germanic and Slavic languages on this process will be indicated. Possible reasons for limiting the scope of the “eruption” of the concept of the “great” Sclavania, which never dominated the way of thinking about Central and Eastern Europe as a whole, will also be analyzed.

Shane McLeod, University of Tasmania

Vikings and St Cuthbert: interruption or disruption?

The Vikings are infamous for their attack in 793 CE on the monastery on Lindisfarne, home to the Community of St Cuthbert, and later (c. 875), their renewed attacks led to the community 'wandering' northern England for seven years with the body of St Cuthbert. During this period, Vikings established a kingdom centred on York. Despite this evidence for hostility, there is evidence for the Community of St Cuthbert working with Viking leaders from c. 883. Furthermore, a curious collection of church sculpture suggests that Viking influence reached further north than the traditional area of their settlement, into the heart of the Community of St Cuthbert itself. This paper will review this evidence and argue that the Vikings represented more of an interruption than disruption to the Cuthbertine community.



Bernard Mees, University of Tasmania

Runes and the Anglo-Saxon invasions

In the 1920s, three bones with runic inscriptions carved in them were presented to the museum at Oldenburg. Long thought to be fakes, in the 1980s the German criminologist Peter Pieper declared them to be genuine finds, not capable of being forgeries. In the 1990s, a further runic inscription was found in the area, at Falward, on the sandy embankment that marks out the earlier coast before the silting of the area about the mouth of the River Weser. The runic inscriptions come from an area that was depopulated in the mid-fifth century, at the same time as jewellery, burial practices and ceramics typical of the area begin to appear in sub-Roman Britain. The runic inscriptions from the Lower Weser are clearly written in an ancestor of Old English, as are the earliest runic finds from Britain. But the importation of the runes to sub-Roman Britain was more than just a technological matter. The introduction of knowledge of the runes to sub-Roman Britain at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasions necessarily implies a range of cultural practices associated with runic writing that are brought into new light by the finds from the Lower Weser.

Lynette Olson, University of Sydney

Britannia and Romania in the First Life of St Samson of Dol

The history of the *Tractus Armoricanus* (what is now northwestern France) as the Roman Empire crumbled in the West is complex. Disruption came not only from the westward extension of Frankish control but also from the settlement of Romano-British people who gave their name to Brittany. Yet when the First Life of St Samson of Dol was written in the late seventh century to ca 700, the territory east of Brittany at least as far as the River Seine, though clearly ruled by the Frankish king Childebert I whose court Samson visits, is referred to not as Francia but as Romania. This paper explores this distinction and argues that it is essentially a linguistic one.



Erica Steiner, University of Sydney

The Fatherless Child: The scandalous early medieval origins of Merlin Ambrosius

The figure of Merlin is arguably one of the most enduring and recognisable literary creations from the medieval period, being consistently popular from the character's very first appearance in the twelfth century works of Geoffrey of Monmouth – which in order of publication are: the *Prophetiae Merlini*, *De gestis Britonum*, and the *Vita Merlini*. The sources which Geoffrey pillaged to create his infamous history are well-known, most notably the ninth century anonymous *Historia Brittonum*, which Geoffrey used extensively. Nowadays, it is generally agreed that the figure of Merlin is a work of fiction, but this was not always the case as for the first centuries of Merlin's existence, he was understood to have been a real historical figure. Merlin appears in all three of these works at different stages of life, and I here will focus solely on the young Merlin, or Merlin Ambrosius as he was called from very early in the reception of Geoffrey's works to distinguish him from the aged Merlin Caledonensis. In Geoffrey's works, Merlin was possessed of magical powers because he was the unholy product of the union between a nun and an incubus. But the *Historia Brittonum* makes no mention of Merlin being a half-demon. In this paper I propose to examine the early medieval sources behind the story of Merlin Ambrosius to uncover an unsanitised version of Merlin Ambrosius' paternity and historicity. The key to my analysis is the consistent description of Merlin Ambrosius as a 'fatherless child', a detail which Geoffrey developed into the notion that Merlin had no father, therefore must have been conceived through the agency of a supernatural being. But the early medieval usage of this phrase, 'fatherless child' paints a very different – and more sordid – picture.

Ryan Strickler, Australian National University

Jerusalems Old and New: Holy Cities in Seventh-Century Byzantine Thought

With the disruptions caused by the Persian, and later Islamic, invasions of the seventh century Jerusalem loomed large in the imagination of Byzantine authors. While the physical Jerusalem was subject to repeated conquests, conquered by the Persians in 618, retaken by the Byzantines, and finally conquered by Islamic invaders in 636, the promise of a New Jerusalem was brought to the centre of the Byzantine apocalyptic imagination. At the beginning of the century, the Byzantine homilist Theodore Syncellus proclaimed that Constantinople was the New Jerusalem, confident that Byzantine defence of the imperial capital and ultimate defeat of the Persians had fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. For the Jews, the Sassanid conquest restored messianic expectations that a New Jerusalem would be built by God himself on top of the old city. Syriac Christians, in the wake of the final conquest of the Holy City, looked to Jerusalem, rather than Constantinople as the final seat of government when the Last King of the Greeks would surrender control to Christ who would restore the empire to its full glory. This paper examines the place of the Old and New Jerusalems in the apocalyptic imagination of authors writing under Byzantine cultural hegemony, both as a symbol that transcended landscape, and as a locus of hope in a period of eruption of new adversaries and subsequent disruption of self-identity.



Aimee Turner, Macquarie University

The Poet and the Empress: Ovid and Livia in medieval commentaries and glosses

The portrayal of Livia in the early twelfth century is closely connected with the re-emerging interest in the life and works of Ovid, particularly his exilic works. Ovid's writing had remained in circulation since antiquity and received passing attention prior to the Carolingian renaissance. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, this sporadic treatment of Ovid erupted into a closer examination and appreciation of the poet, inspiring the label *aetas Ovidiana*. As Ovid's works began to be more widely studied in educated circles, explanatory texts in the form of *accessus* also arose. At the time, there was considerable interest in the disruption of Ovid's life in the *accessus* tradition, which still remains shrouded in secrecy and has led to ongoing scholarly interest today. The reasons given for Ovid's exile in these works frequently implicate Ovid in sexual scandal. Numerous theories were developed by the medieval authors, including a number featuring Livia, and these theories were incorporated into their introductions to Ovid's works. This paper will explore the association between Ovid's exile and the empress in the *accessus* tradition to better understand the problematic portrayal of Livia that arises out of the early medieval period.

Carol Williams, Monash University

The *Schola Cantorum* of Rome and the Interrupted Transmission of Chant in Anglo Saxon England

Anglo Saxon interest in the Roman liturgy picks up sharply from the late seventh century when in 674 the soldier turned abbot Benedict Biscop built a monastery of stone 'after the Roman fashion' at Wearmouth. The house was dedicated to Saint Peter and in 681 Benedict established a second house at nearby Jarrow dedicated to Saint Paul. These twin houses were among the most exposed stations of the Catholic faith in the north. Benedict repeatedly overcame the great distance that separated his monastic foundation from the papal city undertaking six pilgrimages to assemble a library at Wearmouth-Jarrow with few parallels in the West. Benedict also wanted to learn and teach the 'yearly cursus of chanting together with its ordo of rite, chanting and reading aloud.' To accomplish this he returned from his fifth pilgrimage with John, an archicantator of Saint Peter's basilica and abbot of Saint Martin's, one of four monasteries serving the basilica in the services of the Hours but also at Mass. This is the earliest securely documented case in the early Middle Ages of one centre lending a singer to another. The practice was essential for the transmission of chant which could not be written down and was stored in the memory of one and passed on to the ears of the many to be imprinted on their memories by consistent repetition. Though the founding of the *Schola Cantorum* of Rome is still uncertain, and it is not clear whether John was trained there, its mission was certainly to operate as a kind of living library of singers who, like John, could be borrowed to faithfully pass on the chant as it was sung in Rome. This paper examines the role of the *Schola Cantorum* in bridging the interruption of the transmission of chant in the Anglo Saxon church.

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