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Medieval Studies in Estonia

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MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN ESTONIA

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The Middle Ages are in fashion in Estonia, not only among scholars but in the society as a whole. In Tallinn, one can meet people dressed in a medieval manner several times a year: in June at the Old Town festival, in December at the Christmas market, and so on. Tartu, the second largest city, celebrates the Hanseatic days annually, and there are the restaurants serving “medieval” food, shops selling “medieval” goods, and so on. It is even difficult to explain why the Middle Ages are so popular – perhaps partly because the medieval period is simply fascinating, and partly because of the richness in medieval monuments (e.g., the city centre of Tallinn has largely preserved its medieval appearance and is included in the UNESCO heritage list). On the scholarly level, the popularity may at least partly be caused by the synergy created by a group of medievalists who some years ago founded the Centre for Medieval Studies (see below).

There has been a considerable rise of interest in medieval studies since the re-acquisition of independence in 1991. Since the late 1980s it has been possible to study topics that in Soviet times were “inadvisable” (e.g., subjects related to religion) or could not be treated objectively (political history, “German” institutions, etc.). In fact, one of the few “safe” subjects in the Soviet period was agrarian history. The past decades have witnessed a growing interest in medieval church history, daily life, and mentalities. The political history of medieval Estonia (Livonia) has been thoroughly revised. There are several new studies on urban history and culture and the revival also concerns medieval archaeology and art history.

A change of generations should also be mentioned. Several scholars who were the main figures in medieval studies in the 1970s and 1980s retired in the 1990s (e.g., Sulev Vahtre, Enn Tarvel). Prof. Jüri Kivimäe (b. 1947), still one of our leading medievalists, left Tartu University in 1999 because he was elected Professor of History at the University of Toronto. He is also the Chair of Estonian Studies there. All these changes opened up opportunities for young medievalists, many of whom had, after graduating from Tartu University, studied abroad.

It should be noted that it is not possible to earn a degree in medieval studies in Estonia; one can graduate as a historian, art historian or archaeologist. For a long time, Tartu University was the only one with MA and PhD programs in these

disciplines. From the end of the 1990s, however, it has been possible to defend an MA at the Institute of History of Tallinn University, and in 2003 a doctoral program was accredited there.¹

CMS – Centre for Medieval Studies

Estonia is a small country with only about twenty medievalists (including historians, art historians, and archaeologists). Most of us are good friends and involved in joint projects. Some years ago, it was realized that our ties could be made even stronger and research better coordinated if we formed a research centre uniting people from different institutions. Thus, in 2005, the Centre for Medieval Studies (CMS) of the Tallinn University (TLU) was founded.² One of the main supporters of this idea and the first head of the CMS was art historian Kersti Markus. Although the CMS is located at the Institute of History of TLU, it has members from several other institutions as well. The twelve founding members (what a symbolic number) and their research interests should be briefly introduced here (listed in alphabetical order).

Helen Bome (MA 2003) is a PhD student at TLU. She has studied medieval iconography and the historiography of art history in Estonia.

Tiina Kala (PhD 2001) is a senior researcher in the Tallinn City Archives. She has studied the Christianization of Livonia and the development of local written culture. She has also written on the Reformation and the subsequent religious, economic and social changes.

Linda Kaljundi (MA 2005) is a PhD student in the History Department of the University of Helsinki. The title of her thesis is: “Representations of Violence and Affection in the Northern Mission and Crusading: The Emotional History of Europeanization.” She is also interested in sites of memory.

¹ Tallinn University (<http://www.tlu.ee>) was founded in 2005 when some high schools (Tallinn Pedagogical University and the Estonian Institute of the Humanities) and research institutions (Institute of History, and others) were united.

² <http://www.ai.ee/?pid=59>

Juhan Kreem (PhD 2002) is a senior researcher in the Tallinn City Archives. He is interested in the development of power structures in medieval Livonia, particularly the Teutonic Order.

Ivar Leimus (PhD 1989) is a senior researcher in the Estonian History Museum. He is a specialist in numismatics, but has also studied the colonization and economic history of medieval Livonia.

Marika Mägi (PhD 2002) is professor of Archaeology at TLU. Her research interests include the society and burial customs in Livonia in the transition period between the Viking Age and the Middle Ages.

Anu Mänd (PhD 2000) is a senior researcher at the Institute of History of TLU. She is interested in urban history, visual culture, and the cult of saints in medieval Livonia.

Kersti Markus (PhD 2000) is Professor of Art History at TLU. She has studied medieval church architecture and the interaction of pagan and Christian culture.

Inna Põltsam-Jürjo (PhD 2008) is a senior researcher at the Institute of History of TLU. She has studied medieval food, the Reformation, and the medieval and early modern history of Livonian small towns.

Priit Raudkivi (PhD 1987) is a senior researcher at (and former director of) the Institute of History of TLU. He is interested in the political and social history of medieval Livonia and Livonian-Danish relations.

Anti Selart (PhD 2002) is Associate Professor of Medieval History at Tartu University. He has studied the political history of medieval and early modern Livonia and the relations between different confessions.

Marek Tamm (MA 1999) is a researcher at the Institute of History of TLU and lecturer at the Estonian Institute for the Humanities (EHI). He has analysed the image of Livonia in Western Europe as well as the Christianization processes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He will defend his Ph.D. thesis ("Inventing Livonia") in 2009.

A short CV of these and other members can be found in the homepage of the CMS. A detailed CV and a full list of publications of each scholar in Estonia can be found on the homepage of the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS).³

The CMS has close connections with similar institutions in other countries, such as the Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies (NCMS) in Bergen and naturally the Medieval Studies Department at the CEU. The CMS is a member of the FIDEM (*Fédération Internationale des Institutes d'Études Médiévales*) and actively participates in CARMEN (Co-operative for the Advancement of Research through a Medieval European Network). Conferences are often organised jointly with a partner from abroad. These are the major international events in Estonia in the past five years that have been coordinated by members of the CMS:

August 2004: 19th Nordic Iconographic Symposium, "Images in the Margins," in Kuressaare. The proceedings were published in 2006.⁴

August 2006: Conference of the doctoral school, "Regional and European Identities in the Medieval Baltic Sea Region," in Tallinn (in cooperation with the NCMS).

July 2007: Symposium "Who Owns Memory? The Power of Remembrance," and a doctoral school conference: "How Collectivities Remember" (with the EHI).

August 2007: Conference on: "The Edges of the Medieval World," on the island of Muhu (with CEU). The proceedings have been published.⁵

October 2007: "Changing Spaces: Danish-Estonian Seminar on Negotiating Culture and Christianity Across the Medieval Baltic Sea," in Tallinn (with the NCMS).

May 2008: "Crusading and Chronicle Writing at the Medieval Frontier: The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia," in Tallinn (with the NCMS). The proceedings will be published by Ashgate in 2010.

Some forthcoming events also deserve to be advertised. In September 2009, a conference "Art, Memory, and Patronage: Visual Culture in the Baltic Sea Region at the Time of Bernt Notke," and in 2010, the CARMEN meeting will take place in Tallinn. It is the aim of the CMS to organise at least one international or doctoral school conference a year.

³ <https://www.etis.ee/index.aspx?lang=en>

⁴ Kersti Markus, ed., *Images in the Margins: Nordic Studies in Medieval Art / Bilder i marginalen: Nordiska studier i medeltidens konst* (Tallinn: Argo, 2006).

⁵ Gerhard Jaritz and Juhan Kreem, eds., *The Edges of the Medieval World*, CEU Medievalia 11 (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009).

Estonians at CEU

Six Estonians have studied at the Medieval Studies Department of CEU. At first glance, this number seems to be rather small, but if we consider that there are altogether about twenty medievalists in Estonia, then the role of the CEU in their training is more than impressive. The first Estonians – Juhan Kreem and Erik Somelar – were admitted to the MA program in 1993, that is, for the first academic year. They graduated in 1994. Since then, Juhan has developed into one of the leading medievalists in Estonia, being particularly interested in the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. He defended his PhD on a related subject at Tartu University in 2002 (see the section on books below), and has worked in the Tallinn City Archives since 1996. Erik decided not to choose the career of a scholar, but has made use of his broad knowledge in several important positions, including that of an economic advisor to the president of the Estonian Republic in the late 1990s. Currently, he works at the European Commission in Brussels.

The positive experiences of Juhan and Erik encouraged others to apply to CEU. Anneli Randla (art historian) and Ken Kalling (anthropologist) defended their MAs in 1995. Anneli continued her studies at the University of Cambridge, where she defended her PhD in 1999. From 2000 to 2004 she was the director general of the National Heritage Board of Estonia, where she now serves as the deputy director for research. Ken returned to Tartu University, but has not yet concluded his PhD studies. Currently, he works as lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine.

The next, and the last (so far), pair of Estonians entered the Medieval Studies Department in 1995 and defended their MAs in the following year. Both of them chose to continue there in the doctoral program and both of them chose topics totally different from their MA theses. Anu Mänd, who wrote her MA on liturgical vessels, defended her PhD on the social history of festivals (2000),⁶ and Ülle Sillasoo, a trained archeobotanist, moved from medieval food to plant depictions (2003).⁷

Two professors have played a particularly important role in the training of these Estonian students: Gerhard Jaritz and József Laszlovszky. The first supervised the MA theses of Erik, Juhan, Ülle (together with Prof. Laszlovszky), and Anu, as well

⁶ Anu Mänd, "The Urban Festival in Late Medieval Livonia: Norm, Practice, Perception" (PhD dissertation, CEU, 2000). The thesis was published in Estonian in 2004 and in English in 2005 (see the section on books). I am grateful to my supervisor Prof. Gerhard Jaritz who encouraged me to publish my work.

⁷ Ülle Sillasoo, "Plant Depictions in Late Medieval Religious Art in Southern Central Europe: An Archaeobotanical Approach" (PhD dissertation, CEU, 2003).

as both PhD dissertations; the second supervised the MA theses of Anneli, Ken and Ülle (together with Prof. Jaritz). It is thanks to their wide scope of knowledge, kind support, and the necessary application of pressure that we managed to complete our studies and to enjoy the painful procedure of writing a thesis. The close co-operation between Gerhard Jaritz and his former students has continued ever since; there are happy reunions at conferences and other scholarly events, and there are conferences and publications organised in common.

The quality of education and the inspiring atmosphere of the Medieval Studies Department have had a positive influence on not only the alumni themselves, but also on their students. Juhan and Anu give lectures at the Tallinn University, Anneli at the Estonian Academy of Arts, and Ken at the Tartu University. Through teaching and supervising, the knowledge and methodological approaches acquired at CEU are passed on to the next generations.

Inspiring Books

It is clear that when one is asked to provide a list of books which have had the deepest impact on medieval studies in Estonia the list reflects the subjective opinion of its compiler. I have left out several dissertations, conference proceedings and source publications that have also contributed to the research on medieval Estonia (Livonia). However, it is the following books, arranged chronologically, that in my opinion have been the most inspiring.

Kivimäe, Jüri and Juhan Kreem, ed. *Quotidianum Estonicum*. Medium Aevum Quotidianum 5. Krems, 1996.

This volume is the “first” in many aspects: it is the first collection of articles on daily life – a subject that had only recently begun to be studied in Estonia; it contains the articles of very young scholars (except Prof. Kivimäe) and for several of them it was their first article in a foreign language, and it was the first joint project of a CEU professor (Gerhard Jaritz as the initiator of the volume) and an Estonian alumnus (Juhan Kreem).

Markus, Kersti. *Från Gotland till Estland: Kyrkokonst och politik under 1200-talet* [From Gotland to Estonia: Church Art and Politics in the Thirteenth century]. Kristianstad: Mercur Consulting OY, 1999.

This is a PhD thesis, defended at Stockholm University in 2000. Kersti was

the first art historian to study and defend her thesis abroad and publish it in a foreign language. Her thesis is highly original and interdisciplinary.

Kala, Tiina. *Euroopa kirjakultuur hiliskeskaegsetes õppetekstides: Tallinna dominiiklase David Sliperi taskuraamat* [Late Medieval Literary Culture and School Manuscripts: The Handbook of the Dominican Friar David Sliper from the Tallinn Friary]. Tallinn: Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, 2001.

Tiina's meticulous study, defended as a PhD thesis at Tartu University, is a model to everyone dealing with literary culture and medieval manuscripts.

Mägi, Marika. *At the Crossroads of Space and Time: Graves, Changing Society and Ideology on Saaremaa (Ösel), 9th–13th Centuries AD*. Tallinn: Ajaloo Instituut; Gotland: Center of Baltic Studies, 2002.

In her PhD thesis, Marika presents innovative material on the society and funerary customs of the ancient Estonians.

Põltsam, Inna. *Söömine-joomine keskaegses Tallinnas* [Eating and Drinking in Medieval Tallinn]. Tallinn: Argo, 2002.

This book, based on Inna's MA thesis, is written in a popular manner and targets a general audience. It has increased the public interest in the Middle Ages.

Kreem, Juhan. *The Town and Its Lord: Reval and the Teutonic Order (in the Fifteenth Century)*. Tallinn: Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, 2002.

Juhan's PhD thesis focuses on legal, military and economic aspects in the relations between the city of Tallinn and the Teutonic Order.

Selart, Anti. *Liivimaa ja Vene 13. sajandil: Uurimus poliitilisest ajaloost* [Livonia and Russia in the Thirteenth Century: A Study in Political History]. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2002. Revised version: *Livland und die Rus' im 13. Jahrhundert*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2007.

Anti's PhD thesis is an internationally recognized study on the political history of Livonia.

Mägi, Marika, ed. *Eesti aastal 1200* [Estonia in 1200]. Tallinn: Argo, 2003.

This volume presents new and challenging results on the society, mentality and material culture in pre-conquest Estonia.

Mänd, Anu. *Pidustused keskaegse Liivimaa linnades 1350–1550*. Tallinn: EKSA, 2004. A revised version: *Urban Carnival: Festive Culture in the Hanseatic Cities of the Eastern Baltic, 1350–1550*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2005.

This study, based on the PhD thesis defended at the CEU, analyses the festive culture in Livonian cities, focusing mainly on the annual festivals of guilds and confraternities.

Kala, Tiina, Juhan Kreem, and Anu Mänd. *Kümme keskaegset tallinlast* [Ten Inhabitants of Medieval Tallinn]. Tallinn: Varrak, 2006.

Each chapter of this book is devoted to the occupational and social career of a specific individual (merchant, goldsmith, city scribe, priest, mercenary, etc.) and opens the wider context of his profession.

Pirita klooster 600 [Pirita Birgittine nunnery 600]. *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi/ Studies on Art and Architecture* 4 (2007).

This collection of articles presents new information on the foundation and the founders of the Pirita convent, and its role in Estonian historical memory.

Tamm, Marek, ed. *Kuidas kirjutatakse ajalugu?* [How to write history]. Tallinn: Varrak, 2007.

This book includes Marek's interviews with twelve renowned scholars (Peter Burke, Jacques Le Goff, Jean-Claude Schmitt, and others) and discusses methodologies of history writing.

Põltsam-Jürjo, Inna. *Liivimaa väikelinn Uus-Pärnu 16. sajandi esimesel poolel* [A Livonian Small Town, New Pärnu in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century]. Tallinn: Argo, 2009.

The manuscript was defended as a PhD thesis at Tallinn University in 2008. Small towns (with a thousand or less inhabitants) have rarely been a focus of scholarly studies. Inna's book can be regarded as pioneering.

Ongoing and Future Projects

There are two main ways in which research is supported in Estonia: long-term collective projects (up to six years) financed by the Ministry of Education, and individual or collective projects (up to four years) financed by the Estonian Science Foundation. Several members of the CMS are currently involved in the long-term project “Christianization, Colonization and Cultural Exchange: The Historical Origins of the European Identity of Estonia (13th–17th Centuries),” scheduled to last from 2008 to 2013. The project addresses one of the “hot” issues in current Estonian scholarship – the Livonian crusades and the incorporation of this region into the Roman Catholic world. In recent decades, the study of the conquest and Christianization has witnessed a clear paradigmatic change leading to abandoning the earlier national-romantic viewpoint.⁸

The aim is to examine the processes of Christianization and colonization, including their reflections in visual culture, from new perspectives and in the wider Northern European context. The main focus is on two transition periods: the thirteenth-century crusades and the sixteenth-century Reformation. We will study the role and significance of Livonia as one of the European borderlands, the administrative, economic and cultural Europeanization of the region, the formation of new social elites, the interrelations of elite and popular culture, and so forth. We will also explore how the processes of Christianization, colonization, and cultural exchange developed in the confessionalization period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

One of the results of the project will be the *History of Estonia*, vol. 2 (The Middle Ages), edited by Anti Selart. It is quite a challenge to prepare this volume because we have to find the right balance between tradition (the book is a part of the six-volume series, of which volumes 4 and 6 have already been published, which imposes certain restrictions on us concerning the format and content) and innovation (our aim is not just to take into account the research results of the recent decades but also to conduct a conceptually new study).

⁸ In earlier scholarship, the period of 1208–1227 is known as the “ancient fight for freedom,” in which the Estonian tribes heroically fought against the bloodthirsty German crusaders. The loss in this war led to the “700 years of slavery” that ended in 1918 with the foundation of the Estonian Republic and the War of Independence in 1918–1920. These notions are deeply rooted in the Estonian historical memory. In 2005, a film “Malev” (in English “Men at Arms: Henry of Livonia Lied”) – a parody of the ancient fight for freedom – turned out to be a great success, but also caused controversial reactions.

In the future, the members of the CMS plan to carry out two other collective projects: to write a *History of Estonian Visual Culture* that will provide an alternative to art histories by conducting a multi-faceted analysis of the visual environment of the past, and a volume on *Sites of Memory* that will not study historical events, persons or phenomena themselves, but their reception (the use, abuse and misuse) in later centuries.

One of the general goals of these projects is to analyse the history and visual culture of medieval Estonia within the context of pan-European processes, and in doing so, to integrate local history writing into the international research. Working with similar concepts and using similar methodologies provides the best basis for interdisciplinary and comparative research.