

# Editor's Introduction: Comparative Studies on Medieval Europe

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This volume of *Medieval Worlds* focuses on comparative studies of Europe. Within this limited scope, the topics range from transcultural Iberia to Old Norse literature, and from early Irish identities to late medieval Byzantium. The main cluster of six papers continues a theme already addressed in Issue 3 under the heading »Tribes, Ethnicity and the Nation«. This time, the papers are derived from an Oxford project on »Ethnicity and the Nation«, which the two project leaders, Ilya Afanasyev and Nicholas Matheou, present in their introduction. Ethnicity and nationhood are not comfortable topics because they have often been used for identity politics, for chauvinist ideologies and worse. Therefore, many scholars prefer to regard ethnic groups and nations as rather irrelevant to their field of study as ideological constructions that had or have little basis in real life. However, rather than leaving ethnicity and the nation to those who misuse them, we should try to understand why they do become salient under certain circumstances. This requires historicizing ethnic and national identities, and looking at when they mattered and to whom. It also implies going beyond all the debates about words and their definitions. After all, it is secondary whether we call the early medieval Visigothic kingdom or high medieval England a ›nation‹ or not, or whether we use the label ›nationalism‹ for late medieval Scottish or Hussite rebels. Rather, we should aim at more precise and complex descriptions of the forms of collective agency, individual allegiance and symbolic representation in certain historical contexts, and of their changes over time. This is what the papers in this volume aim to achieve. We hope to continue this debate in one of the upcoming issues, and most importantly, extend it to a more global horizon.

Apart from the cluster, an important stand-alone paper by Lars Boje Mortensen looks at a key topic of literary history from a very broad comparative (and also rather controversial) angle: »The Sudden Success of Prose«. A companion paper has arrived too late and will hopefully make it into a later issue. The contribution by Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski responds to a critique on the first volume of their »Mosaics of Time« by Jesse Torgerson in *Medieval Worlds* 3. Behind the perhaps slightly arcane title »Could Isidore's Chronicle Have Delighted Cicero?«, there is the question »What is a chronicle?«, and ultimately, the fundamental issue of the temporal framing of historiography. We hope for more debates like this about problems relevant for the global Middle Ages. Both Mortensen and Burgess/Kulikowski address basic problems of how medieval texts could be framed, and how context and genre were related, in a very broad and long-term perspective. The horizon is European, but we hope for non-European approaches to similar issues in the near future. *Medieval Worlds* 5 is complemented by two project reports, one on a Digital Humanities project probing into ›patterns of power‹, and the other on the uses of the Bible in transcultural Iberian societies. We encourage submitting reports about projects relevant to issues of wide-ranging comparison, and addressing its methodological aspects. Issue 6, due out on December 1, 2017, will essentially be a thematic issue comparing »Religious Exemption in the Pre-Modern World.«-Submissions on other topics are always invited.