Society for Medieval Archaeology

Being Medieval 4-6th December 2015

Abstracts Book:

University of Central Lancashire
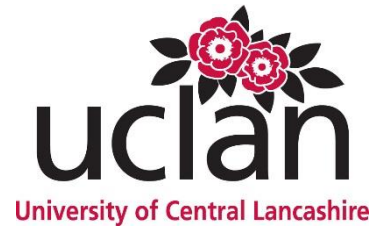
ANNUAL ADDRESS

Experiencing the 'other' Middle Ages:
Urbanization and state formation east of the Aral Sea

Heinrich Härke (Universität Tübingen, Germany)

Urbanization and state formation were probably some of the most profound social transformations affecting early medieval societies across Eurasia, from the British Isles to Inner Asia. While western debates have familiarized us with the notion that these are interlinked processes in sedentary societies engaged in agricultural intensification and long-distance trade, it is easy to overlook the fact that one of the 'other' models of medieval economics, steppe nomadism of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, experienced similar processes in quite different environmental and historical contexts.

The site of Dzhankent (Kyzylorda region, Kazakhstan) in the delta of the Syr-darya is identified by Arab geographers of the 10th century as the seat of the ruler of the Turkic Oguz. The results of archaeological and geophysical fieldwork since 2011 demonstrate that in its last phase (9th – 11th cent.) this was, indeed, a fully urban settlement. New dating evidence suggests that the enclosed town with its citadel was built as a single complex in the 9th century, but it seems to have been built on the site of an existing open settlement (7th-8th cent. or even earlier). The rise of a river delta settlement to the centre of a steppe empire may be explained by regional state formation resulting from the impact of Oguz nomads on a local sedentary population engaged in trade and contacts to the Khorezmian civilization further south.

Key Note Speakers,

Saturday:

Being a Medieval person: The lived experience as viewed from skeletons from archaeological sites

Charlotte Roberts (University of Durham)

Incorporating early and late phases, the early period was characterized mainly by rural living, while the succeeding later period incorporated the development of urban settlements. There is a plethora of excavated burials from the archaeological record, cemeteries that are increasingly revealing the lived experiences of these populations. At various times cremation and Inhumation were the normative burial practices, and in the late medieval period cemeteries were usually associated with parish churches, but are also found with monasteries, hospitals, and less commonly catastrophic contexts (e.g. mass graves). I would argue that integrating the archaeological evidence about the living environment (context) with the remains and funerary contexts of those who lived and died during these periods is focal to understanding Medieval period dynamics as a whole. This paper will provide a thematic approach to exploring how these medieval environments impacted health and well being. It will incorporate previous and ongoing research from a range of authors, with a view provided on the recent advances in analytical methods applied to human remains from both phases of this period. Over the last 25 years the UK has seen a considerable advance in analysis and interpretation of archaeological human remains. This has been due to available structured training from 1990 (MSc and PhD), a national organization from 1998 (BABAO), and many more people working in this field (bioarchaeology) in the commercial archaeology and university sectors. It is a time to celebrate bioarchaeology's contribution to understanding the medieval period at this conference.

Sunday:

Dwelling in and on the early medieval landscape: perceptions and engagements with place and space.

Sarah Semple (University of Durham)

This paper explores how early medieval populations perceived, understood and used the early medieval landscape. The fabric of the natural world and the remnants of past prehistoric and Roman activity were structuring agents for early medieval praxis, in daily life, funerary ritual, seasonal activities, or political and elite ceremony. Regional and temporal variations are evident, along with hints that an emerging elite were seeking to legitimise their power through associations with surviving monuments and ruins. Early medieval communities were themselves monument builders and used earthworks and later standing stone monuments to re-inscribe importance and signal new systems and networks of authority. These ideas are discussed with reference to a large corpus of evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, as well as other parts of early medieval Europe. It is argued that to fully understand 'Being Medieval' we need to harness and integrate a full range of source material to describe the shifting dialectic between people and the landscapes in which they lived.

Research Papers:

Apocalypse Then? Surviving the Baltic Crusades

Aleks Pluskowski (University of Reading)

Throughout the 13th century, crusading armies unleashed a relentless holy war against indigenous pagan tribal societies in the eastern Baltic region. Conquered tribal territories were reorganised into new polities governed by a militarised, Christian theocracy, dominated by the Teutonic Order. The impact on the indigenous population varied from region to region, defined by exclusion, inclusion and transformation; from virtual depopulation through to co-existence and assimilation. This paper considers the archaeology of cultural destruction and resilience in the medieval eastern Baltic as a result of the crusades, contrasting variability at the local scale with supra-regional paradigms of Christianisation, commercialisation and corporate lordship.

More than "a fine stone fort": what do we know about Norse castles in Scotland?

William Wyeth (University of Stirling & RCAHMS)

We know castles to have been a definitive element of medieval life. We also know of at least one, Cubbie Roo's, built by the Norse in Scotland. But what evidence is there for further Norse castles? If there were more, what did these castles mean to the societies in which they appeared in the mid-12th-13th centuries? This paper argues for a closer examination of Norse castle sites in Caithness, Sutherland, the Northern and Western Isles, placing them in the context of contemporary social and political trends in the North Atlantic world.

Pontefract and Hereford Castle, Conquest, Continuation, or Convenience: Castles Built on Cemetery Sites

Therron Welstead (University of Wales, Trinity St David)

This interdisciplinary paper will be looking at Norman castles built on, or around, pre-existing cemeteries. In the past it has been argued that this phenomenon was a Norman statement of power; the construction of a castle restricting access, if not destroying, an Anglo-Saxon culturally sensitive space. There are several other factors which will be explored, such as deliberate attempts to include a working cemetery within certain castles.
The findings of this research will be fed into current research of the transition from Anglo-Saxons to Anglo-Norman society.
From the 30+ examples, two key case studies will be examined; Pontefract (W. Yorks) and Hereford (Hereford).

Being Medieval in the Cathedral: Death, Memory and Materiality

Howard Williams (University of Chester)

For mortuary archaeology, distinctions between early medieval, later medieval and post-medieval continue to define our parameters and perspectives. This paper demonstrates one way we might overcome these conventional divisions. Drawing together theoretical perspectives from medieval and post-medieval mortuary archaeology, the study of the history of antiquarian and archaeological investigations of the medieval dead and the biographies of medieval monuments, this paper presents the results of research conducted for the Leverhulme Trust funded project *Speaking with the Dead* (forming part of the ERC-funded *Past in its Place* project). My focus is to explore long-term literary and archaeological definitions, uses inventions and reinventions of the medieval dead through the materialisation of 'being medieval' in death from the Middle Ages themselves to the present day. In particular through the curation, discovery and display of the medieval dead — including both bones and stones — and their citation through new monuments, being the medieval dead was a movable feast of competing and conflicting mnemonic strategies. Focusing on case studies from English and Welsh cathedrals, I aim to show the contrasting and divergent uses of medieval tombs and memorials within cathedral topographies of memory in which antiquarian and archaeological work has been key to the creation and recreation of the medieval dead.

Memorial support of the grave and social status in Saint Jean de Todon cemetery (Laudun-l'Ardoise, Gard, France)

Yann Ardagna (UMR7268), **Laurent Vidal** (Inrap, UMR7268), **Delphine Blanchard** (VIA), **Marcelle Boyer** (VIA), **Marilou Couval** (VIA), **Yves Manniez** (Inrap), **Jacky Pantel** (VIA), **Hervé Petitot** (Inrap), **Maxime Seguin** (Inrap).

A recent, archaeological survey at Saint Jean de Todon (well preserved rural Clunician priory In Laudun Gard France) explored thoroughly a medieval cemetery (187 coffered graves), together with its chapel. Radiocarbon dating revealed the main period of burial activity to be the second half of the 9th century to mid 12th century. Unlike most of the recently excavated medieval cemeteries in France, Saint Jean de Todon distinguishes itself by its remarkably well preserved funerary lay out defining the graves on the cemetery ground. The funerary architecture and the cist ornamentation (steles, stone beds, and lime or mortar layers), indicate that the buried individuals were probably ranked amongst the higher echelons of society. Because of the exceptional workmanship, assuring permanent visibility of the grave and remembrance of the defunct(s), they underline the importance a social status rather than paleobiological features, funerary objects or funerary topography? Are these problematics only the monumental translation of willpower of a privileged elite to immortalize their sepulchral memory to attain salvation by insuring itself with a highly visible support for a remembrance through a monastic prayer?

Are Christian Medieval Cemeteries A Good Source For Social Studies? The Case Of Poland.

Adriana Ciesielska, (Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Poland)

There are hardly any written sources on Christianisation in Poland during the early medieval times (9th – 12th century AD). Archaeological research in Poland, from its beginning in the 19th century, was concerned with the question of whether the interpretation of cemeteries is helpful in the study of social structure. There were no doubts that it was helpful in the studies of the Christianization process. In my paper I would like to focus on the question of how the archaeological sources of the early Piast's reign (the row graves – in German the Reihengraeberfelder) were discussed, interpreted and reinterpreted in terms of society and Christianization. In the 20th century the discussion was enriched by the contextual interpretation of the Western funeral archaeology. A kind of mixture of those trends was created in Polish studies. In my paper I would like to answer several questions. Firstly how the historical – cultural research was enriched by western trends? Do the early Christian graves provide information about the world of the living at all? How is ideology and social structure manifested within them? What can we do with some Christian symbols (brooches, belt buckles or crosses)? Are we able to choose and use ethnographical, sociological and historical analogy in our studies? How was the early Christian Polish society organized?

"Our lady of the Sea" Twelve century of persistence and changes around a chapel

Nathalie Gonzalez and Catherine Rigeade (UCL/Archelogy South East)

Excavation surrounding the chapel 'Our Lady of the Sea' (Fos-sur-Mer, Bouches-du-Rhônes, France) conducted in 2012 revealed a cemetery in use for over 12 centuries. The uncovering of earlier built remains shows that its location was long considered a 'sacred' place for inhumation. The cemetery's use has allowed us to trace transformation and persistence in burial customs from the early Christian period to the modern era. The large skeletal assemblage recovered has permitted the study of questions surrounding health, disease and care for disadvantaged or disabled individuals

A time honoured tradition? The effect of social and political change on funerary rites in early Anglo-Saxon England

Kirsty Squires (Staffordshire University)

The factors contributing to the shift from cremation to inhumation in early Anglo-Saxon England have been explored extensively in the past. It is widely acknowledged that changes to funerary practices were closely linked to the transition to a more stratified society. However, an exploration of burials from both cremation and inhumation dominant cemeteries possess many similarities in terms of grave provisions and the interment of individuals in communal cemeteries. This paper will explore how social and political changes affected the daily lives and mortuary practices of communities inhabiting early Anglo-Saxon England, with an emphasis on the persistence of funerary traditions throughout this period.

Human Dentition and biological distance at early medieval Oakington.

Allison Card (University of Central Lancashire)

This paper will discuss the potential to use human dentition to estimate the biological distance between individuals within early medieval skeletal assemblages. Preliminary results analysing metric and nonmetric data collected from 52 individuals from the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Oakington will be presented and used to add to discussions on kinship, familial units and burial practices from this time period. Much of what is known about Anglo-Saxon burial customs is derived from historic records and contextual information; the addition of biological data obtained from dentition will provide further evidence to solidify or rethink ideas surrounding these concepts.

Spatial Organisation, Material Culture and Identity in Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries

Duncan Sayer (University of Central Lancashire)

This paper will explore how material culture and space combine to influence the experience of mortuary space in the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery. It will describe the creation and evolution of group and individual identities from the fifth to seventh century and will explore the cemetery as a changing platform for expression rather than the product of static cultural representation. This paper will argue that the massive variation seen in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries is the result of a deeply localised practice and in each site and at each grave site the actors who make decisions are doing so form personal references and experiences making each burial and each cemetery unique.

The family households of medieval Skagafjörður, North-Iceland

Guðný Zoëga (Skagafjordur Heritage Museum, North Iceland)

In 11th century Iceland, the single farm household was the core social unit, a self-sufficient entity dependent on its own productivity and extended kinship ties for survival. When Christianity was adopted around AD1000 many of these households constructed their own private farmstead cemeteries which, for about a 100 years, were the final resting places for individuals of the household. In Skagafjörður North-Iceland two such cemeteries, Keldudalur and Stóra-Seyla have been fully excavated. Both sites offer unique glimpses of the demographic composition and social actions of two neighbouring medieval households. Bioarchaeological analysis will be put in context with the wider perspective of medieval laws and relevant saga material.

'Territory, governance and collective property rights: the case study of early medieval fenland landscapes'?

Susan Oosthuizen, (University of Cambridge)

The paper explores the origins of the social and political identity of early medieval peasant cultivators through their common property rights in non-arable resources, taking the fenland landscape as a case study. It is based on the proposition that all aspects of a stable, sustainable, agricultural economy depend on property rights over land, arable and non-arable, and thus anchor abstractions about social relations into the everyday realities of making a living. The paper concludes that in some places at least the intertwined aspects of identity, kinship and polity expressed through structures for the collective governance of both resources and territories may have evolved from traditional rights of access to common resources.

Medieval Consumers? Commercialisation and the Social Self in 13th-15th century southern England.

Ben Jervis (Cardiff University)

What is the relationship between the commercialisation of medieval society and the expression of the self? We might expect a growth in 'consumer choice', of the self being expressed in new ways through the acquisition and use of material culture. Here I argue that the relationship is more complex, addressing the question through the application of the concept of the social self, a self formed of social relations (after Shaw 2005). Rather than seeking a medieval 'consumer revolution' the paper argues for a more subtle approach through which we can trace interwoven trajectories of individuality and consumerism.

References

Shaw, D. 2005, *Necessary Conjunctions. The social self in Medieval England*, Palgrave MacMillan.

Known Unknowns: Insights into zooarchaeological bias in the differential supply of rural and urban elite residences

Holmes, Matilda (Consultant Archaeozoologist/UCL)

A recent review of zooarchaeological data from England has revealed considerable differences in the relative proportions of various taxa recorded at urban and rural elite sites. This is particularly notable in the increased recovery of bones from pigs, game and birds at rural sites compared to their contemporary urban counterparts. The knowledge of this bias (the 'knowns') will be considered for the possible reasons contributing to apparent differences in consumption and/ or supply at urban sites (the 'unknowns').

This presentation considers some of the many factors that may influence the procurement and discard of animal products within urban and rural environments. Issues such as availability of resources, redistribution of food, and rubbish disposal will be addressed using zooarchaeological and documentary sources. This will then be put into context in terms of how it may reflect attitudes towards animals within urban and rural society, links between the two and practical implications for future zooarchaeological interpretations.

Food consumption in the multi-faiths society of medieval Portugal: an isotopic case study from beja.

Alice Toso, **Michelle Alexander** (University of York)

Diet had an important cultural and symbolic meaning in medieval societies. In particular, the preparation and consumption or avoidance of certain foods played a part in the construction of identities by social status, age, sex and faith. This is especially intriguing for the multi-faith societies of Medieval Iberia were Christians, Muslims and Jews co-existed during the Medieval period. This research uses carbon (δ13C) and nitrogen (δ15N) stable isotope analysis to investigate the diets of Islamic and Christian communities from the site of Beja (9th-12thC AD) in Portugal. This cemetery is notable for the presence of both faiths in the same burial location and offers a rare opportunity to explore dynamics in contemporaneous Islamic and Christian diet in communities under Islamic political control. This is the first application of stable isotope analysis to study the diet of medieval multi-faith populations from Portugal.

Probi homines: understanding the material world of English medieval merchants

Chris King (University of Nottingham)

The largest English medieval towns and cities were dominated by wealthy merchants who typically controlled the upper ranks of civic government; whether or not they should be considered a distinct class in medieval society, they formed a highly integrated economic and political elite. This paper will seek to explore aspects of the distinctive social identity of the medieval merchant as defined and expressed though space, buildings and material culture. The organisation of mercantile domestic spaces and the expression of wealth and status through portable material culture was extended into the wider urban landscape through practices of civic and religious patronage and display, through which means medieval merchant families sought to constitute themselves as rulers of urban society in the earthly city below as well as the heavenly city above.

Being Medieval: Being 'Together' in medieval society

Kate Giles (University of York)

This paper will explore the concept of 'togetherness' (after Sennett 2012) was a fundamental part of 'being medieval', especially through membership of a religious fraternity or craft mystery. The paper will explore the material legacies of these organisations, in their creation of some of the first 'public' buildings, corporate material cultures, and how these were deployed in everyday rituals and elaborate ceremonies designed to bind individuals and communities together in a rapidly-changing social, economic and political world. The paper will argue that although such activities reinforced concepts of community and togetherness, they were also exclusive and exclusionary, designed to differentiate those adhering to normative forms of civil behaviour from those on the margins of medieval society.

How did the people of early medieval Ireland live together?

Prof Aidan O'Sullivan (University College Dublin)

The archaeological and historical sources for early medieval Ireland are amongst the richest in Europe, giving us an almost unparalleled sense of how households, communities and landscapes were organised. One can read today a passage from a 7th century law tract like Crith Gablach and feel that one is actually looking over the shoulder of a lawyer who is sitting in a house, describing it, and the things that are lying around its floor. This presence and occasional concordance of text and material culture can sometimes give a sense of familiarity, that we are simply listening in to conversations of people who were not markedly different to ourselves, or at least to the rural Ireland of our grandparents who lived and worked on farms. But the past is a different country, and the people of early medieval Ireland did things differently... This paper, largely based on the work of the Early Medieval Archaeology Project (EMAP) will explore questions of household, community, kinship, gender and status and will investigate how early medieval people's identities were performed and negotiated through buildings, dwelling spaces and objects, and how we can occasionally listen in, and how sometimes we cannot understand.

Modelling Marriage Ages and Fertility in the Medieval Period

Andreas Duering (Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford)

Our understanding of demographic change in the medieval period strongly depends on information about social and biological parameters which influence female fertility. In the absence of direct data, modelling approaches utilizing skeletal and historical mortality can be used to assess different marriage patterns. Demographic software is used to show that the ages at which women marry and the ages at which they have their first child have a very strong effect on the probability of survival of small agricultural populations. Contrary to current interpretations, I demonstrate that the majority of women in the (early) medieval period married before age 20.

A magical solution to a materials problem: Smiths, spears, and ironworking in Anglo-Saxon England

Andrew Welton (University of Florida)

Most studies of early medieval ironworking discuss iron's technological properties separately from its social and ritual significance. This paper argues that iron's physical and social properties may instead be understood as related products which emerge from blacksmiths' material practices in the forge. Reinterpreting data from metallographic analyses of iron spearheads, this paper argues that the choices smiths made while shaping iron expressed and transformed social attitudes toward iron's material properties, while simultaneously transforming those properties into something new. These transformations were not always controlled, and smiths' strategies for coping with uncertainty suggest they understood iron to be a living material with personality.

Old lead, new numbers: medieval 'shell-shaped' ampullae re-interpreted using PAS examples

Greg Campbell (Independent Researcher)

Many medieval lead-alloy ampullae are said to be 'shell-shaped'. Features on the obverse of the numerous examples documented by England's Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) were analysed. The two recognised types are broadly valid, but only the minority type is shell-shaped: the majority are representations of drawstring pouches, probably containing small glass vessels. The principal image of pilgrimage and guarantee of thaumaturgic power was not the scallop-shell but the emboursed vessel. The implications for interpretation and further research are explored.