

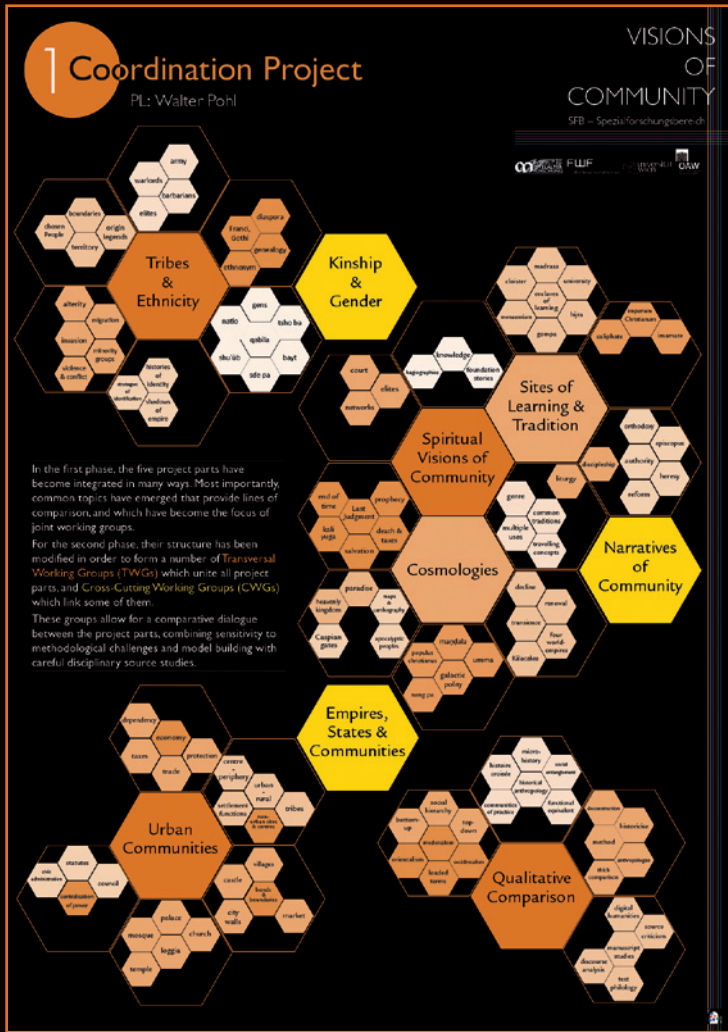
# COMPANION

## VISIONS of COMMUNITY

Comparative Approaches to  
Ethnicity, Region and Empire  
in Christianity, Islam and  
Buddhism (400-1600 CE)

VISCOM SFB F42-G18  
Special Research Programme  
Austrian Science Fund (FWF)





## 2 Christian Discourse and Political Identities in Early Medieval Europe

PL: Walter Pohl

VISIONS OF COMMUNITY  
SFB – Spezialforschungsbereich

### Empires, Communities & Political Culture

**HOW** do empires achieve a sense of political loyalty across the diverse local political and religious communities in their realm?  
**WHERE** does religious discourse reinforce the quest for political unity?  
**WHERE** does it function to challenge and criticize the imperial project?

The Carolingian empire developed models of religious authority and political culture which drew on Roman and Christian traditions, but also had a long-lasting impact on later European societies. Their study forms the core of this cluster.

Comparative studies from medieval Europe and Islam suggest we are still in the process of political integration in Europe.

- The religious dynamics underpinning imperial projects
- The processes of political integration in Eurasia
- The emergence of new political communities in the shadow of empire

### General overview

In the course of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, a complex political landscape emerged in Europe, shaped by Christian, ethnic, imperial, civic and territorial identifications. New communities replaced the Roman order. Kings ruled in the name of God and their ethnic group. P02 studies the deep impact of Christianity on the formation of political communities and ethnic identities. The comparison with Islamic and Buddhist societies helps to ask new questions, and to put the history of the Latin West in a Eurasian perspective.

### Scripts for Community

The Bible as a Model

chosen people  
 KING DAVID TOWER OF BABEL  
 revelation calling of the nations  
 heavenly kingdom  
 of the Just nation and nation TRUE ISRAEL

**WHAT** was the impact of the Bible on the formation and legitimization of the new political communities in the post-Roman West?

P02 approaches this question by studying biblical commentaries, sermons, letters and their social and political function in early medieval societies.

Case studies include:

- Cassiodorus' *Commentary on Psalm 134* interpreting biblical verses into a Christian political text
- Peter the Deacon's *Life of the Emperor Constantine* in the *Collectio Canonum of the Late Roman Empire*
- The metaphors of the "chosen people" in Christian sermons of 8<sup>th</sup> century
- Use of exaltation in ascetic autobiographies
- Use of the Old Testament in early medieval historiography

### Ethnicity and Political Identities

The focus of P02 is on the emergence of ethnicity as a conceptual grid for understanding a political landscape defined by Christian peoples and kingdoms.

**WHY** did ethnicity become important for the definition of political communities in the early medieval West?

After the end of the Roman Empire, we seek to understand the emergence of new political communities and their political and social structures. We study how Christian discourses, the Bible, and other sources by the church and learned their political and social functions.

### Texts of Identity and Narratives of Community

To understand the role of texts in the social communication about identity and community, this collaborative project links case studies from ancient and medieval Europe and Asia.

**DID** historiography have any impact on ethnic, political or religious identities?  
**HOW** do historiographical texts 'construct' identity or 'imagine' community?

It follows several shared research hypotheses:

- Historiography texts after a long time interval are not only a single identity, but rather a complex of multiple and overlapping identities
- The texts are not only a reflection of identity, but also a means to construct and maintain it
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## 3 South Arabia between Late Antiquity and Early Modernity

PL: Andre Gingrich

VISIONS OF COMMUNITY  
SFB – Spezialforschungsbereich

### WHAT? Social & Ideological Transformations

### WHERE? Historical Yemen's Highland and Coastal Areas

### WHEN? Late pre-Islamic to late pre-Ottoman period (c. 400-1600)

### Tribe and State

An ever-fluctuating struggle for authority

The *galactic polity model* examines the states' multiple spheres of political influence on people, rather than focusing on the coercive control of territory.

Examples of case studies:

- Negotiations of power in and around the city of *Sa'da* among the tribes and representatives of the *Zaydi Imamate* from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards.
- The mid-fourteenth century departure of the late medieval Rasulid state from the central highlands due to their inability to establish firm administrative, ideological, economic, and ultimately military influence over its local population.

### Socio-Cultural Diversity

Revealing the complexity of South Arabian society

Studying communities and individuals less visible in textual sources provides new perspectives on hierarchy and social organization in medieval South Arabia.

Examples of case studies:

- The use of *ethnonyms* in key historiographical works in comparison with medieval Western European sources.
- Insights on women's lives and gender roles.
- The social positions of slaves of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

### Spiritual Communities

The Islamisation of South Arabia

Various actors and movements used Islam in constructing authority and new visions of community.

Examples of case studies:

- The administrative functioning of *Al-Bayt*, centres of religious learning built by the *Zaydis*, and their comparability to European monasteries and Tibetan gompas.
- The development of competing *Zaydi* sects, including the formation of the autochthonous community of the *Al-Bayt*.
- The role of newly introduced Islamic institutions, such as *masjids* (religious endowments), on urban communities.

### Historical Anthropology

Methodological and theoretical approaches

**Contexts:** Ethnographic knowledge is used to produce new research questions and contextualize our medieval sources.

**Sources:** Texts ranging from court chronicles and administrative documents to biographies and travellers' accounts, as well as material remains such as architecture and pottery.

**Analysis:** Anthropological theories and concepts are employed to elaborate findings.

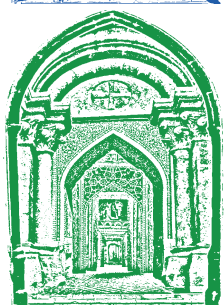
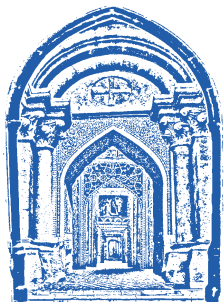
# VISIONS of COMMUNITY

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## COMPANION

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## PREFACE

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The large interdisciplinary project 'Visions of Community' (VISCOM) was funded by the FWF, the Austrian Science Fund, from 2011 to 2019, as an SFB (Spezialforschungsbereich / Special Research Programme). This is a format that allows consortia of scholars affiliated to Austrian academic institutions to embark on an extended period of collaborative and interdisciplinary research. The generous grant, which we were awarded in 2010 in a highly competitive process, has also provided funding for a number of junior team members. The project was conducted at two institutions, the University of Vienna (with its Department of History, and its institutes for Austrian Historical Research and for East European History), and at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (and its institutes for Medieval Research, for Social Anthropology and for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia). We are very grateful to all these institutions for their support. The project was able to build on the strengths and the international reputation of the research teams in these fields, which allowed us to develop an intense interdisciplinary cooperation.

VISCOM was a pioneering project in the emerging field of the 'Global Middle Ages', addressing similarities and differences between the social impact of the three major Eurasian religions in the period between c. 400 and c. 1600. How did these universal religions shape the emergence of particular communities in history? VISCOM proposed a comparative approach for addressing and answering this fundamental research question. Christian, Islamic and Buddhist examples were examined to explore the complex relationship between religious and socio-political 'visions of community' in medieval periods across the Eurasian Middle Ages. All three religions could be used to legitimize imperial rule, but they also supported other – regional, urban, local or ethnic – forms of community. This scholarly and intellectual 'adventure in comparison' not only yielded many specific results from the case studies pursued in the project and from their meticulous comparison along several lines of inquiry; it also helped to shape new methods and approaches. The present 'companion' to the project offers a brief introduction to our work in VISCOM.



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SCIENCES

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## I. THE VISCOM EXPERIENCE

### 1. VISIONS OF COMMUNITY

In the first millennium CE, the ‘universal’ religions – Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – spread far and wide. In many parts of Eurasia, they marginalised the cults and creeds of particular peoples and communities. How did that affect the social coherence of such communities? There was a tension between the professed aim of all three religions to construct an overarching spiritual community that transcended existing social groupings and the impossibility of replacing them. In more or less paradoxical ways, all three creeds could be used to legitimise states and empires, and to shape and transform a variety of other communities and groups: regional and local polities, tribes and ethnic groups, urban or rural populations, but also monastic or dissenting communities. In the process, they also changed and adapted themselves to their social environment. Visions of Community has addressed ways in which complex pre-modern societies conceptualised and constructed their overall unity and the role of all the smaller groupings within them.

### VISCOM STRUCTURE

#### Early Medieval Europe

Christian Discourse and Political Identities in Early Medieval Europe

#### South Arabia

South Arabia between Late Antiquity and Early Modernity: International Connections and the Entanglement of Histories

#### Late Medieval Central Europe

Social and Cultural Communities across Medieval Monastic, Urban, and Courtly Cultures in High and Late Medieval Central Europe

#### Late Medieval Dalmatia

Society, Statehood and Religion at the Fringe of the Late Medieval Balkans: Case Studies from Dalmatia

#### The Tibetan Empire

The Tibetan Empire and the Formation of Buddhist Civilisation in the Highlands

VISCOM has applied this question to a number of spatially and chronologically quite distinct cases in medieval Eurasia: early medieval Europe; medieval South Arabia; high to late medieval Central Europe; late medieval Dalmatia and imperial and early Buddhist Tibet. It has selected its exemplary case studies in order to cover a fairly wide spectrum of social formations and types of sources: among others, it has dealt with Christian constructions of community in early medieval exegetical and eschatological texts; with forms of identification in tribal and Islamic communities in South Arabia; with spiritual texts written in post-imperial Tibetan monasteries; with the production and uses of an inclusive collection of saints’ lives in high and late medieval Austria; or with conflicts and their legal documentation in a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Dalmatian city. None of these case studies, however, were simply conducted for their own sake; all of them were linked with more or less comparable cases in other project parts and, more importantly, with the overarching central research question.

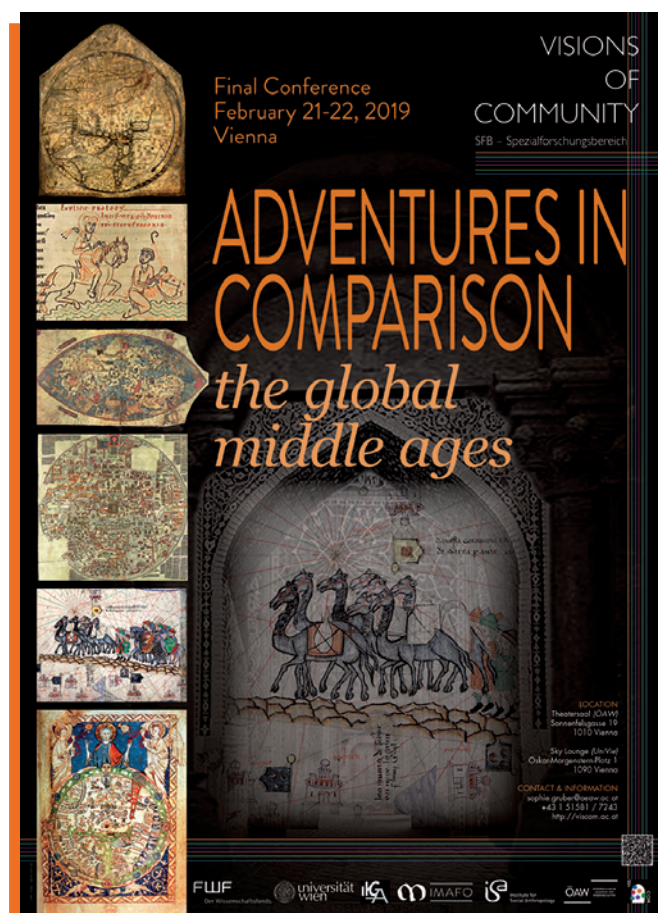
To study these issues, VISCOM has combined approaches that have usually been employed separately: the project has looked at ‘visions’ and concepts of community, and at the shaping of communities on the ground; it has studied religious frames of reference in connection with social and political practices; it has compared a diversity of selected European and Asian case

studies in order to find out which level of qualitative comparison may be appropriate in which case; and it has combined source-based analyses with theoretical and methodological efforts to enable a broader applicability of the project results.

As Global History emerged as an important field of study in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Medieval Studies generally remained more limited to their European horizons. Theories of ‘axial ages’ mostly concerned ancient Eurasia, and models of the rise of modernity were discussed by modern historians. There was, of course, some awareness of instances of medieval connectivity on a Eurasian level, for instance, along the Silk Road, especially in the Mongol Empire. Interest in comparison between medieval societies on a global level grew slowly in the 2000s. Comparative studies in this field were often conducted by single scholars who had acquired some knowledge in a field beyond their expertise; or they were the outcome of conferences and loose scholarly networks – which could provide inspiring encounters, but did not always lead to in-depth exchange and mutual understanding. Initially, comparative efforts also tended to be driven by wholesale and binary confrontations pitting such entities as ‘Christendom’ and ‘the Islamic World’ against each other. Not least due to the inadequacy of such static general models, scepticism against the enterprise of comparative history, which supposedly reified its areas of comparison, gained ground. Yet the consequence could hardly be to abandon the emerging field of global comparative studies. Rather, new ways had to be found in order to gradually overcome the problems and pitfalls of ambitious global lines of research.

In 2008, some members of the later VISCOM team organised an exploratory conference called “Visions of Community”. Its success led to a project application for an SFB, Spezialforschungsbereich, submitted to the FWF in 2010. VISCOM was among the pioneers in the emerging interest in global and non-Eurocentric perspectives on the Middle Ages. It has contributed to its growth alongside some other major projects, funded by the German ‘Excellence Initiative’, the ERC or the British Academy. These ‘Adventures in Comparison’ are addressed at the VISCOM final conference in 2019 and in a series of VISCOM-sponsored sessions at major congresses. What were our experiences, and what can we learn from them? The open-access journal ‘Medieval Worlds’, a VISCOM spin-off, has created a forum for global and comparative Medieval Studies. This field has now moved to the centre of attention: the 2019 meeting of the Medieval Academy of America is devoted to ‘The Global Turn in Medieval Studies’, as it has now come to be called.

## 2. EXPLORING THE ‘GLOBAL MIDDLE AGES’



Comparative & interdisciplinary studies

[www.medievalworlds.net](http://www.medievalworlds.net)

### 3. ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL DEBATES

As historians of medieval Europe trained in Europe and the USA adopt a global view, they have to face several problems regarding paradigms and methodology. World history had long taken Europe as a benchmark for progress, and sought to explain its unique development and the 'backwardness' of all other 'civilisations'. Even when outright colonial attitudes had been overcome, Europe was taken for granted as a vantage-point for global history. This corresponded to an academic world in which European and US universities still took the lead. The very tools of the historical disciplines and of social anthropology had been developed in these universities. To what extent does that shape our perception of 'other' world regions? All of this has been debated in the wake of the recent 'global turn'. It is obvious that global medieval studies cannot be pursued without a keen awareness of its problematic context. We should, however, not demote the standards of the historical and anthropological disciplines by classing it as just one of the possible histories that can be told, and thus open the door to 'alternative truths'. If we work on global topics in Europe, we cannot simply step out of our European research tradition; but we need to reflect on its potential and limitations, and monitor how our research progresses. This is what VISCOM has sought to do.

This requires reflecting on the methodology of global comparison. Comparing, for instance, 'Europe' and 'the Islamic World' tends to fix them in their essential otherness, and has often yielded generalised statements about what Islamic society 'lacked': separation of Church and State, organically-developed nations, parliaments, city communes, universities and other features of 'progress'. Such judgements ignore the fact that both 'civilisations' are not homogeneous and much more differentiated than it seems at first glance. Assessing such features by the benchmark of European modernity does not do justice to the Middle Ages. Medieval developments in the East and West did not inescapably lead to the 'great divergence' on the road to modernity. We have to study similarities and differences in all their complexity. VISCOM has not taken 'Europe' and 'the Islamic World' as units of comparison, but concentrated on smaller macro-regions. We have addressed some of the key topics of the divergence debate – states and religious institutions, urban communities, ethnicity and 'nations' – on the basis of specific historical contexts and not as trans-historical phenomena. And we have opened up comparison by not limiting ourselves to the delicate comparison between 'Christendom' and 'Islam', but have also included Buddhist case studies. In a carefully balanced structure of regional case studies, the goal was to develop mid-range comparison in a dynamic framework, not macro-level comparison reifying such entities as 'Europe' and 'Asia', or 'Christendom' and 'Islam'.

### 4. FINDING A SHARED LANGUAGE FOR THE PAST

Many of the terms used for the scholarly analysis of communities have become controversial, and their uses differ within and between the disciplines. Identity, ethnicity, community, religion, culture, state, tribe and other words have been criticised for being opaque, for projecting modern concepts into a distant past and for imposing particular European models on other parts of the world. Without abandoning these



terms, we have critically reflected upon their problems and limitations. For example, the study of various dimensions of identity/identities covers a wide range of disciplines and topics, and is as rich in heuristic potential as it is in methodological pitfalls. Seen as a dynamic category, 'identity' can provide a useful interface between personhood and society. It can also help to locate ethnicity and religious orientation within a broader matrix of gender, status, culture and other social modes of identification. To avoid modern projections into the past, it is useful to historicise (or 'anthropologise') our concepts: how are they related to the terms used in the sources? How did contemporaries employ and understand them? And how did they differ in space and time? For instance, it is remarkable that in Latin, 'gens' covers a wider range of identities regarded as conferred by birth – ethnic groups, tribes, even clans or noble families. In Arabic, on the other hand, there is a wide range of overlapping terms for ethnic and tribal communities. Our modern terms can be used as translational concepts that allow the accommodation of past knowledge of social groups into modern abstractions, a hermeneutic process that we should keep transparent.

The concept of the 'Middle Ages' raises the problem of periodisation. Its use has been criticised by some Western medievalists, and whether it is adequate to other macro-regions is even more controversial. Modernisation (and globalisation) is still the central master narrative in the humanities and social sciences; much research on the origins of the modern world juxtaposes 'modernity' with a vague notion of 'pre-modern' or 'medieval' societies. Yet those societies were much more complex than such reductive and almost teleological models imply. They have to be studied in their own right in order to contribute to a more general understanding of social and cultural dynamics. In this approach, using 'Middle Ages'/'medieval' pragmatically but cautiously does not imply teleological concepts of modernisation. Openness in handling the chronology of period changes in different contexts makes the term flexible enough for the regions addressed in VISCOM.

The aim of VISCOM was to assess Christianity, Islam and Buddhism as three major 'universal' religions by their impact on community building through a carefully selected number of exemplary in-depth historical studies in the following fields:

## 5. RESEARCH STRATEGIES

1. The Post-Roman West (*with its Mediterranean and Eastern European contact zones*)
2. South Arabia (*with its main interaction zones in Western Asia*)
3. High and Late Medieval Central Europe (*specifically Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary*)
4. The Late Medieval Balkans (*with a focus on Dalmatia*)
5. The Tibetan Empire (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> c.) (*within its wider Asian contexts*)

On the first level, we studied specific sets of themes and problems in these focal fields on the basis of disciplinary methodologies. We addressed big questions through a rigorous analysis of textual, and in some cases material evidence. Instead of examining a random collection

of pertinent passages in well-known texts to arrive at an easy synthesis, VISCOM focused on exemplary studies that offered an in-depth analysis of important sources, contextualising them in their social, cultural and intertextual worlds. To be interdisciplinary and comparative, first we have to be disciplinary and precise in order to grasp the various shades of meaning of the different types of source material.

On a second level, existing models for community building and their relevance for identity formation in these societies were critically reviewed. This is where trans- and cross-cultural comparison became essential. So far, comparative studies have mostly operated on a rather general level, often relying on handbook knowledge to assess state-building processes or the forms of religious integration in different societies. VISCOM's interdisciplinary approach made a more complex and more differentiated interpretation possible.

On a third level, VISCOM has pursued systematic attempts to sharpen theoretical tools of comparison. The project was experimental in combining disciplinary source studies with interdisciplinary reflections on methodology, in order to adapt the comparative models to the complexity of historical evidence. The comparative approach has allowed us to sharpen the tools of source criticism and to reflect on the big differences between the types of texts that were written and transmitted in the different cultural/religious spheres. Theories of comparison were discussed, and methodological procedures critically reflected upon. This also allowed us to monitor the way in which our own research evolved.

## 6. THE VISCOM APPROACH

- Case studies are conducted by specialists on the basis of sources in original languages.
- We try to make transparent how conclusions are reached in disciplinary research, which provides a sound basis for comparison.
- We constitute specific comparanda, and do not postulate Christendom, Islam and Buddhism as units of comparison.
- We select what should be compared in an interdisciplinary dialogue on the basis of preliminary results from the disciplinary studies within the VISCOM thematic frame.
- We historicise modern scholarly concepts by taking contemporary perceptions and the terms used in the sources into account.
- Comparative research takes time and is an open-ended process.
- VISCOM was designed to provide opportunities for reflecting on this process and its methodological implications, as an integral part of research activities.

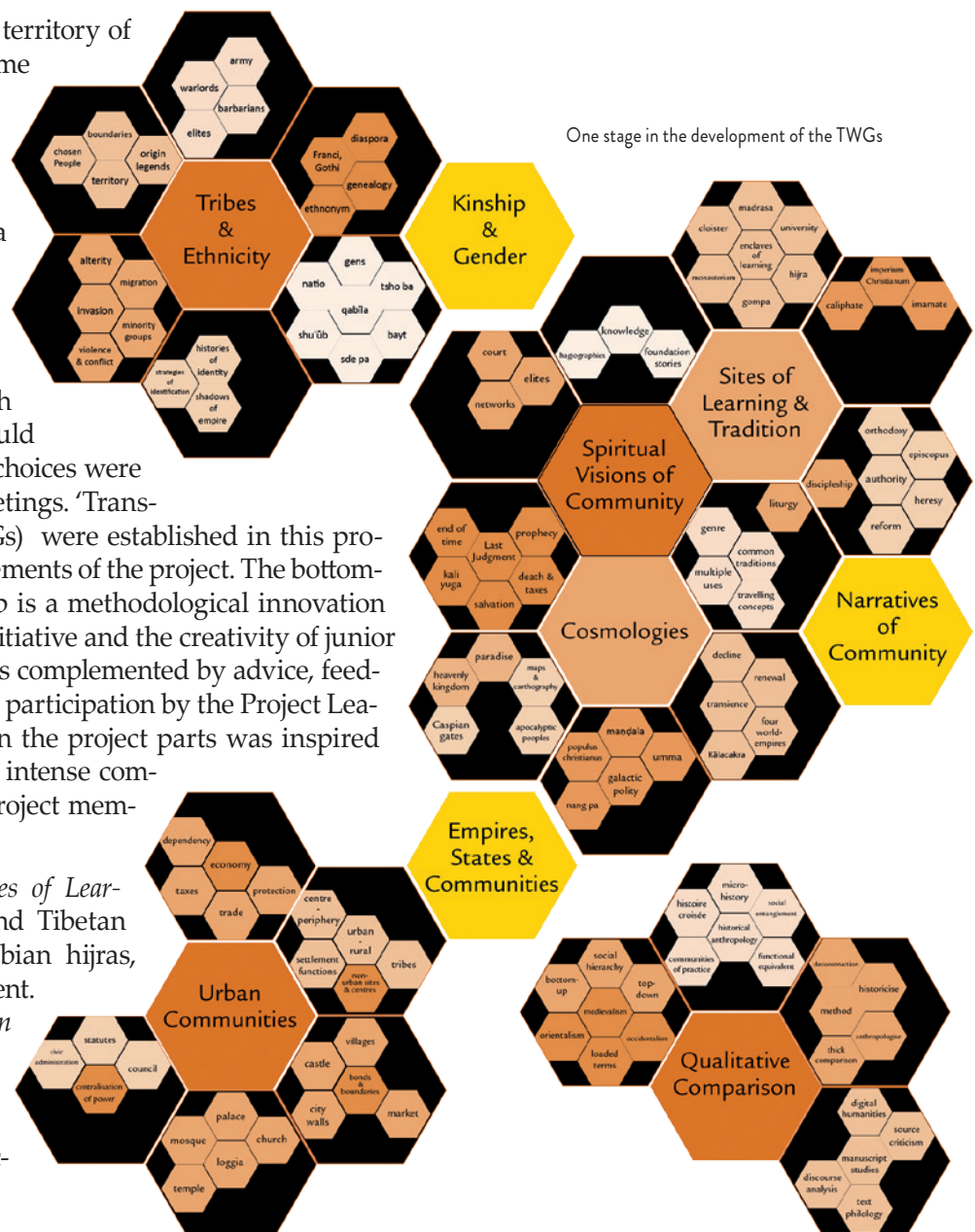
## II. COMPARATIVE TOPICS AND TRANSVERSAL WORKING GROUPS

VISCOM gave us the opportunity to employ between ten and fifteen junior researchers at a time in the project, adding up to over forty in the course of eight years, almost half of them female. This comprised a core group which remained in VISCOM for a longer time, typically PhD students from the first period who later continued as PostDocs. Others stayed for three to four years, came as guests or were employed for a shorter period of time. The highly international team comprised junior scholars from Austria, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK, Ireland, France, the US, India, Egypt, Palestine and Tibet/China.

As VISCOM entered the new territory of global comparison, it took time to explore shared interests among the team members from different fields. Comparative questions were not established top-down, but in a bottom-up process, building on the research done by the junior team members. They took the lead in defining a number of concrete research areas in which comparison could be profitably pursued. These choices were then discussed in plenary meetings. 'Transversal working groups' (TWGs) were established in this process, and soon became core elements of the project. The bottom-up transversal working group is a methodological innovation in VISCOM. It relied on the initiative and the creativity of junior VISCOM members, which was complemented by advice, feedback and in many cases active participation by the Project Leaders. The disciplinary work in the project parts was inspired and deeply influenced by the intense comparative experience that all project members enjoyed.

TWG topics included *Enclaves of Learning*, comparing Christian and Tibetan monasteries with South Arabian hijras, a partial functional equivalent. *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the End of Times* concentrated on eschatological and apocalyptic ideas; in this case, Buddhism provided a correc-

### 1. A BOTTOM-UP MODEL FOR IDENTIFYING AREAS OF COMPARISON



## 2. ENCLAVES OF LEARNING an adventure in comparison

tive to Christian and Islamic visions both based on the Old Testament. *Addressing Community* looked at terminologies relating to communities. *Historiography and Identity* and *Genealogies as a Means of Constructing Community* both addressed the complex construction of communities in texts. *Medieval Biographical Collections* studied a wealth of hitherto unexplored material in the three religious spheres. *Urban Communities and Non-Urban Sites and Centres* investigated how urban centres were structured, and how they interacted with their surroundings. *Tribes and Ethnicity* dealt with ethnic origin narratives and with the relationship between ethnicity and religion, a surprisingly under-researched question. Results of the TWGs will be discussed in the final section.

The TWG on *Enclaves of Learning*, coordinated by Rutger Kramer, Eirik Hovden and Mathias Fermer, started from the obvious comparison between early and late medieval Western monasteries and Tibetan Buddhist 'gompa'. It had to face the fact that for most of the medieval period, 'monasteries' did not exist in Yemen. Looking for functional equivalents, it started to focus on the 'hijras', limited and protected areas often situated on the boundaries of tribal territories which served as zones of asylum for, in part dissenting, scholars and as hubs of education and knowledge.

In the beginning, *Enclaves of Learning* had to overcome a number of difficulties in defining the topic and the strategies of comparison. First, the source base was uneven – in Tibet and Yemen, many texts were as yet unedited, unstudied or inaccessible. Furthermore, the dearth of documentary evidence in these regions also contrasted sharply with the wealth of documents preserved in Latin Europe, which suggests a contrast in archival practices. Second, divergent research traditions and states of the art in the different disciplines led to terminological and methodological problems. Third, previous scholarship had overstated the similarities between Western and Tibetan 'monasteries' from a Eurocentric point of view. Fourth, what these communities had in common was not so much their status as elite practitioners of their respective religions, but their role as conduits of knowledge that justified their seclusion. And fifth, the tension between the idealisation of these communities as separate 'enclaves' and their semi-permeable reality led to divergent strategies of distinction.

These issues required long discussions both in the group and in plenary meetings. We learnt that it is an illusion to do substantial comparative research without this phase of addressing the disparity in the sources and discordant traditions of interpretation, and going through a successive process of gradually tuning into comparison. Still, we also saw that these difficulties could to a considerable extent be overcome. They allowed us to explore methodological issues in an exemplary way – what can we learn from the comparison of institutions as different as Christian monasteries and Yemeni hijras? Thus, *Enclaves of Learning* worked as a pilot project for the Transversal Working Groups that were established towards the end of the first and during the second phase of VISCOM, and remained a touchstone for the methodological work done within VISCOM.

Much work has been done on apocalyptic movements in the medieval West, but it has rarely been studied in conjunction with Islamic eschatology (which also relied on Biblical prophecies), and with the rather different visions of the end of times in Hindu and Buddhist communities. In both Eastern and Western societies, ideas about the present and the future were shaped by the expectation that all things must end.

The aim of this TWG, coordinated by Veronika Wieser, Vincent Eltschinger and Johann Heiss, was to produce a more nuanced understanding of how eschatological thought influenced the political and religious perception and self-definition of medieval communities. Apocalyptic interpretations provided powerful tools to explain political developments in the light of prophecies in sacred books. Actively engaging in cross-cultural comparison helps us to arrive at a deeper understanding of apocalypticism as a broad cultural phenomenon and to shed light on specific literary traditions and underlying discourses. All three religions concur in offering a conciliatory vision of salvation, which was carefully balanced with the fear of the end of times often imagined as being near.

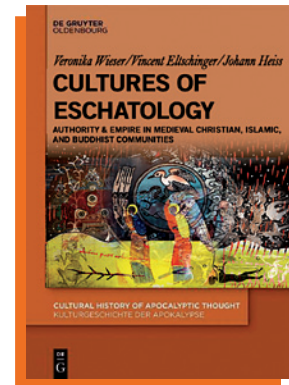
The two collaborative volumes on *Cultures of Eschatology* that resulted from the working group explore the many ways in which apocalyptic thought and eschatological visions intersected with the developments of medieval political and religious communities and with profound social changes. They address intellectual traditions and political uses from the early Christian communities in the first century onwards, to the times of the Islamic invasion, and the Crusades, spanning from Carolingian Spain, the Byzantine Empire, South Yemen to the Caspian Gates and the Hidden Lands of Tibetan Buddhism. The case studies are grouped in thematic clusters and examine literary and scriptural traditions, apocalyptic cosmologies, ideas about end of time actors and empires, Last Judgment, death and the afterlife, and perceptions of time in medieval Christian, Islamic and Buddhist communities. They represent the first cross-cultural comparative collection of studies on eschatology and apocalypticism in the Middle Ages in such a wide geographical scope.

Biographies of scholars and saints had been a main source in the TWG *Enclaves of Learning*, and they provided a useful field of comparison. The

focus soon shifted to the genre of biographical collections, which was important in Christian, Islamic and Buddhist contexts. Extensive biographic material about Christian saints, Islamic scholars and Buddhist teachers were collected. The TWG, coordinated by Daniel Mahony, Diarmuid Ó Riain and Giorgia Vocino, examined the ways in which the construction, contents, and reception of compilations of biographical tracts emerged from, reflected, critiqued and influenced the formation and coherence of medieval communities. Encompassing multiple



### 3. THE END OF TIMES



Veronika Wieser, Vincent Eltschinger (eds.), *Cultures of Eschatology 1: Worldly Empires and Scriptural Authorities in Medieval Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist Communities*

Veronika Wieser, Vincent Eltschinger, Johann Heiss (eds.), *Cultures of Eschatology 2: Time, Death and Afterlife in Medieval Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist Communities*

### 4. MEDIEVAL BIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTIONS

Daniel Mahony, Diarmuid Ó Riain and Giorgia Vocino (eds.), *Medieval Biographical Collections: Perspectives from Buddhist, Christian and Islamic Worlds* (Leiden: Brill 2020).

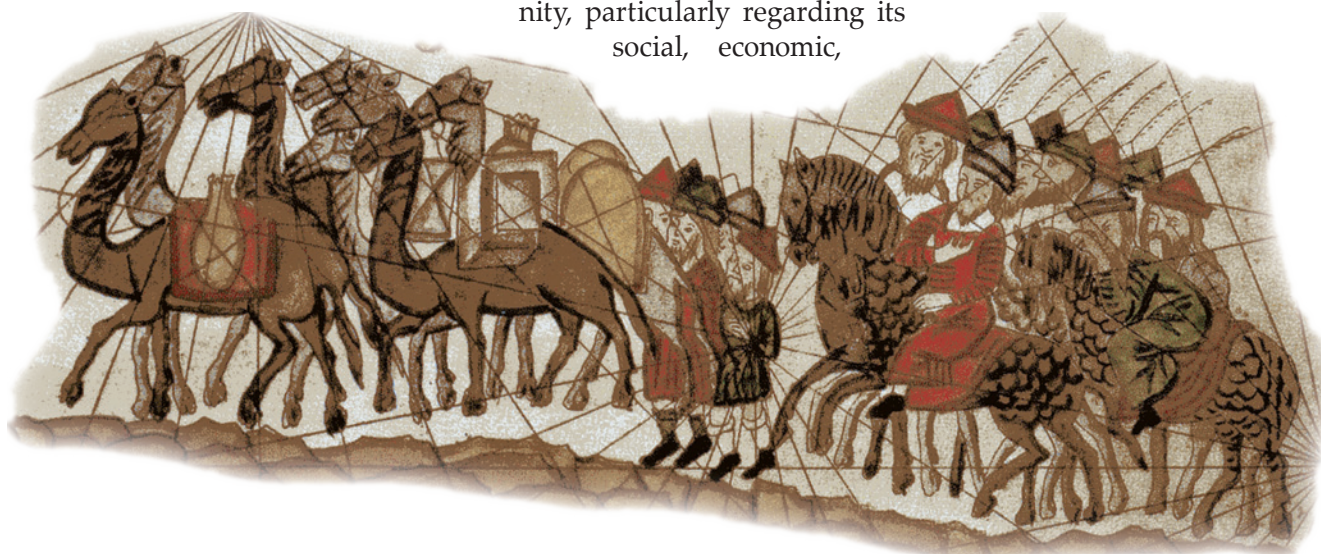
St Jerome presents a martyrology to Bishops Chromatius and Heliodorus

stand-alone texts, single texts containing multiple biographies, or more complex works containing biographies alongside or intermeshed within chronographic and genealogical texts, these collections describe remarkable men and women who stood out in a way that triggered a complex, often long process of retelling their lives and preserving their memory for their contemporaries and for future generations. Whether predominantly religious or more overtly secular, the erudition, piety and lifestyle of these people were subsequently (re)framed in written narratives, and thus became examples and sources of inspiration and identification for wider communities. When compiled together, they became part of a larger textual whole with new meanings and significance, sometimes forming over-arching narratives that served as foundational touchstones for communities. Thus, they offered specific visions of community that highlight the connections between the past and the present and could convey a sense of history for its members. This research will result in an edited volume (*Medieval Biographical Collections in Comparison: Perspectives from the Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic Worlds*, expected 2020), consisting of case studies from Europe, South Arabia and Tibet, as well as an extensive introduction which lays out the project's main points of comparison focused on the compilation strategies, writing strategies, and reception of the biographical collections.

## 5. URBAN COMMUNITIES AND NON-URBAN SITES AND CENTRES

The relationship between cities and communities (or 'communes') differs between Eurasian societies, as Max Weber already stated; and types of urban settlements or other centres of habitation diverge. Yet discussing straightforward typologies did not prove very productive, and the TWG, coordinated by Elisabeth Gruber, Fabian Kümmeler with the cooperation of Judit Majaorossy, Károly Goda, Eirik Hovden, Kateřina Horníčková and Johann Heiss, sought for more tangible comparative aspects of urban and non-urban communities and their interrelation in late medieval Central and Southeast Europe, South Arabia and Tibet. The TWG started by with critically discussing both the historical terminology and the historiographical perception of city/hinterland distinctions as well as the extent to which communities were considered to take part in it. In order to answer this question, the TWG subsequently investigated different 'functions' of community, particularly regarding its social, economic,

The caravan of Marco Polo traveling to the Indies, 14<sup>th</sup> c.

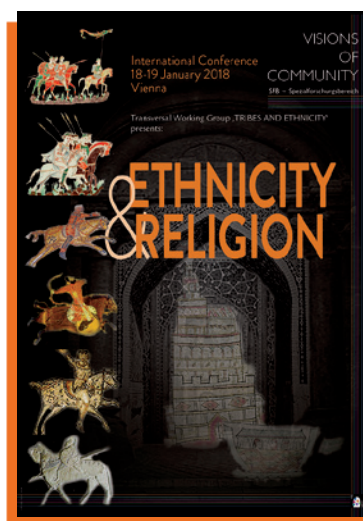


political, legal and religious dimensions. The way communities dealt with their natural, structural and social environment in practical terms lent itself best to productive comparison. The TWG thus scrutinised practical aspects of communal life in urban-rural relation against the background of power politics, legal systems and visions of community. Three practices and visions of community were identified to be of importance: 1) sustaining a community in and throughout urban-rural relations by managing resources, infrastructure, exchange of goods, administration and information; 2) representing, symbolizing and enacting community through public buildings and performative culture in spatial settings and 3) practices and ideas of social belonging and otherness, of integration and differentiation in order to serve a common good in both its religious and secular meanings in Central and Southeast Europe, South Arabia and Tibet. The results of these comparisons will be published in an edited volume (*Practicing Community in Urban and Rural Eurasia (1000–1600): Comparative Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Fabian Kümmeler, Eirik Hovden and Judit Majorossy).

Fabian Kümmeler, Eirik Hovden, Judit Majorossy (eds.), *Practicing Community in Urban and Rural Eurasia (1000–1600): Comparative Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden: Brill 2019).

Tribal structures and ethnicity have been in the focus of debates since the beginning of VISCOM. Both concepts are controversial, and their uses were critically assessed. Their significance in research also diverges between the different areas of study. While ethnicity is a key term in the study of early medieval Europe, where the concept of tribe has largely been abandoned, tribes figure prominently in Islamic Studies, where ethnicity plays a secondary role. In Tibet and in late Medieval Europe, both concepts are used only rarely and often hesitantly. This divergence is based as much on differences in social organisation as on different approaches to these subject areas.

The TWG, coordinated by Daniel Mahoney, Gerda Heydemann, Reinier Langelaar and Salvatore Liccardo, after a phase of wide-ranging discussion of these problems, focused on two issues. First, it dealt with ethnic and tribal origin narratives and their impact on the construction and affirmation of communities. The results were published in a special issue of *The Medieval History Journal* (21/2, 2018). Among the case studies are early medieval European 'Origin gentium'; the irresistible spread of narratives of Trojan origins of the Franks; the medieval receptions of the Amazon story; the ancient Turkish myth of descent from a wolf; the many variants of the origin legends of the Tibetans; and Yemeni tribal origin narratives and dynastic genealogies. Comparative findings include the variability of particular foundational myths; the differing significance of first ancestors and genealogical elements in ethnic origin stories; and the



## 6. TRIBES AND ETHNICITY



*The Medieval History Journal* 21/2 (2018)  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/mhja/21/2>

Ethnonyms in Europe and Asia: Studies in History and Anthropology, special issue, *Hungarian Historical Review* 7/1 (2018).

ways in which pagan lore was adopted and transformed in Christian, Islamic or Buddhist environments. Ethnic (or tribal) identities were gradually accommodated within a wider religious discourse, instead of simply being replaced by new (for instance, Christian) models. Origin narratives continued to matter and some of them could ultimately be appropriated by modern national ideologies.

The relationship of tribal/ethnic communities to religion, central to the overall topic of VISCOM, was extensively discussed in the TWG, and with guest speakers at the conference *Ethnicity and Religion* in January 2018 (to be published in 2020). In research, 'ethnicity' and 'religion' are often treated separately, or even as contrasting principles of social organisation; one of the main contentions of VISCOM is that, not least in the European case, they are directly linked, and that Christianity helped to legitimise the rise of kingdoms with ethnic names. Among others, the conference addressed concepts of the divine election of peoples, the relationship between Arab expansion and the 'community of believers', links between orthodoxy and identity, and the ethnicisation of religious minorities. Together with an associated Doc-team group working on ethnonyms, the TWG contributed to a conference about this topic at the Hungarian Academy in Budapest, published in a special issue of the *Hungarian Historical Review* in 2018.

## 7. RETHINKING SCHOLASTIC COMMUNITIES ACROSS MEDIEVAL EURASIA

Scholasticism has been defined by a strong concern with tradition and transmission, and with the systematic and inclusive ordering of given knowledge. The term lends itself well to transcultural comparison. In this context, the working group, thematically linked to the TWG *Enclaves of Learning* and its associated studies, aimed at rethinking scholastic communities and revisiting the phenomenon of specialist intellectual cultures in medieval religions from a perspective that integrates the exploration of textual and intellectual aspects of religion with issues of social practice and process. Its core was a series of three workshops covering different aspects of the topic and geared towards publication.

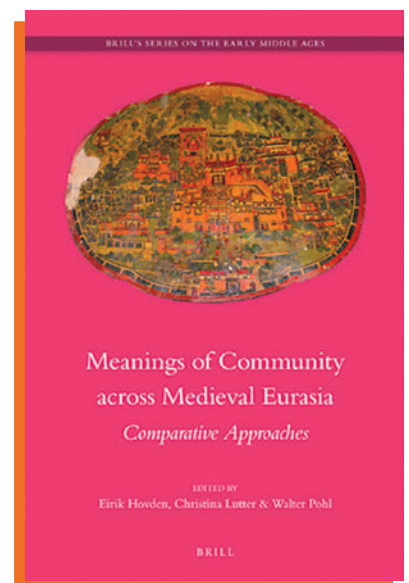
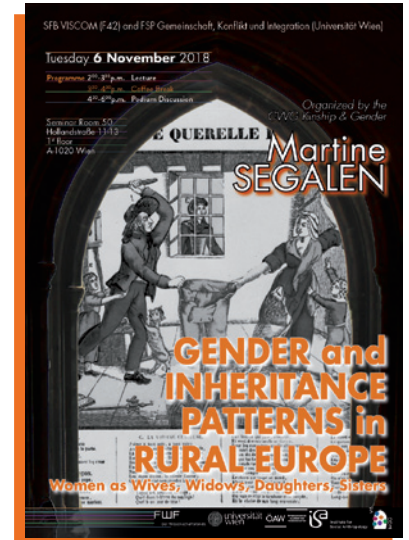
Tsongkapa surrounded by life-story narrative scenes





VISCOM's Working Group on Kinship and Gender builds upon insights gained during the research programme's first phase and follows the results of two joint PhD seminars at the University of Vienna, and the co-editing process of a History & Anthropology special issue discussing comparative perspectives on community building in different Eurasian pre-modern settings (2015). Gender and kinship constitute two intersecting analytical and social categories as well as central dimensions in comparative and transcultural historical analyses. On the one hand, this Working Group reflected upon the relevance of these two dimensions for visions of community and practices of community building along conceptual and methodological lines. On the other hand, it used these improved analytical tools to focus on a few selected key topics such as marriage patterns (including their implications for status and transactions) and inheritance practices (including their immediate or delayed relevance for women) as well as spiritual and material economies (including donation practices, relations to and within religious communities). Several VISCOM lectures with input from leading scholars in history and social-cultural anthropology in the fields of kinship and gender and an ensuing publication of a thematic issue in a listed peer reviewed journal will summarise and present these findings. The publication will bring together contributions that address new trends and perspectives in addressing kinship and gender in history and anthropology, as well as on an interdisciplinary level, with case studies based on research in VISCOM's project parts. Accordingly, kinship and gender will be addressed as relational social dimensions (Andre Gingrich/Magdalena Kloss; Christina Lutter/Judit Majorossy), as resources and organising principles of social and political life including various forms of rulership, e.g. dynastic rule (Jeroen Duindam), as local and regional ties (Martine Segalen) at the intersection of discourses and a variety of practices (Gabriela Signori), as symbolic fields connecting past and present (Hilde Diemberger), and as interpersonal codes (Robert Parkin).

## 8. KINSHIP AND GENDER



Eirik Hovden, Christina Lutter, Walter Pohl (eds.), *Meanings of Community across Medieval Eurasia: Comparative Approaches* (Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages 25, Leiden: Brill 2016) <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/9789004315693>

## 2. CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE AND POLITICAL IDENTITIES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

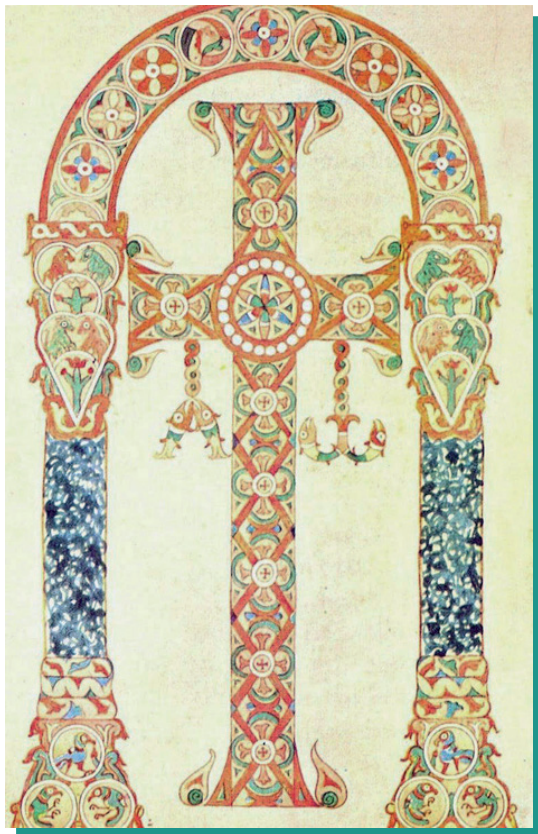
### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The VISCOM project *Christian Discourse and Political Identities in Early Medieval Europe* was situated at the Department of History at the University of Vienna and the Institute for Medieval Research (IMAFO) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

PL Prof. Dr. Walter POHL,  
Department of History,  
University of Vienna

The Christian Roman Empire of Late Antiquity and the early medieval kingdoms represent a decisive stage in the formation of many elements of European history: Christian discourse and ecclesiastical institutions, law-books and public rituals, ideas of universality and ethnicity, forms of community-building and of othering, changing strategies of political integration, new peoples and states, and ambivalent relations with the Islamic world, among others. In this dynamic research field much progress has been made since the 1990s. Grand syntheses and controversial debates have shaped the scene, for instance, regarding 'The Transformation of the Roman World' vs. 'The Fall of Rome' or 'ethnogenesis'. Still, research has often been compartmentalised, focusing on Late Antiquity or the Early Middle Ages, West or East Rome, Romans or barbarians, economy or religion, Christianity or ethnicity. VISCOM has sought to transcend these binary opposites.

The project part *Early Medieval Europe* has looked at the ways in which ethnic identifications and Christian visions of community shaped the political landscape of early medieval Europe. Both the Christian religion and most European peoples and states appeared on the scene between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Christianity developed complex 'visions of community' for all purposes; its impact on the development of ethnic, political and territorial communities was much bigger than mostly assumed. Comparison with Asian examples in VISCOM gave important new impulses to research on European developments. Early Medieval Europe has addressed key issues of community and identity formation in the late antique and early medieval West in three closely related research clusters. First, it asked how Christian discourse shaped the formation of new political and ethnic identities (*Scripts for Community – the Bible as a Model for Communities in the Early Middle Ages*), mainly in two case studies on the exegesis of the Psalms and on the uses of the Apocalypse. A second cluster (*Ethnicity, Identities and the Formation of Political Communities*) looked at the relationship between ethnic/political identities and Christian discourse, including research on the relationship between empires and communities, the history of European steppe peoples, on the Carolingian Empire and its sustained efforts to bring political realities in line with Christian discourse, on ethnic terminology and on the role of ethnonyms. A third cluster (*Texts of Identity*) dealt with narrative texts as part of an ongoing social process of community formation, and looked at the methodological problems of linking historiography and identity.



Sacramentarium Gelasianum  
frontispiece, mid 8<sup>th</sup> c.

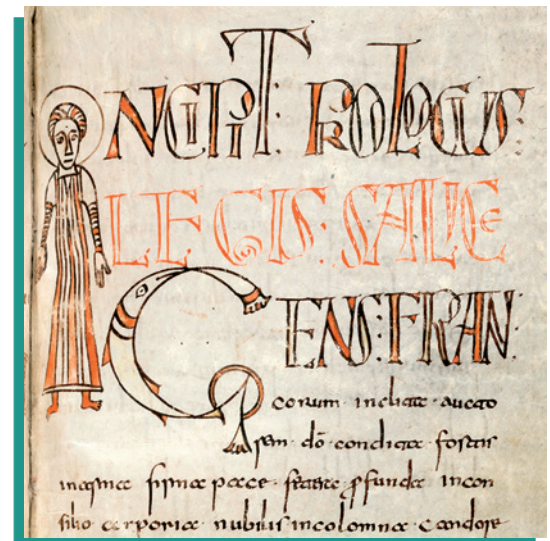
A key research question for the project part on early medieval Europe was: why was the Western Roman Empire replaced by kingdoms distinguished by ethnonyms? The kingdoms that succeeded the Roman Empire in the West from 400 onwards were increasingly distinguished by the ethnic designations of their ruling groups: *rex Francorum* or *Angliae*, *rex Danorum* or *Hungarorum* became common, often with the epithet 'by God's grace'. Most post-Roman kingdoms – Vandals, Goths or Lombards – disappeared, but this principle of distinction continued to shape the political geography of Europe up to the rise of modern nations. National histories since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have appropriated these kingdoms as the foundations of their national identities. In the 1960s, scholarly critique of these modern origin myths set in – in spite of a continuous succession of rulers, there is no straight line from the Germanic Franks to the French of today, and England since 1066 might well be called la Grande Normandie instead of Great Britain, to mention just the two modern model nations. The concept of identity was crucial to describing these changes and ambiguities.

But one question was not asked, strangely enough: if continuity was not based on the resilience of the peoples and their states, why did ethnicity begin to play such a political role at all in the early Middle Ages? The Roman Empire had been a multi-ethnic state built on citizenship, and these kingdoms restricted the right to rule to one ethnic group. From the retrospective point of view of national histories that seemed natural, but it is not. What can we do to explain that?

The approach taken in VISCOM was to take Christianity into the equation. All new ethnic kingdoms in Europe were or soon became Christian. Christianity has always been regarded as universal and in contrast to particular identities such as ethnicity – indeed, New Testament quotes (for instance, from Paul) support such a view. But then there is the Old Testament – a detailed history of a chosen people in a covenant with God, composed of tribes, facing foreign peoples repeatedly sent by God to punish Israel. We all know how influential the Bible was in the Middle Ages, but we know little about the ways in which it could be used to legitimise ethnic identification and distinction. This line of research was complemented by a comparative approach: In most other empires in dissolution, new realms were not named after tribes or ethnic groups that grabbed power, but after dynasties or territories – Persia, the Caliphate, India, China. The emergence of a stable plurality of ethnic kingdoms from the remains of an empire in Europe was quite unusual.

How did empires affect smaller communities – for instance, ethnic groups, religious communities, local or peripheral populations? An international research group uniting some of the best scholars working on the Latin West, Byzantium and the early Islamic World came together in yearly meetings to address these questions. How were different types of community integrated into the larger edifice of empire,

## 1. WHY DID ETHNICITY MATTER IN POST-ROMAN EUROPE?



Long Prologue of the Lex Saliica, late 8<sup>th</sup> c.  
*Gens Francorum inclita, auctore deo condita...*  
 (The glorious people of the Franks, founded by God)

## 2. EMPIRES AND COMMUNITIES



Head of Constantine I, reverse:  
Alamannia, minted in Trier, c. 310

Walter Pohl, Rutger Kramer (eds.), *Empires and Communities in the Post-Roman and Islamic World, c. 400-1000 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019).

Walter Pohl, Veronika Wieser (eds.), *Shadows of Empire – Imperial Peripheries in Early Medieval Eurasia* (Cambridge: University Press 2019).

and in which contexts could the dialectic between empires and particular communities cause disruption? How did religious discourses or practices reinforce (or subvert) imperial pretences? While successive parts of the Roman Empire eroded, its Byzantine core areas showed a surprising resilience. Islamic expansion led to a succession of caliphates in a wide area previously dominated by the Roman and Sassanian empires. The Franks attempted to recreate a Western Roman Empire, albeit with limited success. The period is thus exceptionally well suited to studying the various expansive and erosive dynamics of empires and their interaction with somehow smaller communities. How were Egyptians accommodated under Islamic rule, Yemenis included in an Arab identity, Aquitanians integrated in the Carolingian Empire, the population of Rome and Constantinople aligned behind its rulers? Why did the dissolution of Western Rome lead to the emergence of ethnically-denominated kingdoms, while the break-up of the Abbasid Caliphate produced mostly short-lived dynastic realms? These questions were addressed from a comparative perspective in a volume published by Oxford University Press.

A second collaborative venue was called 'Shadows of Empire', and addressed the new political communities that emerged when empires lost their grip on peripheral areas. Often, they were ruled by military elites from outside the empire, who had been more or less involved with its defence system. Frequently, a political landscape of the 'middle ground' evolved, with several competing political centres and considerable extension into the barbarian fringes of the imperial system. These new political powers had rather divergent structures: many relied on dynastic legitimacy, others on ethnic identification, often also in combination. All of them sought imperial legitimation, though to different degrees; a few also claimed imperial status themselves. Most of these polities were rather short-lived, while some of the peripheral polities turned into rather stable entities, as in post-Roman Europe. The volume to be published by Cambridge University Press will compare a wide range of case studies: the post-Roman kingdoms in the West; Byzantium and its peripheral states; the Carolingian Empire and the emerging states on its northern and eastern periphery; the Inner Asian fringes of the Sassanid empire; the Abbasid Caliphate and the new dynastic formations on its territory; and China and the 'Northern Dynasties' after the Han Empire.



Europe around 526

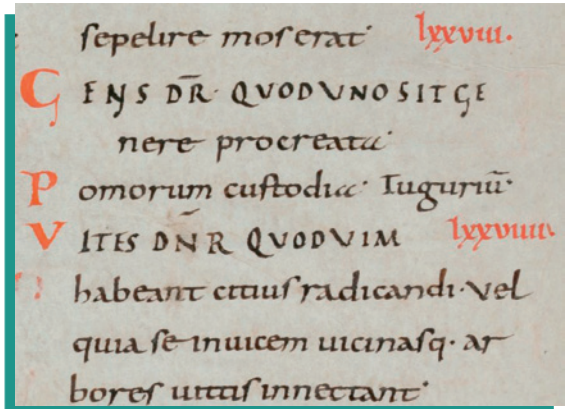
### 3. CHRISTIANITY AND ETHNICITY

VISCOM's hypothesis was that, contrary to most previous scholarship, Christianity played an important part in establishing ethnic identification as a principle of political distinction. Therefore, we addressed the role of Christianity in the shaping of communities in late antique and early medieval Europe, when new 'barbarian' kingdoms inserted themselves into the overarching matrix of Christianity. Important resources for subsequent political and religious identification emerged.

In Classical Antiquity, most religions were closely related to ethnic or civic communities and could directly reinforce the bonds within the

community. Gods had specific roles and functions; in most cases, they were also translatable. For instance, the Roman Jupiter's day (*dies Jovis*, giovedì) could be equated to the Germanic Thor's day (Thursday). This flexible arrangement allowed particular cities (such as Athens), tribes or even individuals to venerate their own deity. With Christianity, all of this changed fundamentally. The social field of religion expanded significantly as compared to ancient religion, including moral behaviour and philosophy. The claim of revelation as an ultimate, non-negotiable truth made religious co-existence difficult. However, that does not mean that the relationship between religious and ethnic/political formations necessarily became less flexible. For a while, it seemed as if Christendom and the Roman Empire could converge, as the universal pretensions of the Roman World (*orbis Romanus*) favoured Christian proselytising ambitions. Yet imperial unity required state intervention in contentious issues of Christian dogma, which increasingly proved divisive. After the dissolution of the Roman Empire in the West, this part of Europe was transformed into a political landscape of Christian peoples and their kingdoms.

Why did kingdoms of the Franks or the Angles arise, and not a Christian commonwealth (like the Caliphate), competing Roman empires (like in China in periods of crisis), or kingdoms of Gaul or Britain? VISCOM demonstrated that the rise of Christian kingdoms distinguished by the peoples that ruled them was greatly furthered by both the Christian message and by ecclesiastical institutions. The Old Testament reflected and conceived of the world as a plurality of peoples, while also providing comfortable support to a good dose of ethnocentrism. The New Testament both endorsed and modified the thrust of the Hebrew Bible. The God of the Jews was addressed as the God of all peoples, but he had adopted one in particular. The Christian God wanted all other peoples to venerate him: go and teach all nations, was Christ's order to the apostles. The divine plan of salvation gave agency and responsibility to a multiplicity of *gentes*. Christian peoples could proudly claim that their conversion had been an essential part of the history of salvation. The actors in the European political landscape were now competing peoples and their kingdoms that operated within the same Christian matrix.



Biblical glossary explaining the term *gens*, 9<sup>th</sup> c.



The Bible provided a matrix for ordering and explaining the social world in medieval Europe. In several ways, VISCOM addressed the challenging issue of the often implicit ways in which it shaped identifications and social actions, and how exegetical, catechetical and historiographic texts sought to mediate and direct its impact. Gerda Heydemann's PhD thesis and subsequent publications dealt with

## 4. SCRIPTS FOR COMMUNITY: The Bible as a Model

Noah's Ark, Beatus of Urgell, c. 975



Cassiodorus in Vivarium  
Codex Amiatinus, 8<sup>th</sup> c.

exegetical works, especially the *Commentary on Psalms* by Cassiodorus, a sixth-century Roman senator, intellectual and top administrator in the Ostrogothic kingdom, who used the poetic terminology of the psalms to come to terms with an emerging world of *gentes*. In this text, Cassiodorus gives several nuanced definitions of key ethnic terms such as *populus*, *gens* and *natio*, and discusses the role of peoples in history. Whether in a spiritual, polemical or political sense, the ethnic vocabulary employed in exegetical works produced between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries provided hitherto understudied access to the mind-set of the intellectual elites at the time.

One line of study was the question of ‘chosen peoples’, subject to some recent controversial debate: to what extent were early medieval peoples believed to be the ‘new Israel’? Gerda Heydemann and Walter Pohl analysed the use of a key passage in the New Testament, the first letter of Peter (2.9-10), which addresses the Christian community as ‘chosen people’ and a ‘holy nation’. This passage was frequently, but very subtly applied to early medieval peoples. Explicit self-identification as ‘the’ chosen people was, however, rare. Rather, the conversion of the *gens* was regarded as a form of divine election. Saints, holy places, orthodox beliefs and pious conduct were believed to confer special divine favour, and Christian authors sought to use these ideas to put moral pressure on the representatives of their people. The people as a whole, also understood as the Church (*ecclesia*) of the realm, had a shared responsibility to maintain divine favour, which was a necessary precondition for the success of the polity.

## 5. HISTORIOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

It is a standard assumption that works of early medieval historiography construct and reaffirm identities. In particular, that holds true for a genre often, though somehow anachronistically, called ‘national histories’. Yet the concept of ‘identity’ is often used in a rather straightforward manner: it is no surprise that Christian or Frankish historiography constructed Christian or Frankish identities. Work in VISCOM started with a redefinition of the difficult term ‘identity’. We regarded ‘identity’ as resulting from a series of identifications which require interaction and communication, both within the in-group and between the in-group and the out-group. Narratives, and specifically historiography, thus not only reflect identities, but also contribute to constructing them.

And they hardly ever construct a single (ethnic, religious, political) identity, but complex bundles of identifications. Often there are also internal tensions in these entangled strategies of identification which can be detected in the texts. This model provided a useful approach to studying early medieval historiography.

In cooperation with Helmut Reimitz (Princeton), several workshops were held, which resulted in a series of six volumes on *Historiography and Identity* to appear in 2019/20. Spanning the entire time period from Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages, they focus on particular selections of texts: Volume 1 addresses *Ancient and Early Christian Narratives of Community* and contains an extensive introduction by Walter Pohl. Volume 2 deals with *Post-Roman*

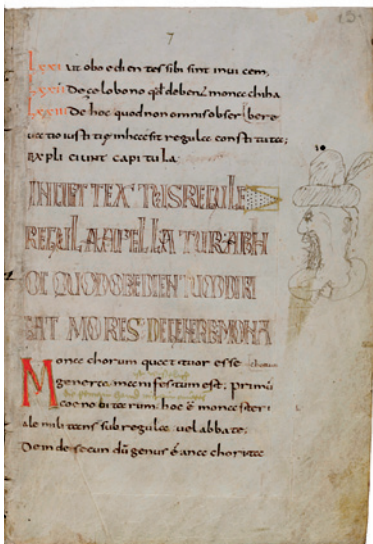


*Multiplicity and New Political Identities*, and Volume 3 with *Carolingian Convergence*. The fourth volume, *The Writing of History across Medieval Eurasia*, opens up to a Eurasian comparative perspective ranging between China and the West, mostly in the period around 1000 CE. The fifth and sixth volumes focus on Eastern/Central Europe: Volume 5 on *The Emergence of New Peoples and Polities, 1000–1300*; and Volume 6 on *Historiographies in Central and Eastern Central Europe between Latin and Vernaculars, 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> ct.*

In the course of the Middle Ages the prophetic books of the Old and New Testament provided central models for the perception of the world, for the individual's confrontation with salvation, and for the interpretation of socio-political changes – such as the identification of Goths and Huns with the apocalyptic peoples of Gog and Magog, or the interpretation of the end of the Roman Empire according to the Book of Daniel. Leading Christian scholars and intellectuals intensively debated themes of eschatology and pondered the relevance of apocalyptic notions for Christian community. In her PhD thesis and subsequent work, Veronika Wieser studied apocalyptic narratives in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, and sought to connect political history, history writing, religious developments and the use of the Bible in the transformation period of the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries in order to embed apocalyptic thought in a larger social context and to examine its variety in the process of political and religious transformation in the Western Roman Empire.

The end of the world and the Last Judgement inspired hopes of salvation, but even more so, prompted fears of physical destruction and eternal damnation. The powerful message of the apocalypse could be used to align communities behind moral imperatives, and to explain catastrophic events of the present in the context of the history of salvation. Contextualising expressions of apocalyptic thought helps us to gain a deeper understanding of the way observers in the fourth and fifth centuries thought the end of the Roman Empire and the arrival of God's kingdom would unfold. This also tells us more about how early medieval authors positioned themselves in difficult times, how they reflected on political and religious identity and rulership.

How did religious communities function within the society around them – and how were these functions expressed through the texts they produced? This was the leading question of Rutger Kramer's work. European monasteries in the Early Middle Ages appear as well-defined, face-to-face communities that present themselves as “enclaves of learning” and microcosms for the ideal practice of their religion, but they had a place in a larger social whole as well. Their leaders and top intellectuals were active in ongoing political debates and weighed in on social issues, while remaining proponents of the ideal of the cloister as well.



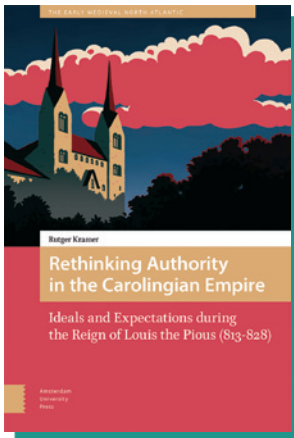
St. Benedict's Rule, first third of the 9<sup>th</sup> c.

## 6. APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVES IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES



Image from Beatus' of Liébana commentary on the apocalypse, made by Facundus, 11<sup>th</sup> c.

## 7. AUTHORITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE CAROLINGIAN EMPIRE

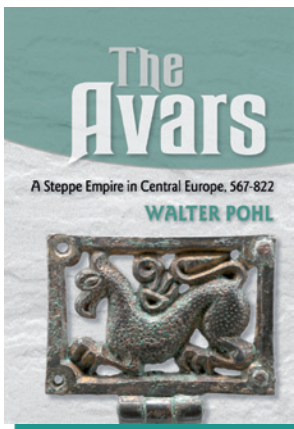


Rutger Kramer, Emilie Kurdziel, Graeme Ward (eds.), *Categorising the Church. Monastic Communities and Canonical Clergy in the Carolingian World (780-840)* (Turnhout: Brepols 2019).

Thereby, they show the tensions between the 'visions of community' on a universal scale and the way these universalising ideals affect the way people present themselves. The role of debate about the (necessity of) reforms was a key factor: rather than being a concerted top-down movement, they could be interpreted as part of a more open process of continuous improvement built into the ideological foundation of the Carolingian Empire. To the extent that a singular Carolingian 'vision of community' existed, this was not necessarily based in coercion and the exercise of authority, but rather in fostering a willingness among the subjects to accept the moral authority of the court.

Kramer's research activities have resulted in his monograph, *Rethinking Authority in the Carolingian Empire* (2019), as well as several articles on Carolingian religious policies. Additionally, he has been instrumental in setting up an international research network together with the University of Poitiers, which will yield an upcoming collected volume on monastic reforms in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, *Categorising the Church: Monastic Communities, Canonical Clergy and Episcopal Authority in the Carolingian World (780-840)*.

## 8. ETHNIC TERMINOLOGY AND ETHNONYMS



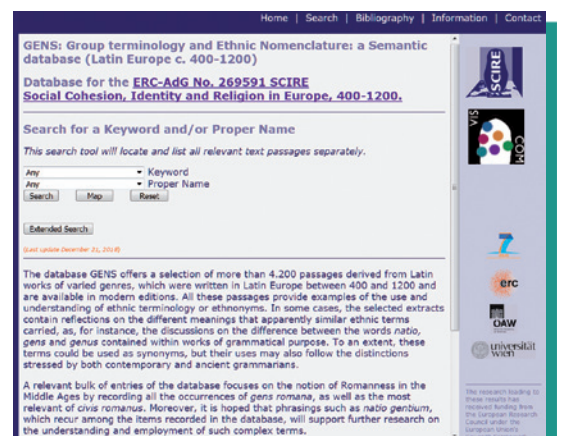
Ethnicity remained one of the central topics in the project part *Early Medieval Europe*, and work was closely linked to the TWG *Tribes and Ethnicity*. As argued above, it is a controversial concept addressing a social field full of problems, and deserves scholarly attention for precisely this reason. Walter Pohl has undertaken substantial work on the theory and methodology of ethnicity, and offered several conceptual differentiations. 'Ethnicity' is used to describe a social distinction between groups defined by ethnonyms, which became the main cognitive tool for describing the political landscape in the early medieval West. In texts, *gentes*, ethnic groups, and not states feature as the main collective actors. These uses do not necessarily indicate that all these groups had stable ethnic identities; but habitual classifications surely had an impact on self-identifications. It is not very productive to debate whether or not a group (or an identity) was or was not 'ethnic'. Hardly any identification is only ethnic (but also political, territorial or religious); what we can see is that the relative salience of these different types of identification varies. Further work by Walter Pohl dealt with steppe peoples and their identities. A book on *The Avars – a Steppe Empire in Central Europe*, which appeared in German in 1988, was thoroughly revised for the English translation which appeared in 2018. Several articles placed the European steppe peoples in a Eurasian perspective, among others, comparing the 'ethnic' origin of the Huns with the more 'political' identity of the Avars.

GENS Database:

<https://www.oaw.ac.at/imafo/gens>

Screenshot GENS

A strong focus was on ethnic terminology and its meaning. Cinzia Grifoni worked on the online database *GENS: Group Terminology and Ethnic Nomenclature: a Semantic Database*, which she had built up in the





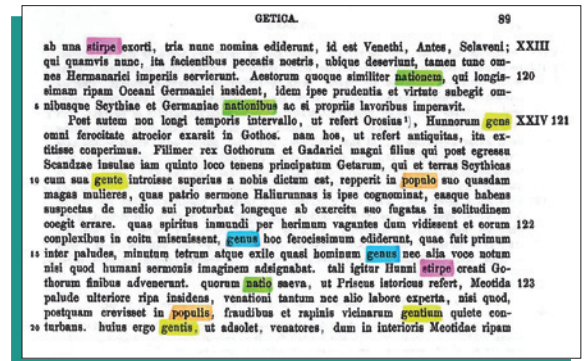
context of the ERC AdG project SCIRE (PI Walter Pohl) in 2011-2016. It contains thousands of passages relevant for tracing the significance of Latin ethnic terms in the early Middle Ages. In parallel, she analysed the origin and use of the seemingly paradoxical concept of *populus gentium* in the medieval West – a conceptual innovation which early Christian scholars introduced to present the Christian multi-ethnic community (including future converts) as the new subject of divine preference.

The PhD thesis by Maria Nezbeda focused on the ethnic terminology (mainly *gens*, *populus*, *genus*, *stirps* and *natio*) used by late antique/early medieval historians and its contexts, in particular the *Gothic History* by Jordanes. Her research shows that the author used several parallel yet distinct ways to imagine the development of (ethnic) communities, from family structures to military elites and from shared religion to political loyalties. The author appears to be aware of the flexibility of the concepts he uses, but relies on the context to convey quite subtle shades of meaning.

Salvatore Liccardo, who started his research as part of the associated Doc-Team project on ethnonyms, studied the social meaning of ethnonyms during the transition period from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. He has looked at several contexts in which ethnonyms featured prominently: in Roman maps such as the *Tabula Peutingeriana* ethnonyms occupy the periphery around the Empire (defined by cities and provinces) and thus become the main reference points in distinguishing non-Roman from Roman territories. Lists of peoples convey meaning by the exclusion/inclusion of *gentes* and by their order. In descriptions of triumph, ethnonyms are part of an imperial rhetoric which enumerates the *gentes* as the essential other of Rome, whose names also adorn imperial triumphal titles. In a case study, he focused on the gendered function of the Amazons in descriptions of victory and defeat, doubling the notion of barbarian/female otherness.

All these research threads were brought together in a conference about the *Terminology of Ethnicity*, which featured not only problems of ethnic terminology and ethnonyms in Latin, Greek and medieval European vernaculars, but also in Arabic, Persian and Chinese. Understanding the many shades and changes of meaning of such terms and distinguishing between core concept and metaphoric or derivative uses is not only important to interpret the texts to the best of our knowledge; it also helps to confront modern scholarly concepts with related terms of the past. Some scholars have argued that in classical Greek, *ethnos* was not an ethnic term (because it could also be used for other groups of humans or animals). However, it is not very helpful to simply classify words of the past as 'ethnic' or 'non-ethnic'. Rather, VISCOM has taken care to historicise our terminology – for instance, of ethnicity. This also means thinking about the cultural translation of past and present terms into each other, and in what ways we need to adapt our concepts to specific languages and contexts.

The numerous instances of ethnic terminology in Jordanes' *Getica*



Tabula Peutingeriana, detail

### 3. SOUTH ARABIA BETWEEN LATE ANTIQUITY and EARLY MODERNITY: International Connections and the Entanglement of Histories

#### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The VISCOM project part *South Arabia between Late Antiquity and Early Modernity* was situated at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

PL Prof. Dr. Andre GINGRICH  
*Institute for Social Anthropology  
Austrian Academy of Sciences*

Among the project's aims was research into the internal organisation of socio-cultural diversity and complexity in South Arabia, where, in medieval times, communities of Persians, Ethiopians, Kurds and Turks were living as well as communities of Jews and Christians. The tribal societies of that time (and until the present day) in South Arabia, and their co-existence with larger political units ("states") led to investigations into the political dynamics of the relations between tribal communities circumscribed by a common genealogy and "states", governed to varying degrees by the Zaydī imams (since 897) or by the dynasties of the Ayyubids (1173-1229) and the Rasulids (1229-1454). In the formation of tribal communities and federations and in cooperation between groups and government, genealogy and often imagined kinship was seen as the glue of cohesion – or as its opposite, as an explosive factor among tribal, religious, and political communities. In consequence, religious and political visions of community and of the language of the elite personalities like the imams or sultans neither could nor should be separated from each other. Islamic legal visions of community connected with war, welfare, taxes, and pious endowments, were implemented very flexibly, thereby facilitating a coexistence and cooperation between a more centralised government and members of the tribal groups, especially the tribal elite that was expected to be able to influence the entire tribal community they represented.

Village on Jabal Sallab



A further field of research was the rich South Arabian historiographical and especially biographical literature of the period between roughly 900 and 1500 (and later), which spans the Zaydī north with the imams' biographies, and the *shafi'ī* south and west with biographical collections of e.g. *Sufī* holy men. In the course of the two phases of VISCOM, it was possible to establish a centre of South-Arabian studies for the project part *South Arabia* with co-operators from different countries and scientific traditions. This contributed decisively to the dynamic course the research took.

The research in the project part *South Arabia* roughly began with the tenth century and ended with the first Ottoman conquest of the Yemen shortly after 1500. There was cooperation with the NFG (*New Frontiers Group*) project team led by Marieke Brandt, which was prin-

cipally concerned with today's Yemen. This structure led to a synchronic and interregional orientation on the one hand, and to a diachronic orientation reaching up to the present on the other.

A selection of group-related terms in the Arabic language were closely studied by Johann Heiss and Eirik Hovden, and their uses examined to arrive at a basic comparability. The terms were compared and contrasted with early European Latin terms such as *gens*, *populus* and *natio*. Among the Arabic group-terms were words like *umma/umam*, *qabīla/qabā'il*, *'ashīra/'ashā'ir* and similar terms. In the course of the study it became clear, for example, that the term *umma* could be used as a translation for the Greek *ethnos*, and thus did not have exclusively religious connotations. The use of *qabīla*, pl. *qabā'il*, was not restricted to the Arab speaking regions. Tribes or *qabā'il* were also found in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in regions settled by Turks or in Africa. In Arabic, no term comparable to the Latin *natio* exists that at least originally conveys a meaning of being born into a community of related people by signifying genealogical relations

The research on ethnonyms concentrated, among other things, on the use of the different terms for Persians living in the Yemen, and how they changed over the course of time. As Odile Kommer was able to show, different territorial or occupational groups of Persians were known by different names; many were simply called *ajam*, strangers. From pre-Islamic times on, the Persians were brought to the Yemen at first as soldiers, later also as administrators, intellectuals and miners. After six or seven centuries, they dissolved into the Yemeni populace.

The region of Dhamār, where Kurds, originally soldiers, were settled in medieval times, was examined with regard to the role of the Kurdish Yemeni population and, in this context, horse breeding in the region. The Kurds, together with Turks, came to the Yemen as soldiers, mostly for the Ayyubids and the Rasulids, and they stayed there. Both, Turks as well as Kurds, were commonly referred to by the generic name Ghuzz. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ayyubids left control of the Yemen to their generals, the Kurdish troops became an influential community with political force in the Yemen, and their generals were sometimes even called kings, as emerged from the studies by Daniel Mahoney.

Terraced fields near Ibb south of Ṣan'ā'

## GROUP-RELATED TERMS & ETHNONYMS IN ARABIC



Artificial irrigation, Jabal Shadā

## THE KURDS IN YEMEN AND THE REGION OF DHAMĀR



## TRIBES & STATE

### Genesis of tribal federations

Village Kibese on Jabal Shadā



As in so many European and other cases, migration plays a constitutive part in the development of communities, in our case of tribal federations like the *Khawlān*. Obviously different groups with no prior relationship cooperated and finally developed into a tribal federation. This seems to have been realised by the construction of a common genealogy and a common immigration into a region that was already settled. The original inhabitants had to be displaced either locally through war or peacefully through genealogical changes. Whether there was peace or war during the process of settlement is difficult, or rather impossible, to assess. For our main source of these events, al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (lived 893-945), it was war that finally helped to constitute the tribal federation of *Khawlān* in the region of Ṣa'da. Al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī is the main source for the history of the Yemen prior to his time especially with his south Arabian genealogies in his *al-Iklīl*.

### Yemeni society around 1000: the imam and the tribes

Little is known historically of the period between the death of the imam al-Nāṣir Aḥmad, a son of the first imam of the Yemen, in the year 934, and the appearance of imam al-Manṣūr al-Qāsim al-'Iyyānī in the year 999. As far as we know from the biography of the first imam al-Hādī ilā l-Ḥaqq, written by Muḥammad al-'Abbāsī al-'Alawī, two sons of imam al-Nāṣir Aḥmad fought against each other using an old tribal conflict



Terraced fields on Jabal Munabbih  
in North East Yemen

in the north as a pretext. According to the biographer, this conflict was mediated and ended by the first imam, the founder of the Zaydiyya in the Yemen. However, it seems the imam was not entirely successful with his mediation. Due to the lack of strong imams during this period, a kind of imamic interregnum survived locally, possibly comprising single groups of Zaydis, one of them the so-called Muṭarrifiyya. In order to stay in power, the imam al-Manṣūr al-Qāsim had to reintroduce administrative procedures that had fallen into oblivion. Consequently, he had to instruct his governors how to treat the Yemeni people. For that purpose he drew a picture of the structure of the Yemeni society as he saw it, dividing it into seven strata, all of which,

so the imam claimed, had to be treated differently. This shows that laws were handled very flexibly, in line with the goals of the imam, to maintain his rule. Here a principle can be seen at work – the flexible handling of the law – that enabled the imams to coexist and cooperate with the tribal population without trying to dissolve tribal structures.

## RELIGIONS & POLITICS

### The Muṭarrifiyya

From its opponents', the imams' point of view, the Muṭarrifiyya was a religiously heterodox movement that did not recognise the imams and opposed their occasionalist view that God himself intervened in each natural event like rain, drought, etc. The Muṭarrifiyya believed that God created the world and everything in it at the beginning, and then everything developed according to natural laws, leaving no role for God in nature. This was unacceptable for the imams.

The Muṭarrifiyya was hard-pressed in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, because the imams needed the occasionalist notions that enabled them to show that God worked wonders through them, e.g. he created rain or sent hail and destroyed the crops. We know from the biographies of the imams al-Mutawakkil ‘alā Allāh (reigned 1138-1171) by Sulaymān b. Yaḥyā al-Thaqafī and of al-Manṣūr ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥamza (reigned 1187-1217) by Abū Firās b. Di‘tham that both imams initially tried to cooperate with the Muṭarrifiyya, but when they were more firmly established in power, they opposed them. One of the members of the Muṭarrifiyya, Musallam al-Laḥjī (d. around 1150), left a collection of biographies. The fourth book of his *ṭabaqāt*, as yet unpublished, brings very important and rare insights into the Yemeni society between c. 1050 and 1150. The religious and scientific life in the hijras or enclaves of learning of the Muṭarrifīs, the ways in which their knowledge was transmitted, become clear. Additionally, women are mentioned in the roles of agents, e.g. as teachers and educators, in a way we find only very rarely in other sources. Musallam al-Laḥjī’s *ṭabaqāt* are a unique source that deserve to be studied further.



Village Kibese on Jabal Shadā, detail

The period of imam ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥamza (reigned 1187-1217) is one of the best documented of South Arabian medieval history. At least two biographies of the imam survive, which are only partly edited. He himself authored a large number of mostly theological works. The important role he played in Yemeni politics at the time of the late Ayyubids can be inferred from Ibn Ḥātim’s history. Additionally, the imam features in many other contemporary biographies of members of the *sunni-shāfi‘ī* school of Islam. The contacts with *sunni* personalities mentioned in biographical dictionaries happened along with incursions of the imam’s troops into the *sunni* regions of the Tihāma, the lowland on the coast of the Red Sea. Imam al-Manṣūr ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥamza was eventually successful in declaring the Muṭarrifīs unbelievers or *kuffār*. That was the violent end of this part of the Zaydiyya. It was pre-announced by a hailstorm that destroyed the crops of a Muṭarrifī village.

### ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥamza and his time

The Rasulids (1229-1454) reigned over parts of the Yemen as sultans. Under their reign, an intellectual and artistic flowering developed in the Yemen, and far-reaching connections were established or maintained, e.g. to Egypt, Persia, India, Sri Lanka and China. Envoys and diplomatic presents were exchanged with these countries and their kings. Especially at that time, chronicles were written by courtiers transmitting the view of events as the sultans preferred it. The most important author of this dynasty is al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī (died 1410), who was also a politician, painter and genealogist. As Daniel Mahoney has shown, the dynasty of the Rasulids was equipped with a south Arabian genealogy, possibly to endear them to the Yemenis,

## THE RASULIDS

Houses on Jabal Sallab



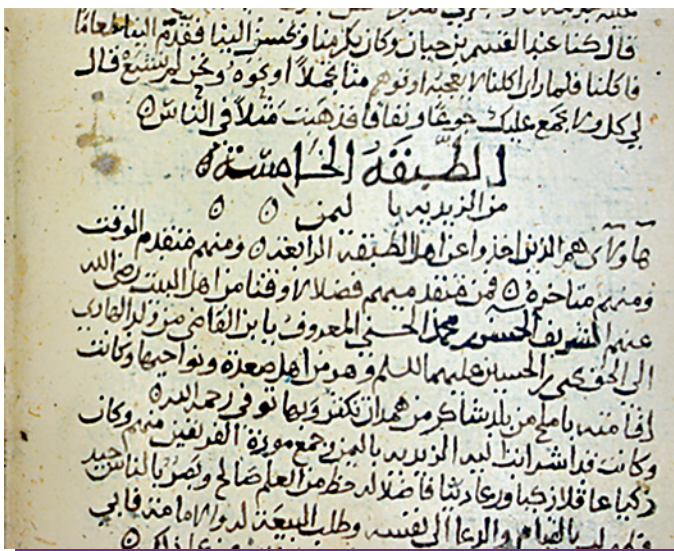
but certainly to gain a propagandist advantage vis-à-vis their opponents, the Zaydī imams, who, as members of the family of the prophet, had a north Arabian descent.

## THE ROLE OF SLAVES

Magdalena Morthy-Kloss, in her PhD thesis, studied the role of female and male slaves in medieval southern Arabia. She also addressed the interregional connections that arose through commerce with slaves, and the different terms used for them. As in other Islamic regions, certain slaves could rise in society and even become rulers.

## BIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

Biographies, generally of saintly persons, in the collections of different south Arabian writers (mostly with *sunni* background) were compared with medieval European and Tibetan biographies. A survey of biographies also provided historical insights that differ from those gained from the texts of historians, because not all authors of biographical texts lived at or near the sultans' courts and were not so strongly biased by a proximity to the court.



Manuscript of al-Lahjī's ṭabaqāt:  
the beginning of the fifth ṭabaqa

Much research was done on medieval biographies and biographical collections in Yemen, also in connection with the TWG *Medieval Biographical Collections*. This concerns especially al-Khazrajī, who wrote annalistic historical works with the usual obituaries at the end of every year as well as a large biographical lexicon, in which he partly deals with the biographies of the same people he mentions in his history. The comparison of these parallel biographies indicates differences in perceptions and in the aims of the authors as well as differences in their surroundings. Biographies of saints can be used as

an important historical source because in some cases they were written by persons less dependent on the courts – of the Ayyubids, the Rasulids, or of the imams – than the historians were. Therefore, in some cases, judgements on rulers and their actions were made which show an alternative assessment of people and situations, sometimes – otherwise practically unimaginable – even negative ones. In most of the cases the biographies of the Zaydī imams were written by their secretaries, who transmitted deep insights into the life and the opinions of their masters. They had easy access to documents like edicts, missives, epistles, and they usually included some of them in the imams' biographies, turning them into a kind of archive. The biographies of his fellow Muṭarrifis written by Musallam al-Lahjī present valuable information about a time about which we have only scant historical and social data.

The project part *South Arabia* focused its research within this group on medieval towns of the Yemen such as Ṣan‘ā’, the capital of the north, Ṣa‘da, and Dhamār south of Ṣan‘ā’, with an emphasis on the natural and social environment of these towns and their inner organisation. The close collaboration with the other project parts allowed a comparison between the island and town of Korčula in Venetian Dalmatia and the town Ṣa‘da in the north of Yemen, and the importance of their environments, especially for food supply. The study of the town Ṣan‘ā’ investigated its economic and social relations with its natural surroundings as well as its social surroundings, namely the tribal groups in the vicinity of the town, the dynasties aspiring to rule town, and their influences on the inhabitants of the town, be they south-Arabian Arabs, or south-Arabian Persians. Dhamār south of Ṣan‘ā’ was at that time settled by a high proportion of Kurdish inhabitants, some of whom had been brought in as soldiers and had to coexist with the tribal population around the town. As a special urban event, the public festivities in the town of Zabīd, which were held as processions on the occasion of the publication of books written by authors in high political offices, formed another research focus.

In addition to the typical use of the eschatological narratives common to Middle Eastern medieval authors, be they Muslims, Christians or Jews, considerable differences were found in the Yemen. South Arabian authors used the common material dealing with Alexander the Great, the “two-horned one”, and the stories about Gog and Magog for their own purposes. The narratives were instrumentalised to support South Arabian self-reliance.

## URBAN COMMUNITIES



Village Jabjab in Wādī al-‘Abdīn near Ṣa‘da

## THE END OF TIMES



Boys in the village Raḥbān near Ṣa‘da

## 4. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS MEDIEVAL MONASTIC, URBAN, and COURTLY CULTURES in HIGH and LATE MEDIEVAL CENTRAL EUROPE

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The VISCOM project part *Social and Cultural Communities across Medieval Monastic, Urban, and Courtly Cultures in High and Late Medieval Central Europe* was situated at the Department of History and the Institute for Austrian Historical Research (IÖG) at the University of Vienna.

PL Prof. Dr. Christina LUTTER  
Department of History,  
University of Vienna

In late medieval Central Europe forms of social and cultural belonging developed within the framework of negotiations and conflicts that accompanied the formation of territorial reigns. Both within the Holy Roman Empire and in the neighbouring Central European Christian *regna* (Bohemia as part of the Holy Roman Empire, Poland, and Hungary), monasteries, towns and noble elites played a crucial role in these processes. The last decades have seen older traditions of national historiography in Central Europe come under critical scrutiny, while comparative historical research has started to gain weight. It embraces analyses of noble groups and courtly cultures, monastic and urban landscapes, networks of kin and patronage among noble families and urban elites. Recent research has also taken up new conceptions of the formation of medieval Central European polities of different types – kingdoms, principalities, and urban communities. New approaches in social and cultural history have been tried out on classic topics of political, legal and institutional history. Yet, comparative research on community building beyond institutional and territorial borders is still at an early stage.

Hence, this project's aim was trifold: we moved beyond limitations of modern conceptions of borders and of confined social spaces. Methodologically, we moreover transcended classic categories of source genres to address our questions from various perspectives and to relate

linguistic, visual, and material representations of belonging to the variety of practices of identification and togetherness. Our geographical focus lay on Austria/Styria, Bohemia/Moravia, and Hungary, where from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards community building becomes well documented in a variety of sources: when the last Babenberg duke died without arrangements for succession in Austria/Styria (1246), the kings of Bohemia and Hungary raised their claims. Alliances ran across the country and its constitutive groups – nobles, knights, urban families, and clergy – while the expansionist policy of the Bohemian king Přemysl Ottokar II prompted new power constellations. Comparably heterogeneous processes of conflict and negotiation were at work around 1300 during the take-over of power by new rulers in Austria/Styria (Habsburg), Hungary (Anjou) and Bohemia/Moravia (Luxemburg). Which mechanisms led to social cohesion in these processes that contributed to making a variety of groups conceivable as political actors, which at some point articulated a sense of *communal belonging*?

Reconstruction of Heavenly Jerusalem,  
Klosterneuburger Bibel, around 1310



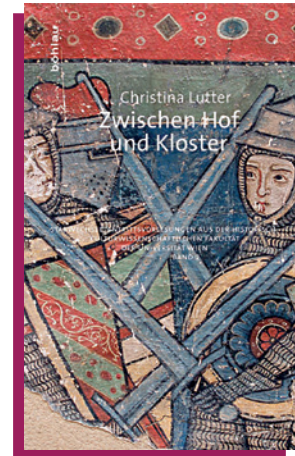


Most sources suggest that social affiliations were basically located within small groups resting upon kinship and other personal ties. This project related the main categories of VISCOM – religion, ethnicity, and empire – to key categories applicable at mid-range levels, typologically framed as “court”, “city” and “cloister”. To address the fluidity of their boundaries, Christina Lutter developed the concept of *overlapping social spaces* to investigate forms of belonging to courtly/noble, urban and monastic environments on local, regional, and trans-regional levels. They were less separated from each other than institutional history would have it, and through processes of negotiation and differentiation provided frameworks for *groups becoming communities*. In various subprojects integrated into VISCOM’s overall comparative matrix we discussed groups and communities as conceptual tools relating them to dynamic concepts of social space. Our approach links the model of *social groups*, among historians most influentially advocated by the German medievalist O. G. Oexle, to *community* concepts developed in socio-cultural anthropology and cultural studies. Both approaches relate representations and symbolic constructions of belonging to social interactions. Combining them, we refer to groups both as a category of perception and classification and as social actors. Communities, in turn, are conceived of as symbolic representations of belonging that include an affective dimension. We thus addressed visions and practices of community as interacting and affecting the coherence of social groups, their norms, institutions and models of thinking and acting.

Methodologically, we embraced a variety of source genres. Representations of visions, traditions and values – as displayed through a wide spectrum of media – have been identified as crucial for the cohesion of communities. Texts, pictures, architecture and material objects served political representation and social bonding linked to practices of commemorating the living and the dead. Many of them were displayed publicly in places characterised by mixed audiences. Our sources point to complex relations between oral and written language, and to their heterogeneous uses in Latin and the vernaculars, in learned and popular discourses. Key questions concerned languages and media of community building, their strategies of representation and models of identification. The publication of a handbook *Kulturgeschichte der Überlieferung* (UTB series, 2017) by Elisabeth Gruber, Christina Lutter and Oliver Schmitt was the result of accompanying discussions in VISCOM’s Transversal Working Groups (TWGs) on *Qualitative Comparison* and *Urban and Spiritual Communities*. In this book we comparatively assess the wealth of source transmission – texts, pictures, archaeological and linguistic evidence – that formed the historiography of the Danube-Balkan area.

VISCOM’s comparative framework and its challenges for individual research fed back on all levels of the project structure: the *VISCOM effect* enabled us to adjust the project’s thematic strands into research clusters to allow for a better integration into the VISCOM architecture. Likewise, sub-projects have been complemented by a number of associate projects and research collaborations.

## COURT, CITY, CLOISTER: the Project’s Approach



Zwischen Hof und Kloster,  
Wien 2010



Elisabeth Gruber, Christina Lutter, Oliver Schmitt (eds.), Eine Kulturgeschichte der Überlieferung. Mittel- und Südosteuropa 500-1500 (UTB Geschichte, Wien: Böhlau 2017).

## THE VISCOM EFFECT

## RESEARCH CLUSTERS

## 1. SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DISTINCTION

Times of change brought about demands for new means of identification, for instance regionally oriented vernacular historiographies that, from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, emerged alongside more traditional genres. What do these texts tell us about processes of conflict and negotiation and likewise about possibilities of political agency and community building? Many of them display visions of community in the triangle between monastic/ecclesiastic, courtly/noble, and urban/civic cultures. In-depth research in this cluster covered complementary aspects of belonging in Austrian regions bordering Bohemia and Moravia. Drawing on narrative sources and likewise on charters from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries we examined forms of identification within different social milieus.

### Historical Writing and Representations of Community

Cistercian Abbey of Zwettl,  
Book of Founders, „Bärenhaut“  
(Hs. 2/1, 14<sup>th</sup> c.)

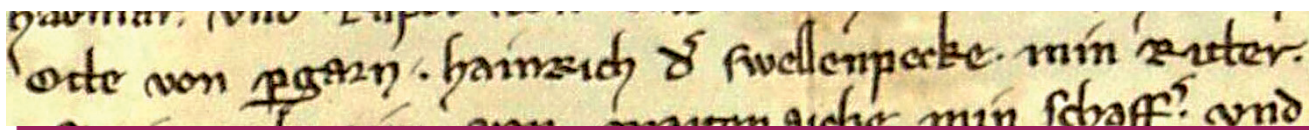


Albeit at first glance stemming from different social milieus, representative texts such as the *Translatio S. Delicianae* written by the Cistercian Gutolf of Heiligenkreuz, the *Liber fundatorum monasterii Zwetlensis*, the *Fürstenbuch* by Jans of Vienna, the *Styrian Rhyme Chronicle*, or satirical texts by Seifried Helbling all show how representations of the past were used for community building strategies. Some of these were analysed in Maria Mair's PhD project. It was framed by Christina Lutter's work which, in several studies, stresses the fluidity of textual genres, social categories of belonging and their political significance: for instance, the monk Gutolf of Heiligenkreuz reworks a hagiographical text into a comment on contemporary politics, stressing the position of the regional elite at the interface of urban and noble milieus and connected to powerful religious houses in the region. The burgher Jans of Vienna, in turn, uses the traditional model of the genealogy of a princely family to promote these urban elites' interests.

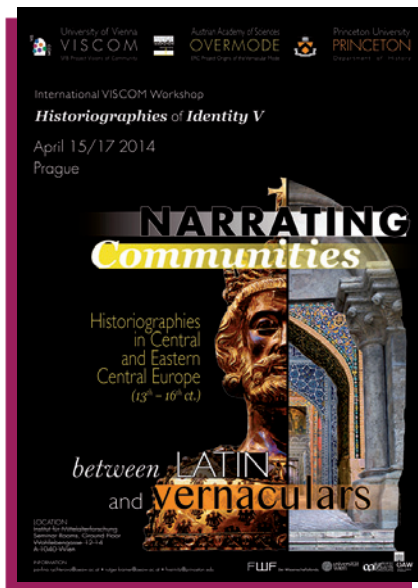
### Noble Identities, Monastic Economies and Patronage Networks

The naming of knights (min ritter) in a witness-list at of a charter issued by Leutold (I.) of Kuenring on 28 February 1295, Dürnstein

In a complementary manner, Markus Gneiß's PhD project on noble identities and strategies of social distinctions in the entourage of the powerful Kuenring family and two MA projects by Daniel Frey and Herbert Krammer on *Monastic Economies and Patronage Networks in Vienna and Lower Austria* drew on several hundred "documents of practice" to clarify regional elites' patterns of belonging. While narrative sources tend to present noble families' entourages as homogeneous groups,



lists of witnesses in charters reveal subtle differentiations of status and loyalty. These projects were also able to show how deep networks of kinship and patronage were linked in with monastic houses and how much the latter served as hubs in community building processes. Various legal transactions point to the tight entanglement of spiritual and material economies, and to the important role of women as members of monasteries and of their kin networks that contemporary historiography often disguises.

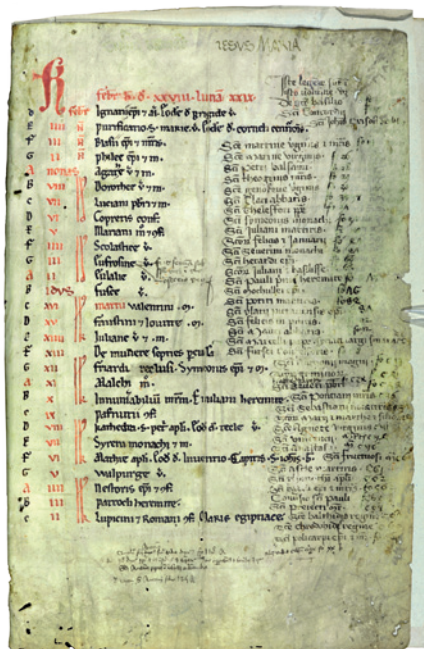


For a broader comparison, the international workshop *Narrating Communities between Latin and Vernaculars in Central and Eastern Central Europe (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.)* concentrated on the interplay between political, social, and religious modes of identification and the choice of language – Latin, German, Czech, Polish and Hungarian. The workshop was organised by Pavlina Rychterová (ERC Starting Grant OVERMODE) and Christina Lutter in collaboration with Walter Pohl's VISCOM project part. Its publication as part of the Brepols series *Historiography and Identity* will bring together contributions on

## Narrating Communities between Latin and Vernaculars

various Central European countries, among them several by VISCOM members who clearly caution against any easy juxtaposition of the variety of religious, ethnic or linguistic strategies of community building.

The idea of a community of All Saints joined in Heaven is paradigmatic for Christian visions of community. Saints' lives and other hagiographical texts provided role models and powerful means of identification for ordinary believers and religious specialists in monasteries. Hagiographical collections were an indispensable part of any monastic or cathedral library. They tended to be composed of a mixture of "universal" and local saints' lives, reflecting the figures venerated in specific regions. What can such products of religious specialists' *scriptoria* reveal about the inner concerns and outer connections of monastic communities?



Magnum Legendarium Austriacum: Calendrical list of contents for February, 13<sup>th</sup> c.

## 2. MONASTIC LANDSCAPES AND HAGIOGRAPHIES

## The Magnum Legendarium Austriacum

This subproject scrutinised the so-called *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum* (MLA), one of medieval Europe's largest hagiographical collections (approx. 530 legends) and its significance within the ecclesiastical and political context of Austria/Styria. What notions of community

and processes of community-building underpinned the compilation and transmission of this prestigious compendium? The multi-volume legendary is preserved in six exemplars (Admont, Heiligenkreuz, Lilienfeld, Melk, Zwettl, Austrian National Library). The project enabled the digitalisation of all 21 manuscripts and the creation of a database (16,000 images) by Martin Haltrich, Peter Gretzel and Diarmuid Ó Riain. The website collaborates with the Austrian manuscript online portal at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (<http://manuscripta.at>), which



Screenshot: MLA database

allows for integrating important resources (web-viewer; codicological database) and guarantees sustainable usability. Information on codicology, archival material, editions, and bibliography as well as links to all legends edited in publications available in the public domain is complemented by data on each religious house that holds a copy of the MLA, i.e. foundation, position in political/ecclesiastical topography, relations to monastic houses, to secular/ecclesiastical authorities, patrons, advocates. Art historian Susanne Rischpler (Basel) provided a complete stylistic analysis of all images.

In-depth research on the collection in Diarmuid Ó Riain's postdoctoral project led to a new model of its transmission that differs substantially from the previous state of the art. It also shed light on the place of the original collection's production – almost certainly the prominent Styrian Benedictine abbey Admont – and elucidated the importance of the MLA within Central Europe's wider legendary tradition. One important result is the minor role of monastic affiliation, copies of the MLA instead passing between houses belonging to different orders, a pattern consistent with studies on other literary genres. These findings fed into some of the key questions in VISCOM's transcultural collaborations.

## Communities of Learning

What were the factors that governed manuscript transmission, whether monastic affiliation, geographical proximity, membership of prayer confraternities, historical connections or patronage interaction? To what degree does textual transmission underlie "communities of learning"? Could involvement in different networks through manuscript exchange create a sense of belonging beyond the walls of the "enclave"? Thus, the use of manuscript studies to tackle community-related questions added to the overall methodological repertoire of VISCOM. Community- and

<http://mla.oeaw.ac.at>  
<http://manuscripta.at>

network-related questions led to several studies on interfaces between hagiographic and annalistic traditions, among them a study on monastic narratives and their perception by local elites by associate Postdoc Martin Haltrich (Klosterneuburg). Relations between manuscript transmission, monastic networks and community-building were considered in several research articles by Diarmuid Ó Riain both for the overall MLA corpus and for individual texts, e.g. the *Vita sancti Ronani episcopi*: In this case, it was through the network of Irish Benedictine monasteries that the text made its way from Ireland via Regensburg and Vienna to Admont and into the MLA. The *Schottenklöster* as centres of text-community-relationships were also key for this subproject's participation in VISCOM's working groups on *Enclaves of Learning* and on *Medieval Biographical Collections*. Responding to the comparative questions that governed the latter working group, research on another prominent hagiographical collection, the *De episcopis Salisburgensibus*, addressed the complex conceptions of community within the politically and spiritually powerful axis between the archbishopric of Salzburg and the religious reform centre of teaching and learning Admont.



Magnum Legendarium Austriacum: Vita Ronani episcopi et confessoris, 13<sup>th</sup> c.

This work is embedded in a survey of the networks of monastic foundations in the Austrian lands, Bohemia, Moravia, and Hungary and linked to a cooperation project on *Church Advocacy and Lordship in the Holy Roman Empire* by Jonathan Lyon (Chicago) that started out as an FWF-funded Lise-Meitner-Grant (2013/14).

Examining interactions between religious communities and their advocates, the secular nobles who exercised judicial authority on their estates, this associated project complements our work in VISCOM by seeking to understand how religious houses were embedded within the neighbouring communities created by noble lordship. Evidence from approximately 300 monasteries and 40 bishoprics was used to analyse these relationships in the light of research on violence, dispute resolution, and social networks. The latter have also been in the focus of Christina Lutter's research on religious communities. Her recent work on sacred topographies in urban space, as well as the case studies provided by Daniel Frey and Herbert Krammer on urban and non-urban monasteries and their patronage networks, underline the need to systematically include kinship and gender as key dimensions of elites' politics of piety.

The Vienna-Chicago collaboration between Christina Lutter and Jonathan Lyon has been continued within the *International Grant Program of the Chicago and Vienna Universities* (2016-2018) that resulted in two workshops on *Secular and Ecclesiastical Networks in Medieval Central Europe, 1100-1400* (Vienna, 2017) and on *Medieval European Urban History, 1200-1500* (Chicago, 2018) connecting issues raised in the main four research clusters of our project.

### Church Advocates and Noble Lordship

Donation charter of the Viennese townswoman Margarethe Preusslin, Vienna, 1306



### 3. URBAN SPACE AND URBAN NETWORKS

How did religious, administrative, and economic practices affect community building within and across urban space? Two associated post-doctoral projects by Elisabeth Gruber (Salzburg/Krems) and Judit Majorossy (Vienna) focused on social networks and religious practices in and across provincial towns in borderland regions of South Bohemia/Upper Austria (České Budějovice/Budweis, Český Krumlov/Krumau, Freistadt), South Moravia/Lower Austria (Znojmo/Znaim, Brno/Brünn, Weitra, Krems-Stein) and Western Hungary (Wiener Neustadt, Bratislava/Pressburg, Šopron/Ödenburg). During the late Middle Ages the Danube region played a mediating role in Central European trade, connecting Buda, Pressburg and Vienna to the towns of Upper Germany and the duchies of Styria and Austria to Wrocław/Breslau and Kraków/Krakau. How did urban communities shape this region and what role did social elites play in these processes? Their intra- and inter-urban relations manifested themselves in terms of kinship as well as in legal, institutional and economic respects. Eminent members of multi-branched elite families had their personal migration histories and operated in various spaces of belonging: the Poll, Ventur, or Jung families, among others, owned houses in several towns in the region, where they managed complex trade networks of kin and business partners, enjoyed close relations to the lords of the towns and countries, and donated extensively to religious and charitable institutions.

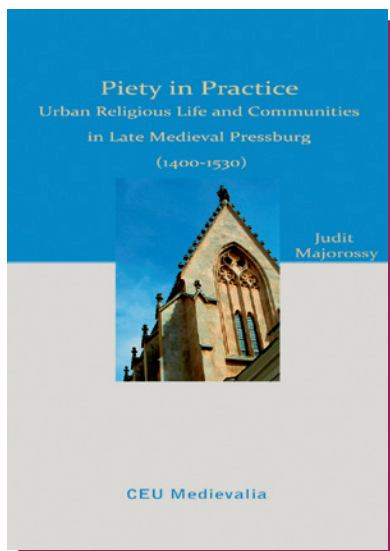


Above and right: Seal and drawing of Weitra, 14<sup>th</sup> c.

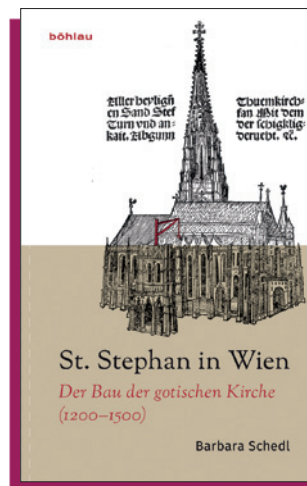


Sacral and profane buildings, town seals and images served as representations of communal belonging as well as social stratification. These structures depended on institutional and economic connections within and to other towns, political influence, religious and cultural affiliations of urban elites, e.g. through trans-regionally acting confraternities. To reconstruct the interplay of

these elements and their impact on community-building, different approaches were followed: regional in-depth analyses – for instance, two in-depth monographs on Freistadt (Gruber 2015) and Pressburg (Majorossy 2019) and an anthology on Vienna (Gruber/Zapke 2019) – were complemented by comparative analyses focusing on the actors' trans-regional interactions. Specific topics such as welfare practices, charitable donations, representations of urban elites in churches, itineraries of procession, and places of municipal communication such as hospitals were first discussed in targeted workshops and at the International Medieval Congress (IMC) in Leeds and consecutively elaborated in individual studies. Moreover, Elisabeth Gruber and Judit Majorossy organised an international conference on urban topography and perceptions of community as displayed in digital historical town maps as sources for exploring the interface of urban topography and community building.



How were buildings, objects and images used to represent ideals of community and notions of belonging? Subprojects in this cluster reflected on the role of visual and material culture in the formation and representation of urban and religious communities from the perspective of endowments of buildings, artworks and monuments. This project collaborated with Barbara Schedl's (Vienna) large-scale project on the long-term building process of Vienna's main parish church St Stephen, a ducal memorial and prestige project that likewise eminently contributed to the burghers' sense of belonging.



## 4. FORGING COMMUNITIES THROUGH VISUAL, MATERIAL, AND PERFORMATIVE CULTURE

Following up on work by Christian Opitz's PhD project on the Austrian/Bohemian border region, a further main focus in this research cluster was put on religious reform movements in Bohemia (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.). Kateřina Horníčková's postdoctoral project analysed changing patterns of patronage of religious and secular buildings and monuments (including murals, altarpieces, epitaphs) in Utraquist Tábor, Catholic Třeboň/Wittingau, and multi-confessional Dačice/Datschitz and symbols such as the Hussite chalice in Utraquist towns. She related her findings to manuscripts such as the gradual of the literati confraternity in Dačice or the "Velislav Bible" (cf. image below *Biblia picta Velislai*) that aims at forging togetherness by presenting a clerical community as a stronghold against dissenting religious voices represented by the "Antichrist". Visual sources articulating political "patriotic" cults (e.g. St. Wenceslas, Jan Hus) in Bohemia before and after the Hussite movement were another key topic. Overall, Kateřina Horníčková's long-term analyses of urban topographies reveal a development from religiously diversified urban landscapes in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century (Prague, Třeboň) to denominational "parallel worlds" in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dačice, Tábor) and to growing intolerance in post-reformation times of "confessionalisation", culminating in urban transformations of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, combining different types of sources and cross-disciplinary collaboration allowed for reconstructing complex socio-cultural topographies of belonging in regional contexts.



### Material and Visual Topographies of Community



Taborite Soldier, caricature in a Catholic Czech Bible, 15<sup>th</sup> c.

*Biblia picta Velislai*, around 1340

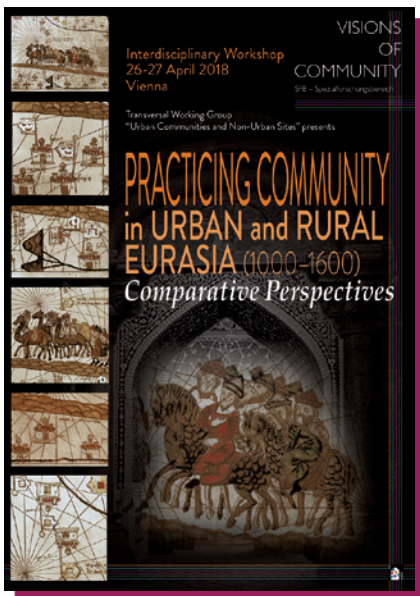
**Communities of Solemn Processions and Festive Entries**

Comparably, the main question of Károly Goda's postdoctoral study on the Central European principal cities Vienna, Prague, Cracow, and Buda/Ofen (*Staging the Mighty*, Cambridge UP 2020) addressed medieval Eucharistic marches and festive lordly entries as articulations of overlapping social spaces and likewise as complex hierarchical interfaces of ecclesiastical, civic, and noble/courtly interactions. On the one hand, Corpus Christi processions in general and especially by 1500 tended to be understood as negotiated forms of community building with more or less inclusive patterns of participation. Yet, in the wake of the Hussite movement and following confessional differentiations their staging became more polarised and even militarised. On the other hand, festive lordly entries remained hierarchically structured events, yet offering wider participatory options. Notwithstanding the Christian origins of both traditions, *adventus* in order to propagate lordly power offered a less sacred and thus more open vision of community (the lord as pars pro toto of a "proto-state") that remained successful even in the bi/multi-confessional contexts of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Jan Žižka processing behind the Eucharist and leading a group of warriors, 15<sup>th</sup> c.

All these aspects were addressed in constant collaboration within the Transversal Working Group *Urban Communities*. Approaches were tested at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds (*Food*, 2016; *Otherness*, 2017; *Memory*, 2018) and continuously re-structured in a series of internal and international workshops that compared Christian, Muslim and Buddhist urban settlements and non-urban sites and resulted in a collaborative volume on *Practicing Community in Urban and Rural Eurasia (1000-1600): Comparative Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Brill 2019).



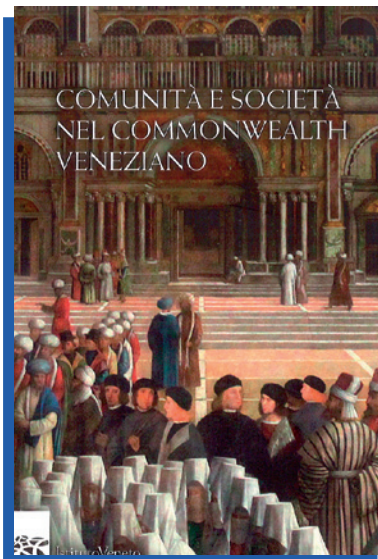
Workshop: Practicing Community in Urban and Rural Eurasia



## 5. SOCIETY, STATEHOOD AND RELIGION AT THE FRINGE OF THE LATE MEDIEVAL BALKANS: Case Studies from Dalmatia

The late medieval Balkans constituted a cross-cultural melting pot where Western and Eastern Christianity, and from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards Islam, intersected, particularly on the eastern Adriatic coast and in its Dinaric hinterland. Dalmatia is therefore probably one of the most fascinating and yet, at the same time, still one of the most under-researched areas in late medieval Europe. Although Mediterranean Studies, late medieval Balkan Studies and Ottoman Studies share a common space and period of interest in late medieval Dalmatia, they long tended to coexist rather than cooperate, mostly due to the divergent source material, various language barriers, and disciplinary traditions. Only very recently, their communication and scholarly exchange intensified, also vivifying this subproject's academic cooperation and activities in the region. Venice's overseas empire, for example, constitutes one of the traditional backbones of medieval Mediterranean studies, although research, until recently, mainly focused on the Greek-speaking areas of Venice's *Stato da mar*, thereby virtually omitting its distinctively differing Adriatic part and the urban and rural communities of late medieval Dalmatia, based on local written law.

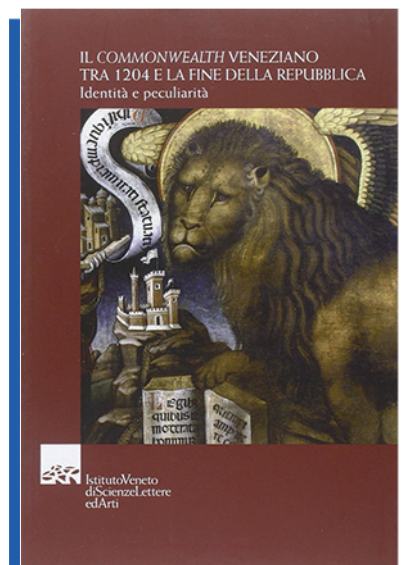
Introducing microhistory as a key approach to exploring structures, practices, discourses and visions of community in late medieval Dalmatia, this project drew heavily on an extraordinary rich corpus of source material discovered at the very outset of the project in the Croatian State Archive of Zadar. In particular, the archival records of the Dalmatian island of Korčula provided a wealth of source evidence on everyday life almost unparalleled in the late medieval Adriatic world. Intertwining the micro-level with overarching research questions through the concept of *Lebenswelten*, the project pursued a versatile comparative approach: by comparing the island society of Korčula to the mainland society of Split, by comparing urban and rural communities, and by juxtaposing pastoral economy and agriculture. Benefiting from theoretical input from social anthropology, the project critically discussed dominant, but binary patterns of interpretation and introduced more sophisticated models of community based on constitutional and socio-professional categories and how they were perceived, negotiated, and dealt with in late medieval social practice. It



### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The VISCOM project part *Society, Statehood and Religion at the Fringe of the Late Medieval Balkans: Case Studies from Dalmatia* was situated at the Institute for East European History at the University of Vienna.

PL Prof. Dr. Oliver Jens SCHMITT  
Institute of East European History,  
University of Vienna



Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt, Ermanno Orlando (eds.), *Il Commonwealth veneziano tra 1204 e la fine della Repubblica: Identità e peculiarità* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti 2015).  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1553/0x0038be22>

Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt, Ermanno Orlando (eds.), *Comunità e società nel Commonwealth veneziano* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti 2018).

thus offers a textual perspective on communities in which statehood and legal culture were key factors of social life, while ethnic and religious affiliation played a less prominent role than in other project areas, albeit fully including rural societies and the gender aspect.

## A VISCOM JOURNEY TO THE 15<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY EASTERN ADRIATIC

Our project embarked on the common VISCOM journey with three key concepts as expressed in its title: Society, Statehood and Religion. In the preparatory phase, it was already assumed that religion would not play a major role as the defining criterion for social belonging, since the area of our case studies was almost exclusively Catholic. Moreover, in the dense archival evidence, religion does not appear as a pattern of cultural belonging. Confessional homogeneity was one of the stabilising elements of late medieval Dalmatian society – and the very silence of the archival evidence (bearing in mind of course its predominantly administrative and jurisdictional character) can be seen as an indirect but powerful indicator of its importance: confessional belonging was evident, unnegotiable and self-explanatory. The same is true for ethnicity, a key concept of other subprojects of VISCOM: in the daily life and conflicts on Korčula, for example, ethnicity was not to be identified as an element defining allegiance and loyalty, despite late 15<sup>th</sup>-century Humanist discourses on Slavic culture and identity produced e.g. on the neighbouring island of Hvar.

The absence of confession and ethnicity in the culturally almost homogenous society of Dalmatia did not imply a lack of processes of community building in our source material. In contrast, discourses on communitarian belonging rather referred to legal categories, in particular to written law codes, the communal statutes. Basically, as local constitutions they stipulated a basic social division between the politically privileged and persons excluded from political decision-making; boundaries were thus imposed by statehood. The central Venetian authorities and their local office holders adopted these elaborate statutory law codes and acted mainly as mediators between local conflicting groups. State-

hood was a key term, omnipresent in the source evidence, since the archival documentation owes its existence to Venetian administration, local chancelleries and communal notaries, whose work triggered a high degree of literacy even at the level of village communities. Statehood consequently affected communitarian belonging in late medieval Dalmatia as a multi-layered phenomenon.

Against this backdrop, our results provided important impulses to ongoing debates on the character and the essence of Venetian statehood and on the question as to

A map of Dalmatia, c. 1690



how colonial or how indirect Venetian rule actually was in its *Stato da mar*. Evidence from Dalmatia points to an Adriatic model of negotiated power contrasted with more colonial patterns of governing in former Byzantine/Orthodox regions. Methodologically, microhistory offered crucial insights and arguments, since it enabled us to reconstruct how both power and communitarian belonging were negotiated in daily interactions between local actors. It allowed for studying these actors in great detail in their social and economic context and for interrelating personal and group agencies by focusing on individual careers and individual forms of behaviour.

Community is in fact both a source term and a theoretical concept to which society and its institutional manifestations only served as conceptional starting points. Analysing its use in late medieval sources demonstrated that contemporaries perceived community (as *communitas*, *comune*, *universitas*, ...) as a key term for structuring and defining social belonging in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Dalmatia. Community was directly bound to local written laws (*statutes*). It was understood as a legal term whose concrete meaning, however, was highly contested: patrician élites claimed an exclusive right to interpret local law and thus to govern island and city communities, while urban non-patricians and, on Korčula, also village communities demanded political equality with the privileged élite. In these debates, community was frequently invoked as a 'battle concept', defining social belonging via legal and constitutional terms – the basic question being who was entitled to be a full member of 'the' *communitas*. Thus, community in late medieval Dalmatia is built through both intensive social practice and conflict-ridden discourse, not only of members of the élite, but also of commoners and women, although the role of the latter is less well documented.

In social practice, communitarian delimitations running along constitutional and social fault lines were much more blurred than commonly assumed. Yet they can be identified in the broad field of encounters between people belonging to different communities, ranging from processes, in which local society materialised its hierarchical orders, to conflicts in pasture areas. Against this backdrop, space was operationalised as a dimension for understanding social and communitarian mechanisms: from the spatial structure of towns and villages with their symbolically charged areas (loggias, the palace of the commune, public places) to village communities that fiercely defended their territories. Communitarian belonging was thus very much expressed in terms of (micro-) space, while conflicts, on the discursive level, often implied a high degree of emotional involvement.

## ADDRESSING COMMUNITY IN LATE MEDIEVAL DALMATIA

The loggia of Korčula from the Comes' perspective



## BOUNDARIES AND DISTINCTIONS

<sup>1</sup> Fredrik Barth (Hg.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø 1969) 9.

City gate of Korčula



Moreover, a special focus was placed on mechanisms and expressions of communitarian belonging, from gestures of defiance and provocation to insults, analysing particularly symbols and gestures of communitarian solidarity (e.g. people rallying to support threatened members of their community). Inspired by recent studies on factions and community building in late medieval Italian cities, we extended our analysis to kinship networks and networks of solidarity and protection, underlining that the sustainable interpersonal contacts at the heart of such networks often crossed the boundaries of legally defined communities. Particularly in economic interaction, boundaries between groups were inconsistent and vague, inasmuch as the reconstruction of agrarian and business networks reveals cooperation even between leaders of opposing political camps.

On the discourse level, legal distinctions were invoked frequently, yet community boundaries were less rigid in social practice. Inspired by Fredrik Barth's observation that "boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them",<sup>1</sup> most of our case studies focused on daily interaction, both peaceful and conflictual, between different groups. They questioned the impermeability of communitarian boundaries drawn by local law and reproduced by modern historiography. The objects of investigation were modelled using both source-based criteria (patricians and non-patricians/commoners, citizens and foreigners, as defined in medieval laws) and hypothesis-driven criteria (e.g. urban/rural, agriculture/pastoralism). Criteria like confession and language were excluded since they did not help us differentiate between ethnolinguistically homogenous groups.

As a migration space, however, late medieval Dalmatia showed a greater variety of microregional differences. Continental Split offered shelter to refugees and migrant workers from Bosnia; although it was often more of a transit port to Italy than a final destination. In the case of the nearby islands, migration developed on a low scale and remained largely confined to short-distance migration (mainly from nearby territories in Herzegovina and Dubrovnik). While there is little evidence for the awareness of cultural/confessional differences on mainland Dalmatia, immigrants to the islands often did not differ culturally from the island communities. Once again, legal patterns of belonging (e.g. citizenship) and kinship ties proved to be far more powerful elements of integration.

Contrary to traditional historiography, however, legal and constitutional group boundaries were perceived as both normative and surmountable in social practice. Although communitarian belonging could not be negotiated on the discourse level, as can be seen in frequent conflicts in which patterns of belonging were reinforced, daily practice provided ways and spaces for enacting situational patterns of solidarity and loyalty even across traditional communitarian boundaries. This permeability implied a basic acceptance of the constitutional set of rules, which stood at the very core of all types of socio-political community building: the system itself was not questioned, yet control over political institutions and legal courts was contested. The common discursive

point of reference of both patricians and commoners was the constitutional community, be it of urban or rural nature, which provided the most stable framework of both communitarian solidarity and social and political inclusion, despite internal legal differentiations. The binary urban/rural model turned out to be rather problematic when understood as a socio-economic distinction: many patricians were involved in agriculture and village life as entrepreneurs and house-owners, thus obscuring socio-professional differences between urban and rural dwellers. The difference lay in legal status – it is only in this sense that terms such as rural and urban can be used.

Studying rural communities, structures and even spaces in the Middle Ages, one is usually confronted with a remarkable lack of profound source material, albeit the vast majority of the population in medieval Europe was rural. Unlike for the usually well, or at least better, documented urban communities, piecing together significant information on the communal life of medieval rural dwellers is therefore particularly challenging. As in the case of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Korčula, however, a wide range of judicial proceedings, administrative records and council and notarial acts concerning the island's rural population lay dormant in the extraordinarily rich archives of the Dalmatian island of Korčula preserved in the Croatian State Archive in Zadar.

On that basis, Fabian Kümmeler adopted a microhistorical perspective on the everyday life of Korčula's rural communities in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In his dissertation, he comparatively scrutinised fundamental structures, dynamics and visions of rural communities as well as the everyday *Lebenswelten* of Korčula's rural dwellers, with particular regard to village and pastoral communities. Within and beyond the scope of Mediterranean and Southeast European history, his dissertation's results foster a comprehensive understanding of both sociocultural and economic rural lifeworlds and the character of Venetian statehood and its judicial and administrative practice in the rural periphery of the Venetian *Stato da Mar*.

Comprehensively contributing to VISCOM's key questions, Kümmeler unveiled and analysed a complex and dynamic fabric of rural communities, which was closely interwoven both interpersonally and institutionally with the urban milieu and its political élite on Korčula. Within rural lifeworlds, village communities played an administrative, legal and sociocultural key role: while the Venetian count, as head of the communal judicial and administrative system, mediated between Venetian and local interests, local villagers carried out extensive administrative and executive tasks as communal officials, also enabling the rural population to directly access administrative writing. Korčula's statutory law and its community patterns served as a main

Loggia of the village Blato



## CASE STUDY 1:

### Rural Communities in late medieval Venetian Dalmatia: Comparing Lifeworlds and Visions of Community on Korčula (1420–1499)

Fabian Kümmeler, *Ländliche Gemeinschaften im venezianischen Dalmatien im Spätmittelalter – Lebenswelten und Gemeinschaftsvorstellungen auf Korčula (1420-1499)* (PhD thesis, University of Vienna 2017 / München: Oldenbourg forthcoming).

reference of social interaction, Venetian jurisdiction and extrajudicial arbitration as well as a centrepiece of rural visions of community. As a community of rights, liability and protection, villagers engaged in legal transactions and litigated jointly, just as they were collectively liable as a village community. Periodically places of jurisdiction, the villages moreover provided a territorial link to both interlocking and overlapping layers of community, whose concepts of otherness merged with the village's internal dynamics of conflict, solidarity and communication.

These layers included the socio-professional community of herdsmen, who practised a rather localised, sedentary form of animal husbandry. Herders were integral members of the village communities along the coast and on the islands of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Dalmatia – and thereby differed

Loggia of the village Blato, close-up



distinctively from the famous transhumant herding communities of Vlachs and Morlachs that inspire and mystify the idea of Balkan pastoralism even today. The lifeworld of Korčula's herders was – as Kümmeler pointed out in his contribution to the volume *Comunità e società nel Commonwealth veneziano* (ed. by Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt and Ermanno Orlando, Venice 2018) – not only contractually committed to the island's socioeconomic élite and closely intertwined with its village communities, but economically also extensively integrated into the Venetian Commonwealth. The close socioeconomic interaction between Korčula's pastoral communities and patrician élite likewise fully confirmed our subproject's adaptation of Fredrik Barth's theoretical model for assessing social mechanisms of community-building (replacing "ethnic" with "constitutional"): in late medieval Dalmatia, "vitally important social relations are maintained across [constitutional] boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomised [constitutional] statuses"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Fredrik Barth (Hg.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø 1969) 9-10.

Analysing mutual zones of contact between Korčula's urban and rural communities and foreigners showed a constant flow of merchant ships and pilgrim galleys on their way to Venice, the Levant, and other Adriatic and Mediterranean destinations, which prevented late medieval Dalmatian communes from being an isolated, peripheral microcosm. Instead, islanders and foreign merchants, sailors and pilgrims turned both the town's port and the island's rural harbours into perhaps small, but vibrant communication hubs, entangling the island's rural periphery within and beyond the Venetian Commonwealth. Moreover, Korčula enticed newcomers from the Adriatic and the wider Mediterranean realm to settle permanently in both its town and villages. Studying these dynamics confirmed not only the hypothesis that constitutional boundaries persisted despite numerous cases of border-crossing, while intensive references to community-linked patterns of belonging channelled communication ac-

ross the social key boundary between patricians and non-patricians. Furthermore, it also helped refining and replacing binary communal models (e.g. patrician/non-patrician, urban/rural, etc.) with a more diverse, filigree and complex conceptualisation of community-linked social practice in the rural realms of late medieval Venetian Dalmatia.

Ermanno Orlando retraced communitarian dynamics and social tensions in the urban community of Split between 1420 and 1480. Primarily basing his research on the rich archival holdings of the late medieval city of Split, Orlando uses the city's notarial, judicial and administrative records to reconstruct the urban community's dense network of personal contacts and collective relationships and their fluid processes of defining identities and communal belonging. In the light of VISCOM's flexible and open conceptualisation of community based on the tangibility of social practices, emotional and affective relationships and multiple forms of solidarity, Orlando centred his focus both on interpersonal relations and on the (symbolic) spaces, in which communities manifested themselves as more or less dense networks of solidarity and protection. He moreover asked how they interacted with and influenced each other in defining and negotiating communal belonging and solidarity, and how they positioned themselves towards the competing dominant powers, such as Venice or the Ottoman Empire. Exploring social structures, discursive rhetoric and various forms of communal belonging from family ties to more informal bonds based on the economy and political factions, Orlando opened up a wide panorama on Split as one of the most important and lively urban communities of the entire late medieval Dalmatian coast.

Similar to Korčula, communitarian identity in late medieval Split was primarily based on the city's statutes. Since all inhabitants referred to the same municipal institutions and the same statutory canon of law, rituals and traditions, a first factor that determined communal belonging was loyalty to the commune. In this context, the law proper – i.e. the statutory law and the privileges granted by Venice – served as an essential momentum of defining communitarian belonging, exclusion and competition between different social groups. As in other Dalmatian cities, the population of Split was legally subdivided into proper citizens, residents and foreigners, and socio-politically into patricians, enjoying the right of full political participation, and commoners. Nevertheless, enjoying political rights fuelled reciprocal solidarity and visions of communal belonging just as being excluded from them, albeit to varying degrees. Hence, all parts of Split's population tried to participate in public and political life, either through statutorily defined or through more informal (but just as legitimate) channels, such as patronage relations, economic interactions and direct negotiation with the Venetian rector of Split or the courts of appeal in Venice.

## CASE STUDY 2:

### Structures and Practices of an Urban Community: Split, 1420–1479



St. Mark's lion without face, Korčula

Particularly when adopting a microhistorical perspective on practical and symbolical dimensions of ceremonial traditions, rituals and the emotional value of urban space, tensions, conflicts and protests foster an in-depth analysis of the city's social dynamics, socio-political dialectic and various forms of interaction between groups. Although the population of Split is considered largely homogenous in terms of language and confession, various communities of foreigners could be traced in the documents; mostly immigrants from the immediate neighbourhood, refugees from the Ottoman Balkans and immigrants from Italy. Their cultural and professional background determined their level of social acceptance and integration, which was also true for the small group of Venetian officials who, despite their (sometimes rather symbolic) power, remained at the margins of local societies, not least because of the short duration of their offices.

Such overlapping social dynamics underlined the aforementioned observation that a careful reading of the sources does not support the idea of a binary antagonistic opposition between patricians and commoners. Instead, the source material revealed a rather osmotic dynamic between both groups, highlighting their reciprocal capacity, in spite of all tensions and conflicts, to negotiate and to interact on a daily basis. In the light of the overall VISCOM project, it was especially these porous and fluid margins of social life that created the opportunity for studying social fault lines, where the complexity of social interaction could foster hybrid combinations of multiple levels of communitarian belonging of individuals in the economic, social or confessional sphere in the late medieval Dalmatian city of Split.

The city of Korčula





## 6. THE TIBETAN EMPIRE AND THE FORMATION OF BUDDHIST CIVILISATION IN THE HIGHLANDS

Research in this project part was geographically and culturally focused on the Tibetan Plateau, but also extended into border regions to the south (i.e. Nepal and Northern India). The principal objective was to investigate the distinctive forms of communities that emerged in the context of the adoption and transformation of Buddhism. Historically, Buddhism was assimilated in Tibet in two main stages, each time in connection with extensive processes of cultural exchange with neighbouring regions: first, during the period of the Tibetan Empire (7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> c. CE) and, after the empire collapsed and the monastic institutions which had emerged during that imperial period disappeared, the Tibetan Buddhist Renaissance beginning in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. Noble families, rulers and religious authorities in the Renaissance period formed and legitimated their identities by referring to the increasingly glorified time of the empire, while at the same time adapting new Buddhist doctrines, practices, as well as forms of community through cultural contact, chiefly with Indian regions. As a result of this historical constellation, the project part conducted research relating to both of these periods.

The project investigators utilised hitherto untapped textual sources as well as newly gathered empirical data to explore stimuli for community building, and also employed narrative representations of communities as encountered in specific regional contexts. Historiographical, hagiographic and genealogical literature was especially in focus; research activities also expanded into the realm of Tantric ritual literature and included epigraphic and archaeological evidence.

In-depth analyses addressed the key institutions of the early Tibetan polity in its various phases, both prior to and after the appearance of the Buddhist religion, thereby laying the groundwork for explorations into how older forms of socio-religious interaction continued in the later period or were overlaid by newly formed patterns. Studies on the Renaissance period accentuated

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The VISCOM project part *The Tibetan Empire and the Formation of Buddhist Civilisation in the Highlands* was situated at the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

#### PLs:

Doz. Dr. Helmut KRASSER  
(2011-2014)

Doz. Dr. Vincent ELTSCHINGER  
(2014-2016)

Prof. Dr. Birgit KELLNER  
(2016-2019)

*Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA), Austrian Academy of Sciences*

### SOURCE MATERIAL

### INSTITUTIONS, LINEAGES AND NETWORKS



The inscription pillar at Bsam-yas monastery

the importance of the principle of lineal succession (both biogenetic and spiritual) in the making and narrating of religious and political communities, which emerged as particularly distinctive in comparison to the European and South Arabian case studies within VISCOM. In Tibet, spiritual transmission lines intersected with lines of descent among noble families, as is demonstrated in these families' genealogical literature as well as in how monastic centres and religious groups were represented. Lineages were memorialised – and sometimes constructed – by means of textual and artistic representations as well as collective practices. As such, they came to be essential for the establishment of political leadership in regional hegemonies within the generally fragmented political landscape of post-imperial Tibet. Nonetheless, studies on the formation of scholarly communities between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries reveal the significance of scholarly networks in cutting across lineages and linking different monastic centres.

## SUB-PROGRAMMES

Research in the project part was organised into five sub-programmes focussing on different forms of community.

### 1. ARISTOCRATIC FAMILIES, EMPIRE AND BUDDHISM

For details, see the results of Guntram Hazod's long-term research on the Tibetan tumulus tradition of imperial Central Tibet, available at: [www.oew.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition](http://www.oew.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition).

The research focus of this sub-programme lay with religious formation in the context of imperial rule and its decline. Combining textual studies with extensive in-situ field investigation, Guntram Hazod's research produced new historical evidence that has sharpened our understanding of Tibet's assimilation of Buddhism between the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the religion was patronised by centralised royal courts.

Relying on historical-religious narratives from the post-imperial age, Hazod examined the role of Buddhism in the creation of a "Tibetan" identity and addressed the tensions that materialised when the older social structures intersected with Buddhist discourses. Drawing on Old Tibetan (i.e. imperial) and post-imperial material, Hazod demonstrated in detail how family affiliation, territorial order and old (i.e. pre-Buddhist) ritual traditions became connected, and how this, in turn,

contributed to the formation of new social groups. Among other things, he addressed the role of aristocratic elites in the civil and military organisation during the empire period. Observations and findings from fieldwork in Central Tibet provided complementary data for examining the intersection of religion and ethnicity, and contributed new evidence in the field of Tibetan Empire studies.

The burial mound commonly ascribed to Emperor Srong-btsan-sgam-po (d. 649 CE), with a Buddhist temple on top from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century



An international conference problematising the conceptualisation of religion as separate from the social realm (*The Social and the Religious in Imperial Tibet*, IKGA, Nov. 2018) rounded out the thematic strand of this part of the project.

Complementing Hazod's enquiries into social formations in the imperial period, Mathias Fermer's dissertation project considered a network of monasteries in southern Central Tibet (Lhokha) in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries during the hegemony of the Rlangs-Phag-mo-gru-pa (r. 1354 – ca. 1480). In the larger VISCOM context, the project provided insights into medieval monasteries as institutions that disseminated Buddhist discourse and practice throughout various layers of society.

Since the administrative documents of most monasteries are lost or remain inaccessible, historical studies of Tibetan monastic communities must make use of various genres of historical and religious literature, combining these with ethnographic data whenever possible.

In pioneering studies like this one, such sources must be laboriously gathered and examined. New evidence can also be gained through close cooperation with Tibetan-language scholars hailing from the region. Such cooperation is also essential for processing new materials.

Hagiographies (Tib. *rnam-thar*, lit. "liberated [performance/s]") turned out to be a rich source for investigating monastic and sectarian group belonging. Analysis of *rnam-thar* texts allowed the tracking of the activities of Buddhist teachers in the region and revealed how monastic members operated in a wider network of different religious orders and (trans-)regional rulers. These sources also shed light on Tibetan ideals of spiritual learning and the entire range of Buddhist scholastic and contemplative practices, while comparative considerations demonstrated commonalities of the *rnam-thar* genre with Christian and Islamic hagiographies studied in other VISCOM project parts. Analyses were assisted by the production of a digital corpus with historical and semantic mark-up (see below: *Sakya Research Centre*). These resources permitted underlying networks of regional teacher-student encounters and preceptor-patron relationships to be traced. In the larger comparative setting, the outcome of Fermer's microhistorical analysis placed the specific role of Tibetan Buddhist teachers (Tib. *bla-ma*; Skt. *guru*) in their communities into sharper relief, particularly with regard to the transmission of esoteric knowledge and the foundation and sustenance of religious communities (into which Tibetan teachers are believed to return in successive incarnations).

## 2. THE SAKYA MONASTIC NETWORK OF SOUTHERN CENTRAL TIBET



Mural painting showing the monastic compound of the Sakya monastery Gong-dkar-rDo-rje-gdan

Supplementing textual sources with ethnographic data, Fermer was also able to show how monasteries of the Lhokha region, in particular those of the Sakya order, became established in close interplay with the regional court of the Yar-rgyab family, authorised by the central Phag-mo-gru-pa court. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, this family governed a fertile region comprising 150 km along the southern bank of the gTsang-po river. Geographic and toponymic information obtained in the field allowed the historical mapping of the monastic landscape as it emerged with the rise of Yar-rgyab family in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### SAKYA RESEARCH CENTRE

<http://sakyaresearch.org>

The *Sakya Research Centre* (SRC), which has been under development since 2011 in tandem with Fermer's dissertation project and with support from research staff at the IKGA, is a web application for Tibetan historical and literary research. It is designed as an open online platform and reference system and is based on a corpus of machine-readable digital texts in Tibetan that are embedded in an interlinked, relational database. The resource has grown into a large repository of Tibetan digital texts, historical references, images and geo-data. Data is entered and processed by a group of Tibetan-language scholars and Western Tibetologists.

In addition to the digital corpus emerging from Fermer's dissertation, the database holds a considerable amount of additional literature, including standard works of Tibetan historiographical literature, as well as numerous genealogies, hagiographies, teaching records and religious histories related especially to the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Digital texts are encoded in XML following the guidelines of the Text En-

SRC eText reader showing a Tibetan hagiography with semantic text mark-up (screenshot)

The screenshot displays the web interface of the Sakya Research Centre. At the top, there is a red header with the site name 'sakya research centre' and navigation icons. Below the header, a search bar and navigation links are visible. The main content area shows a Tibetan text snippet with semantic annotations. The text is in Tibetan script and includes a title 'R2: ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྗེ་ཐམས་ཅད་མཐུན་པ་དོན་གཤན་པ་ཚེན་པོ་ཀུན་དགའ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་དཔལ་བཟང་པོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་ངོ་མཚར་རིན་པོ་ཆའི་གཏེར་མཛོད།'. The text is annotated with red and blue markers, indicating semantic information. On the right side, there is a sidebar with a search box and a 'date / event' section. The 'date / event' section contains a list of dates and events, including '1540: chos kyi rje thams cad mkhyen pa rdo rje gdan pa chen po kun dga' mam rgyal dpa'i bzang po'i nam gar thar pa ngo mshar rin po che'i gter mdzod, at gong dikar rdo rje gdan, with rgya ston byang chub dbang rgyal (1470-ca. 1540/50s), with yongs 'dzin shAkya kun dga' (~16th cent.)'. The bottom of the page features logos for ÖAW, universität wien, and the number 50.

coding Initiative (TEI); they are fully searchable and linked to other entities in the database. The conception and development of this web project stimulated broader discussions within VISCOM on technological methods for contextualising and visualising historical evidence deriving from different regional contexts.

Especially during the Buddhist Renaissance period, Tibetan Buddhism was shaped considerably through ritual and esoteric literature and practices of Indian Tantric traditions – with Tantrism being a phenomenon that in Indian contexts cuts across the boundaries of Buddhism and Śaivism. Moving beyond the geographic and historical frame of medieval Tibet, research in this sub-programme addressed, for the first time, the phenomenon of Tantra in late medieval India (ca. 700–1200 CE) through the lens of “community”. The VISCOM project thus provided new stimuli for this area of study, in which social questions hitherto occupied a marginal position.

The project team around the former PL Vincent Eltschinger, consisting of Nina Mirnig, Marion Rastelli and Francesco Bianchini, investigated early medieval Tantric communities and their surviving textual testimonies in Himalayan border regions (i.e. Northern India, Nepal and Kashmir) in individual case studies. An international symposium, *Tantric Communities in Context: Sacred Secrets and Public Rituals* (IKGA, 5-7 February 2015), brought together leading experts from the field of ancient and medieval Indian textual traditions. The voluminous contributions, published in a conference volume, offer new insights into the emergence and institutionalisation of various Tantric communities as they sought to expand their networks across South-, Central- and South-East Asia.

Mirnig’s post-doctoral research in the project investigated death rites in the earliest extant Śaiva Siddhānta Tantric sources as a mirror of the social expansion of early Tantric communities, and illustrated how Tantric religious specialists adopted the ritual repertoire to include a wider clientele. Mirnig also conducted research on regional patronage networks of Śaiva communities in the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal) on the basis of newly surveyed Sanskrit epigraphic evidence dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century, shedding light on the role of early local devotional practices and courtly patronage in promoting Śaiva initiatory communities within the religio-political landscape of the valley. Pursuing the question of an interface between Tantric communities and political elites, Bianchini focused on the role of Tantric rituals in consolidating the power of Tantric priests in the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra tradition, reconstructing their strategic role in the legitimation of royal power. The research activities of this sub-programme provided fertile ground for wider-ranging explorations into the social history of Indian religions.

Nina Mirnig, Marion Rastelli, Vincent Eltschinger (eds.), *Tantric Communities in Context*, Proceedings of the International Conference Sacred Secrets and Public Rituals held in Vienna, February 5-7, 2016 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press forthcoming).

### 3. TANTRIC COMMUNITIES IN CONTEXT



Diagram of the esoteric “subtle body” in Hindu Tantrism, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.

## 4. COMMUNITIES OF SCHOLASTIC LEARNING

Research in this sub-programme, led by Birgit Kellner und Pascale Hugon, addressed the formation of intellectual communities in Tibet from the beginning of the Renaissance period (late 10<sup>th</sup> c.) and their link to monastic communities. Focusing on the monastery of gSang-phu-Ne'u-thog – a major centre for the development of early Tibetan scholasticism – Hugon explored its roles as an enclave of learning and as a religious centre, as well as the affiliations that famous teachers and representatives of the scholastic tradition had with this institution. Her study highlighted both gSang-phu's function as a "centre of gravity" – attracting students and scholars interested in scholastic learning – and as a "centrifugal point", from which learning was exported and reproduced elsewhere.



The monastery of gSang-phu-Ne'u-thog, detail of thangka-painting, Rubin Museum of Art collection, New York

In a broader perspective, VISCOM's overall focus on visions of community offered a valuable framework for revisiting the phenomenon of specialist intellectual cultures in medieval religions in a comparative framework. Linked to the studies conducted in VISCOM's first period under the larger umbrella of "Enclaves of Learning", the notion of "scholastic communities" integrated investigations of textual and intellectual aspects of religion with questions of social practices and processes. It particularly addressed the sociohistorical formation of scholastic communities, the methods and intellectual practices they cultivated, and the issue of authority in connection with the authorship of religious literature.

These themes were the object of three one-day workshops organised by Kellner and Hugon in the series *Rethinking Scholastic Communities across Medieval Eurasia*. Each workshop brought together contributions from scholars working in the three main areas of the VISCOM project.

## 5. GENEALOGICAL COMMUNITIES: KINSHIP, POLITICS, AND ETHNICITY

This sub-programme set out to assess the background and social usage of late medieval clan genealogies from the Tibetan highlands. Previous scholarship had generally taken for granted the accuracy of the ethnographic gloss "clan" to refer to these important groups (called *gdung* or *rus* in Tibetan), which have long been recognised as key agents in the region's socio-religious history. Nonetheless, no systematic attempt had ever been made to critically analyse the extant textual materials depicting these groups. The genealogies that detail the make-up of these collectives, their background and exploits thus offered a natural source for further research into these important yet poorly understood groups.

The key text in Reinier Langelaar's research, which combined literary-historical with ethnographic work, was the *Singular Volume of the Rlangs [Clan] (Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru)*. Describing the ancestral lineage of the rulers of Phag-mo-gru, who rose to a hegemonial position in the central highlands in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, it is one of the most enigmatic Tibetan genealogies, as well as one of the most elaborate. The work's own

claims to ancient authorship have been accepted by some recent scholars, which further elevated its stature as a source of paramount interest that promised a possible window into the cultural and social formations of an otherwise poorly attested past.

Detailed study of the text (including an edition and translation), however, has demonstrated that the work cannot be pinned to any date before the 14<sup>th</sup> century; rather, it stems from the period of the house's heyday. Accordingly, it is a highly political document that was crafted to boost the stature of the community that embraced it. The political angle of this and related works, as well as the patchwork and contrived nature of the documented descent lines, cast a long shadow on the degree to which this and comparable works can be used to pursue historical ethnographic queries: indeed, it seems that most such genealogies should not be taken as representative specimens of a broader ethnographic reality, but rather as cultural anomalies associated especially with political powerhouses.

Moreover, this line of inquiry even cast doubt on the identity of the ruling house as scions of the Rlangs clan, an allegedly old descent group with a broad and trans-regional historical presence. The only tangible communities that can reliably be discerned behind this genealogical work are a ruling house and an otherwise rather obscure eastern Tibetan descent group, whom the work proceeds to incorporate into the better-known Rlangs. The appropriation of this established name is presumably best understood as a legitimising strategy that helped raise the house's relatively unknown lineage from its geographically and historically peripheral status, thus allowing the house to access the cultural clout associated with established historiographical figures and episodes related to the golden days of the Tibetan Empire, as well as the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. These insights have helped challenge the established image of the Plateau as a large clan-scape filled with deep-rooted descent groups, suggesting instead a landscape filled with local lineage groupings and villages that occasionally were drawn together by politically powerful Lévi-Straussian houses.

Overall, this strand of research tied in well with the larger VISCOM project and several of its working groups. Within the transversal working group (TWG) *Tribes and Ethnicity*, for instance, a similar approach was used to study ethnic origin stories of the Tibetans (*bod-pa*). This demonstrated that Tibetan identity – across various agents, communities, religions, and regions – constituted a rather contested and fluid field. This shed an interesting light on the crafting of historical Tibetan ethnic identities, a field of research that has received but little attention in scholarship. In a like manner, the biographical elements found in genealogies offered substantial materials for comparative research into medieval biographical collections, which was pursued in the TWG *Medieval Biographical Collections*.



A newly erected, 4 metre tall statue of an ancestor of the Rlangs clan, Nang-chen, southern Qinghai, PR China

## VISCOM RESULTS

### 1. FINDING NEW WAYS IN AN EMERGING FIELD

VISCOM was one of the pioneer projects in the emerging field of the 'Global Middle Ages'. This is a field that is highly challenging: it requires mastering numerous languages, disciplinary methods and divergent bodies of historical knowledge. Furthermore, stepping out of the comfort zone of European history with its well-established research routines exposes scholars to the problems of a global knowledge system that is in many ways still post-colonial. We cannot simply put away Eurocentric perceptions of the world like an old pair of glasses. Ideas about the European path to modernity are at the root of the historical sciences, and the Western university system still serves as a benchmark of research excellence. It would not make sense to discard all of this and reboot historical scholarship from a subaltern perspective. We need to find ways in which we can maintain the high methodological standards developed in the development of the Humanities and Social Sciences, but disentangle them from their Eurocentrist assumptions and mechanisms.

There is, as yet, no consensus on how to achieve this. At present, the 'global turn' in Medieval Studies offers more questions than answers. Is global comparison a legitimate method to reach a deeper understanding of historical change? Or should we concentrate on global connectivity and the hybridity that it brings about? If we address comparative questions (as VISCOM has done), how can we constitute our units of comparison? 'Peoples' or 'cultures' should not be reified by regarding them as coherent units fixed across space and time, and comparing them to other such bounded and coherent units. Another challenge is language and terminology. There is growing dissent about the use and definition of key terms, such as culture, religion, identity, ethnicity, tribe or state. This is all the more problematic between the disciplines and world regions. The same applies to issues of periodisation – were there Chinese or Islamic 'Middle Ages'?

VISCOM has developed a road-map to move through this difficult territory, which was already set out in the project proposal. This road-map basically proved reliable, but had to be adapted as we moved along. This required intensive debate and self-reflection, which were an integral part of the project. We insisted on applying comparative methods but avoided generalisations, and focused on mid-range and qualitative comparison. We decided to continue using our scholarly language, allowing for divergent disciplinary uses (e.g. tribes/ethnicity) and making them transparent. We preferred low-threshold terms where applicable, but did not avoid 'loaded' broader concepts where they could hardly be replaced. Addressing Buddhism as a religion alongside Islam and Christianity may be inadequate in many research contexts, but it also offers an approximate way to frame what these 'religions' had in common, as long as we are aware of the fundamental differences. We sought to historicise our terms by carefully relating them to the language of the sources, and by studying the significance of the terms and concepts of the societies under study. In the proposal for the second funding period, we could already offer a list of methodological principles of 'the VISCOM approach' (see I. 6).





VISCOM has not solved all the problems that still create controversy in the field. Yet the achievement of the project was, in the first place, to have addressed the methodological issues in theory and practice, and to have shown a pragmatic way to deal with the problems that global medieval research will continue to pose.

Because of the global context in which VISCOM was set, the project design had to be experimental, and required a process of adaptation to new questions and methods. In comparison with similar large projects in global history (and thanks to FWF policy), VISCOM had some structural advantages. Unlike interdisciplinary networking grants, it not only funded meetings and other networking activities, but received substantial funding for the research itself, and for a team of young scholars. Yet it was not as big and heterogeneous as German Clusters of Excellence or even German SFBs, which have to face major challenges in establishing a manageable team in constant communication. Unlike most ERC grants, VISCOM was not tailored to the needs of a single project leader, but funded a team. And unlike many other project formats, it provided funding for eight years. This made it possible to build up competence, take time to address methodological issues as they came up, and to select and recalibrate comparative issues with great care.

The very suitable size of VISCOM allowed construction of an innovative form of interdisciplinary collaboration through bottom-up identification of comparative topics and the establishment of ‘transversal working groups’. This proved to be a very practical and successful model of comparative research. The TWGs were a flexible format that could easily respond to problems or to the progress of work, but also allowed for continuous exchanges between junior and senior scholars along a particular axis of comparison for years. In the framework of the SFB at large, which provided feedback, critique and institutional support, the TWGs and other comparative formats contributed much to the success of the project.

Unlike many projects of global comparison, VISCOM did not operate chiefly on an abstract level of cultural models and broad social structures, but mainly engaged with medieval sources. We studied a wide variety of texts, but also images. What all case studies had in common is that they dealt with scriptural societies, in a double sense: these were literate cultures with developed writing systems and elaborate practices of written cultural memory; and at the heart of their symbolic systems was Holy Scripture, books of revealed truth attributed to a prophet and/or to divine inspiration, whether Buddhist, Christian or Muslim. The beliefs and cultic practices organised around these revelations tended to expand to areas of human existence that previous, ‘classical’ religions had not included. Such religious discourses pervaded many of the texts studied in VISCOM, from Biblical exegesis, apocalyptic literature and saints’ lives to texts of the Buddhist canon and debates about orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Texts about more mundane issues – historiography, charters, court proceedings, genealogies – could also reflect religious ‘visions of community’ to some extent. However, often that did

## 2. AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT STRUCTURE

## 3. MILESTONES

### a. SCRIPTURES, TEXTS AND NARRATIVES

not impinge much on their worldly concerns. Ideas about community were never fully absorbed into the orbit of revealed truth, even where they employed some religious rhetoric.

Narratives of community and identity were a particular concern in VIS-COM. Historiographical and hagiographical narratives in all studied cases follow a comparable logic. Much is based on largely shared models of good rulership, sanctity or reflections about changing political fates. There are remarkable differences in detail: the truthfulness of a work of historiography can be seen based on its closeness to the reported events, its use of reliable sources, its critique of mistaken ideas about the past, rigorous state control of its contents or the legitimate status of its author as a hereditary priestly guardian of social memory. Most historiographical traditions employ a variety of these strategies of truth. Unlike Latin chronicles, Arabic histories use chains of trusted sources similar to Islamic jurists to certify the veracity of their accounts. Likewise, the legitimacy of an erudite religious scholar in his biography can be argued on the basis of his right creed, his ascetic feats, his lineage of illustrious teachers, the miracles he works, his stupendous learning, God's grace or his incarnating a superior being. For instance, unlike Christian hagiography, Buddhist saints' lives put much weight on the succession of teachers and incarnations of the masters they portray. Our studies resulted in a volume produced by the TWG *Medieval Biographical Collections*, in a database and some fundamental studies of the *Magnum Legendarium Austriae*, in a special issue of the *Medieval History Journal* about ethnic origin narratives, and in the six-volume series on *Historiography and Identity*, among others. The *Sakya Research Centre* provides a rich online collection of Tibetan texts. Historiographic narratives, as we found, rarely construct just one, obvious identity; their 'visions of community' are more complex, and inner tensions and contradictions are an excellent guide to negotiations about identity and belonging. Medieval perceptions of identity are more sophisticated than commonly assumed.

## b. ETHNICITY, GENEALOGY AND KINSHIP

The ways in which ethnicity shaped the perception of the political landscape, and in which ethnic ties were, or were not used to reinforce claims to power or social cohesion were an overarching topic we approached from many angles. In some case studies, ethnicity remained more or less marginal, either because the body of sources studied did not address it, or because it did not seem relevant to the research focus chosen. In 15<sup>th</sup>-century Austria or Dalmatia, ethnicity was a peripheral concern. Being Tibetan, who was or who was not Tibetan, and in what ways Tibetans were or were not related to the Chinese through a common ancestor was not insignificant, as reflected in different versions of the Tibetan origin myth, but it did not pervade the political language in the period under study. Being (or not being) Arab had more political impact, although with changing salience. It certainly mattered in the Yemen, where a pre-Arabic past was Arabicised, or maintained in different ways. Being Yemeni (and not Northern Arab) was an issue in factional strife in the Abbasid Caliphate. When the Caliphate lost its cohesion, ethnic and tribal groups seized power in different regions.

But that did not lead to the establishment of ethnic polities, like it did in Europe after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. This divergent development had many reasons, as our work in VISCOM showed; one reason was, as it turned out, that both Christian teachings and the interests of the Western Churches favoured the rise of kingdoms governed by peoples of barbarian provenance. Our studies of Biblical exegesis strengthened this argument. Universal religion and ethnic particularity were not opposites, as often assumed in the case of medieval Christianity; they rather reinforced each other.

An important line of research dealt with ethnonyms and the terminology of ethnicity. If we want to apply the concept of 'ethnicity' to medieval worlds, we have to understand better how contemporaries wrote about peoples and their significance. Important evidence of the uses of Latin terminology was collected in the data-base *GENS*. Wide-ranging comparison showed that the semantic field of ethnicity, tribes and peoplehood is organised very differently in different languages. Terms may be derived from the language of procreation and kinship, or not at all. The notion of common blood and origin is very wide-spread in the perception of peoples, but there is also a recurrent awareness that peoples may be constituted differently. A comparative study about the role of ethnonyms in late antique Europe and in the Islamic World was conducted in a doc-Team project associated with VISCOM. Comparison was also very fruitful on genealogies, a trans-cultural phenomenon, put to rather divergent uses. In practice, genealogical memories were often relatively vague, and that certainly applies to early medieval continental Europe, where genealogical constructions hardly mattered; while in the Islamic World, there were extensive genealogical handbooks compiled by specialists, such as al-Hamdani in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Elaborate Tibetan genealogies combined biological and spiritual pedigrees.

Visions of community, as we understood them, are not simply ideas about societies. They react to social realities and have a prescriptive character which can deeply shape motivations and practices. They are rooted in discourse and related to power structures, which lends them some degree of authority; but they can also challenge existent powers in the name of actual communities-to-be. The great religions can play ambivalent roles in this field of tension between discourse and practice. They inspire 'visions of community', but cannot always control their impact.

All case studies had something to do with empires, which in many of them constitute a first stage: the Late Roman Empire, the Caliphate and the Tibetan Empire. All of them were driven by religion, enforced or propagated it, and used it for their ends and means. None of them succeeded in maintaining the equation between universal religion and 'universal' empire. Imperial ambitions supported by religion remained on the agenda, although in very different forms, and so the period under scrutiny closed with a largely symbolic Holy Roman Empire, an expansive Ottoman Empire which claimed continuity to the Caliphate, and, a little later, the Tibet of the Dalai Lamas. It is remarkable that in

c. PRACTICES OF  
COMMUNITY:  
empires, cities and  
monasteries

the Western half of Europe, a plurality of states curbed any imperial dynamic, except for colonial expansion. The failure of the Carolingian Empire was a first revealing case to be studied in this context.

The variety of developments of urban communities was a challenge for VISCOM, dealt with in one of the key TWGs. The gradual development of towns in Tibet, the urban enclaves in the vicinity of tribal territories in the Yemen, and the city communes constituted on a strong legal basis in late medieval Dalmatia and Central Europe are rather different forms of city life. They also left behind different types of documentation, although the archival record for some Dalmatian towns is exceptional even in late-medieval Europe. Thus, the thick microhistory of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Korčula with its wealth of examples from everyday life studied found no match in either Yemen or Tibet. In general, the huge body of documentary evidence in medieval Europe, often edited or at least well-ordered in archives, finds no match in the Asian case studies, which in itself raises interesting comparative issues about archival practices, but also about modern historical interest in this type of material. However, the TWG on *Urban and Non-Urban Sites and Centres* did find ample material for comparison on urban structures or the provisioning of cities, and in this area, similarities between the different macro-regions are much more substantial.

As shown above, monasteries as 'Enclaves of Learning' formed a comparative pilot project in VISCOM: this TWG compared South Arabian hijras, Tibetan and European monastic institutions. Similar to the urban communities, the ambivalence between their often well-delineated boundaries and their permeability in practice constituted a very suitable field of comparison. The impact of monastic authority on Carolingian governance, the centrality of Tibetan gompas in the aristocratic power structures around them, the hijras as sacrosanct areas marked off from the tribal territories that surrounded them, the manifold relationship between city and cloister in late medieval Central Europe – all these 'enclaves of learning' catered to the needs of surrounding societies, but maintained a strong sense of 'communal' distinction. They also produced influential visions of community, which they tried to put into practice as models of a communal life according to the revealed truth. Yet they can also serve as examples that such models of communities found their limits in practice.

#### 4. MOVING FORWARD IN A COMPLEX FIELD

These examples provide just a few milestones on the way to a better understanding of complex long-term global developments in the course of a millennium of history. VISCOM was not geared to solving one particular research question, or concluding long discussions with a robust synthesis. Rather, the project opened up new avenues of research. More work will be needed about many of the issues we raised. As could be expected, the lines of mid-range comparison followed in VISCOM do not add up to a coherent new 'grand narrative' about the different impact of universal religions on particular communities. It became only clearer that wholesale comparison between Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, or between Europe and Asia, beyond rather general models,

usually does not lead to results that stand the test on the ground. A differentiated historical narrative can measure developments in different regions by options available and not available, taken or not taken, but also has to take into account the paradoxical effects that such decisions may have. Much has already been published about these issues (see bibliography). The VISCOM team hope to offer more such narratives and conclusions based on the findings of VISCOM in their forthcoming articles and books.

In the last project phase, VISCOM fed the experience we gathered in comparative research back into the field under the label 'Adventures in Comparison'. For that purpose, it liaised with other large and pioneering projects in the 'Global Middle Ages': among them, the AHRC networking grant *Defining the Global Middle Ages*; the international networking grant *Power and Institutions in Medieval Islam and Christendom* (PIMIC); the German Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe' in Heidelberg; the NWO project *Eurasian Empires. Integration Processes and Identity Formations*; and the ERC grant RELMIN: *The legal status of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean world (5<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries)*. 'Adventures in Comparison' is the title of the VISCOM final conference in February 2019, organised to exchange research experiences and to discuss methodologies. Joint sessions under this title were also held at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in 2018 and at the Annual Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America in 2019, which addressed the topic of 'the Global Turn in Medieval Studies'. In this way, the VISCOM experience can be made useful for further comparative research.

VISCOM has also led to the foundation of the open-access Journal *Medieval Worlds: Comparative & Interdisciplinary Studies*, established as a spin-off by the two speakers of VISCOM. It was initially funded by seed money from the FWF, and has been published biannually since 2015. It has fast developed into an important forum for global and comparative Medieval Studies, and has download figures up to 2000 per article and more. Another spin-off is the creation of an interdisciplinary research platform called 'Global Eurasia – Comparison and Connectivity' at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Whatever the institutional impact, what VISCOM has achieved was to educate a generation of junior scholars (approx. forty of them were involved in the project) in taking into account a global perspective in their own research. The VISCOM experience was that disciplinary research can profit enormously from comparative methods. They can teach us to question what we have taken for granted, and thus provide an impulse to go beyond the seeming certainties in the fields in which we do research. Global Medieval Studies are an inspiring approach, and beyond any results about 'comparison and connectivity' that this line of work may yield, they provide new perspectives on the past, and consequently, also on the present.

## 5. VISCOM'S IMPACT IN GLOBAL MEDIÉVAL STUDIES

Defining the Global Middle Ages:  
<http://globalmiddleages.history.ox.ac.uk/>  
Power and Institutions in Medieval Islam and Christendom:  
<http://pimic-itn.eu/>  
Asia and Europe:  
<http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/de/startseite.html>  
Eurasian Empires. Integration Processes and Identity Formations:  
<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/eurasian-empires#tab-1>



[www.medievalworlds.net](http://www.medievalworlds.net)

## VISCOM GLOSSARY

- JFF:** Junior Fellows Research Forum, jour fixe, in which the VISCOM junior members developed strategies of comparison
- Landpartie:** Viennese expression for the VISCOM team's biannual project meeting in a countryside location
- TWG:** Transversal Working Groups, overarching comparative groups addressing primary research topics, in which members of different VISCOM project parts joined in comparative discussions, workshops, conferences and publications (*Enclaves of Learning, The End of Times, Medieval Biographical Collections, Urban Communities and Non-Urban Sites and Centres, Tribes and Ethnicity*)
- VISCOM 1:** The first phase of the project, 2011-2015
- VISCOM 2:** The second phase of the project, 2015-2019
- VISCOM effect:** Research topics developed in the individual project parts opened up comparative avenues to the other project parts and extended the scope of VISCOM. This facilitated comparative reflections on methodology and led in turn to careful model-building within the working groups.
- VISCOM Lecture Series:** Lectures and seminars held by scholars of various disciplines for the VISCOM team
- VISCOM Lecture Strand:** *Ringvorlesung*, lectures held by VISCOM junior scholars, PLs and guests at the University of Vienna during summer semester 2013.
- VISCOM Session Strand:** Several sessions covering VISCOM themes held at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds, UK from 2012 to 2018

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(alphabetical order)

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A detailed overview of our publications is presented in our booklet *Visions of Community – Results* available online at [https://viscom.ac.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/viscom\\_PUBLIKATIONEN\\_web.pdf](https://viscom.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/viscom_PUBLIKATIONEN_web.pdf).

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## SOUTH ARABIA

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ARTICLES IN  
TRANSVERSAL  
PUBLICATIONS  
(alphabetical order)

Comprehensive list:  
<https://viscom.ac.at/projects/south-arabia/publicationspresentations/>

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## LATE MEDIEVAL CENTRAL EUROPE

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ARTICLES IN  
TRANSVERSAL  
PUBLICATIONS  
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Comprehensive list:

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## LATE MEDIEVAL DALMATIA

PL Prof. Dr. Oliver Jens Schmitt  
Institute of East European History, University of Vienna

ARTICLES IN  
TRANSVERSAL  
PUBLICATIONS  
(alphabetical order)

MONOGRAPHS,  
COLLECTED VOLUMES,  
ARTICLES  
(alphabetical order)

The short titles refer to our transversal publications.

Comprehensive list:  
<https://viscom.ac.at/projects/late-medieval-dalmatia/publicationspresentations/>

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## THE TIBETAN EMPIRE

PL Prof. Dr. Birgit Kellner

(2016-2019)

Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA), Austrian Academy of Sciences

ARTICLES IN  
TRANSVERSAL  
PUBLICATIONS  
(alphabetical order)

Comprehensive list:

<https://viscom.ac.at/projects/tibetan-empire/publicationspresentations/>.

The short titles refer to our transversal publications.

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Pascale Hugon, *Enclaves of Learning, Religious and Intellectual Communities in Tibet: The Monastery of gSang phu Ne'u thog in the Early Centuries of the Later Diffusion of Buddhism*, in: Hovden/Lutter/Pohl, **Meanings of Community 2016**, 289-308; [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004315693\\_014](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004315693_014).

Birgit Kellner, *Genealogy into the Future: Glimpses from Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653-1705) Exposition of the Extended Dalai Lama Lineage*, in: Hovden/Lutter/Pohl, **Meanings of Community 2016**, 203-231; [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004315693\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004315693_011).

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Francesco Bianchini, *Scripture meets royal power: the case of the Ahirbudhnyasamhitā*, in: Nina Mirnig, Marion Rastelli, Vincent Eltschinger (eds.), *Tantric Communities in Context* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press forthcoming).

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Mathias Fermer, *Tibetische Meister und ihr »befreites Wirken«: Auf Spurensuche monastischer Gemeinschaften in den Lebensgeschichten des mittelalterlichen Tibet*, in: *Historicum* 31 (2014) 34-39; [http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/0xc1aa5576\\_0x00369fc3](http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/0xc1aa5576_0x00369fc3).

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COLLECTED VOLUMES,  
ARTICLES  
(alphabetical order)

Mathias Fermer, Mural Paintings of the Sakya Founding Masters with Two Hevajra Lineages, in: David Jackson, *A Tibetan Artistic Genius and His Tradition: Khyentse Chenmo of Gongkar* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art 2016) 105-119; [https://issuu.com/rmanyc/docs/a\\_revolutionary\\_artist\\_96](https://issuu.com/rmanyc/docs/a_revolutionary_artist_96).

Mathias Fermer, Putting Yar rgyab on the Map, in: Volker Caumanns, Marta Sernesi (eds.), *Fifteenth Century Tibet: Cultural Blossoming and Political Unrest* (LIRI Seminar Proceedings Series 8, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute 2017) 63-96; <http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/?arp=0x0038c0ea>.

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Nina Mirnig, Marion Rastelli, Vincent Eltschinger (eds.), *Tantric Communities in Context, Proceedings of the International Conference Sacred Secrets and Public Rituals held in Vienna, February 5-7, 2016* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press forthcoming).

Nina Mirnig, The 'Divine' Worshipper in the Śivadharmaśāstra: Conceptualising the Śaiva Lay Devotee (śivabhakta) in the Construction of a Śaiva Social Order, in: Nina Mirnig, Marion Rastelli, Vincent Eltschinger (eds.), *Tantric Communities in Context* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press forthcoming).

## MEDIEVAL WORLDS

All articles are available in open-access at [www.medievalworlds.net](http://www.medievalworlds.net).

The open-access e-journal *Medieval Worlds. Comparative & Interdisciplinary Studies* was developed in the comparative and interdisciplinary discussions of our project and is edited by the two speakers of the project, Walter Pohl and Andre Gingrich. The journal, initially funded by seed money from the FWF, is now run by the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and has appeared biannually since 2015.



Like VISCOM, Medieval Worlds aims to overcome disciplinary boundaries, regional limits and national research traditions in Medieval Studies, to open up new spaces for discussion, and to help developing global perspectives.

## VISCOM IN FILM

*Menandros & Thaïs* (CZ/AT 2016, 129 min., [www.menandros.cz](http://www.menandros.cz))

Directed by: Antonín Šilar and Ondřej Cikán, screenplay: Ondřej Cikán and Anatol Vitouch based on the novel O. Cikán: *Menandros and Thaïs*, Vienna, 2011.

Ondřej Cikán, one of our part-time project investigators, not only dealt with Byzantine novels in his doctoral thesis, but also drew on his subject of research to produce highly entertaining stories for a wide audience. In 2011, he published a surrealist and Byzantine-style novel entitled *Menandros und Thaïs*, which he and Antonín Šilas turned into the thundering sandal movie *Menandros & Thaïs*, released in 2016 and accessible at [www.menandros.cz](http://www.menandros.cz).

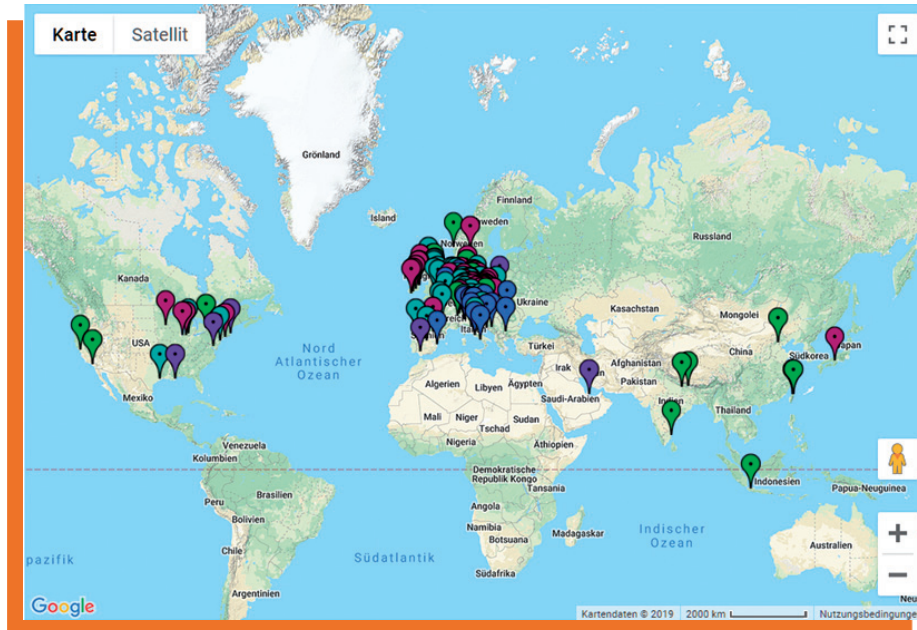


Scene picture of the movie *Menandros & Thaïs*

## EVENTS, SEMINARS & LECTURES

In the course of our eight project years, we presented about 630 papers in 121 places at conferences and workshops all over the world. To provide more detailed information about people involved, conferences attended and papers presented, we developed an interactive map called VISCOM:visible ([www.viscom.ac.at/map](http://www.viscom.ac.at/map)).

### VISCOM:visible Papers and Presentations



Follow the link  
<https://viscom.ac.at/map>  
to browse VISCOM:visible.

VISCOM:visible

A **VISCOM lecture series** was initiated at the outset of the project in which leading scholars in the field, such as Stefan Esders, Barbara Rosenwein, Fred Donner, Paul Dresch, Michael Kulikowski, Miri Rubin, Nora Berend, and Martine Segalen as well as emerging scholars such as Asmahan Al-Garoo or Peter Webb presented their findings to VISCOM team members and associates over the course of our eight project years.

The main strands of investigation also informed some of the **lectures and seminars** held by the project leaders at the University of Vienna over the eight VISCOM years. Thus, seminars on Medieval Visions of Community – Historical and Anthropological Approaches (Walter Pohl, Andre Gingrich), on Vorstellungen von Gemeinschaft – Praxis des Zusammenlebens (Christina Lutter, Oliver Schmitt), on Kinship and Gender – Comparative Approaches in History and Socio-Cultural Anthropology (Christina Lutter, Andre Gingrich), on Cities, States and Empires in Medieval Eurasia (Andre Gingrich, Walter Pohl), on Comparative Approaches to Urban, Spiritual, and Ethnic Communities (Christina Lutter, Andre Gingrich) and a lecture entitled Middle Ages I (to approx. 1200) – Visions of Community in Medieval Europe, South Arabia and Tibet in Comparison (Walter Pohl) were given.

Furthermore, junior team members also had the opportunity to teach at the University of Vienna, and a number of interdisciplinary courses were offered in team teaching by two or more VISCOM members. Apart from several tutorials, twenty-six guided reading courses were held, their topics ranging from early medieval European texts on empire and religion to myths of Shivaism, texts on medieval Yemen and on migrations in European regions to medieval saints' lives. In addition to that, about fifteen seminars were conducted either by project leaders together with one of their junior researchers or by a team of junior researchers, dealing for example with town and community, Europe and the Islamic world, life stories of Tibetan masters and social groups and communities in Central and South-East European regions. Altogether our team members held 89 lectures and seminars at the University of Vienna over the duration of VISCOM (2011-2019).

## SEMINARS AND LECTURES

For detailed information please see  
<https://viscom.ac.at/events/past-events/viscom-lecture-series/>.

Find the details of our *Ringvorlesung* at <https://viscom.ac.at/events/past-events/detail/ringvorlesung/>.

One important lecture strand was our *Ringvorlesung: Visions of Community in Medieval Europe, South Arabia and Tibet in Comparison*. It was delivered at the University of Vienna in 2013 by VISCOM junior members, with introductory and concluding lectures by the project leaders.

The lectures presented during this strand were published in a special issue of the journal *Historicum* 31 (2014) and can be accessed via the following links:

- Walter Pohl, „Visions of Community“ im interkulturellen Vergleich, 12-13; [http://austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fbb](http://austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fbb).
- Veronika Wieser, Gerda Heydemann, Gemeinschaftsvorstellungen in Zeiten des Umbruchs: Der Gebrauch der Bibel in Europa zwischen Antike und Frühmittelalter, 14-21; [http://austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fbd](http://austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fbd).
- Rutger Kramer, Irene van Renswoude, Dissens, Debatte und Diskurs: Kirche und Imperium in der Karolingerzeit, 22-27; [http://austriaca.at/Oxc1aa500e\\_0x00369fbf](http://austriaca.at/Oxc1aa500e_0x00369fbf).
- Eirik Hovden, Daniel Mahoney, Stammes- und Religionsgemeinschaften im mittelalterlichen Südarabien, 28-33; [http://www.austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fc1](http://www.austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fc1).
- Mathias Fermer, Tibetische Meister und ihr »befreites Wirken«: Auf Spurensuche monastischer Gemeinschaften in den Lebensgeschichten des mittelalterlichen Tibet, 34-39; [http://www.austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fc3](http://www.austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fc3).
- Christian Opitz, Bilder von Gemeinschaften – Bilder für Gemeinschaften. Zur visuellen Kultur spätmittelalterlicher Dominikanerklöster in Mitteleuropa, 40-46; [http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fc5.pdf](http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fc5.pdf).
- Elisabeth Gruber, Städtische Gemeinschaftsbildung im spätmittelalterlichen Herzogtum Österreich, 47-53; [http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fc7.pdf](http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fc7.pdf).
- Fabian Kümmeler, Sascha Attia, Der Strafe zum Trotz: Gemeinschaft und Konflikt im venezianischen Dalmatien. Ein Blick auf Korčula im 15. Jahrhundert, 54-59; [https://www.austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576\\_0x00369fc9.pdf](https://www.austriaca.at/Oxc1aa5576_0x00369fc9.pdf).

## VISCOM INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES

For a complete overview including all programmes, please go to <https://viscom.ac.at/events/>.

If not indicated otherwise, the events took place in Vienna.

<b>2011</b>	
21 Oct	Introductory Workshop: Connecting Visions. Methoden der Komparatistik
30 Nov	Workshop: Semantik der Gemeinschaften
<b>2012</b>	
26-28 Jan	Opening Conference: Comparative Methods in the Historical and Social Sciences
9-12 June	Sessions at the International Medieval Congress: Visions of Community, I: The Historiography of Identity, Visions of Community, II: Empire after Empire, Visions of Community, III: Negotiating Empire in the Ninth Century (Leeds)
8 Oct	Conference: Südarabienforschung Heute in Memoriam Walter Dostal (Diplomatische Akademie)
19 Oct	Workshop: Historiographies of Identity I: Narrating Community – Methodological Approaches
<b>2013</b>	
25 Jan	Workshop: Legalism and non-state law in a comparative perspective
6-9 March	Conference: II ‚commonwealth‘ veneziano tra 1204 e la fine della repubblica: identità e peculiarità [The Venetian „Commonwealth“ between 1204 and the end of the Republic - identity and specificities] (Venice)
6 March – 26 June	Ringvorlesung: Visions of Community in Medieval Europe, South Arabia and Tibet in Comparison (Gemeinschaftsvorstellungen und soziale Kohärenz im mittelalterlichen Europa, Südarabien und Tibet im Vergleich)
24-25 May	Workshop: Historiographies of Identity II: Historiographies as Reflection about Community – Ancient and Christian Models (Princeton)
7 June	Workshop: Medieval Hagiographical Collections in Central Europe
7 June	Workshop TWG <i>Empires and Communities</i> I: Problems and Approaches
17-18 June	Workshop: Historiographies of Identity III: From Post-Roman Multiplicity to Carolingian Convergence

- 1-2 July Session Strand at the International Medieval Congress: Visions of Community, I: After the End of Ancient Christianity - The Reconfiguration of Late Antique Topographies in Merovingian Historiography and Hagiography, Visions of Community, II: Related Narratives, Entangled Communities - Strategies of Identification in Central European Historiography and Hagiography, Visions of Community, III: Time and History in the Construction of Authority, Visions of Community, IV: Urban Communities in Late Medieval Central Europe, 1350-1550 - Regions, Visions of Community, V: Urban Communities in Late Medieval Central Europe, 1350-1550 - Relations, Visions of Community, VI: Conflict and Competition, Visions of Community, VII: Enclaves of Learning - Religion, Ideologies, and Practices in Europe, Arabia, and Tibet (Leeds)
- 13-16 Nov Conference: The Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans – Interpretations and Research Debates
- 28-29 Nov Mid-Term Conference: Meanings of Community across Medieval Eurasia
- 16-17 Dec Workshop: Historiographies of Identity IV: Historiography and Identity towards the End of the First Millennium
- 2014**
- 15-17 April Workshop: Historiographies of Identity V: Narrating Communities between Latin and Vernaculars – Historiographies in Central and Eastern Central Europe (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.) (Prague)
- 6 June Workshop: Empires and Communities II: Empire and Ethnicity
- 23 June Workshop: In the Shadows of Empire. Peripheral Polities in the Eurasian Middle Ages
- 25 June Workshop: Historiographies of Identity VI: Historiography and Identity around 1000CE - China and the West
- 7-10 July Session Strand at the International Medieval Congress: Visions of Community, I: Shadows of Empire - Distant Mirrors: The Case of South Arabia, Visions of Community, II: Shadows of Empire - 9<sup>th</sup>-Century Reflections, Visions of Community, III: Shadows of Empire - 10<sup>th</sup>- and 11<sup>th</sup>-Century Reactions, Visions of Community, IV: Shadows of Empire - The Wages of Hindsight, Visions of Community, V: The Meanings of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Europe and South Arabia - A Comparative Perspective, Visions of Community, VI: Social Ties and Media between Cloister and Court in Late Medieval Austria, 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Leeds)
- 2015**
- 27 Jan Opening Workshop: Serial Biographies
- 5-7 Feb Conference: Tantric Communities in Context: Sacred Secrets and Public Rituals
- 20 April Workshop: In the Shadows of Empire II: Peripheral polities of Byzantium and the Caliphate
- 14-17 May Session Strand at the International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, MI)
- 6-9 July Session Strand at the International Medieval Congress: Texts and Identities, I: Transformation and Consolidation - Episcopal Identity in Late Antiquity, Texts and Identities, II: The Politics of Interpretation during the Carolingian Reforms, Texts and Identities, III: New Uses for Old Stories - Dealing with the Past in the Middle Ages, Visions of Community, I: Socio-Cultural Diversity in Medieval South Arabia, Visions of Community, II: A Force of Habit? - Gender and Monasticism in the Carolingian Era, Visions of Community, III: Thinking Genealogically (Leeds)
- 24-26 Sep Conference: Making Ends Meet: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the End of Times in Medieval Christianity, Islam and Buddhism
- 2-3 Nov Workshop: Historiographies of Identity VII: Historiography and Identity in the ‚New Europe‘, 1000-1300
- 2016**
- 6 July Session Strand at the International Medieval Congress: Visions of Community, I: What’s in a Name? - Ethnonyms and Identity in Early Medieval Eurasia, Visions of Community, II: Perceptions of the ‚Self‘ and the ‚Other‘ in Medieval Iberia and Yemen Visions of Community, III: Where Food Connects Communities - Rural-Urban Interdependencies in Food Supplies during the Middle Ages, Visions of Community, IV: Ritual Aspects of Food in Urban Communities and Beyond (Leeds)
- 2017**
- 12-13 Jan Workshop TWG *Medieval Biographical Collections*: Perspectives from Buddhist, Christian and Islamic Worlds
- 20 Jan Workshop TWG *Tribes & Ethnicity*: Ethnic and Tribal Origins: Narratives and Genealogies
- 17 Feb Conference: Getting Better All the Time: Carolingian Correctio Then and Now (Cambridge)
- 9-11 March Conference: Comunità e società nel Commonwealth veneziano [= Community and Society in the Venetian Commonwealth] (Venice)
- 5 April Workshop: Miri Rubin – Methodological Approaches in Cultural History to “Visions of Community”

- 4-5 May Workshop: Categorising the Church I: Debates about Religious Communities in the Carolingian World
- 11-14 May Session Strand at the International Congress on Medieval Studies „Early Medieval Monasticism“, „12 angry Carolingians“, „Purity: Early Medieval Perspectives I+II“ (Kalamazoo, MI)
- 25-26 May Workshop: Empires and Communities in the Post-Roman and Islamic World, c.400-1000 CE
- 1-2 June Conference: Secular and Ecclesiastical Networks in Medieval Central Europe, ca. 1100-1400 – Saints’ Lives and Monastic Networks
- 8-9 June Conference: Secular and Ecclesiastical Networks in Medieval Central Europe, ca. 1100-1400 – Urban Life and Lordship in Central Europe
- 3-6 July Session Strand at the International Medieval Congress: Visions of Community, I: Strategies of Othering in Medieval Eurasia, Visions of Community, II: Strategies of Othering in Medieval Eurasia, Visions of Community, III: Living on the Edge - Authority and Otherness in a Comparative Perspective, Visions of Community, IV: Framing the Other - Social Practices of Urban and Rural Communities in Late Medieval Europe and South Arabia, 1200-1500 (Leeds)
- 18 Sep Workshop TWG *Tribes & Ethnicity*: Narratives of Ethnic and Tribal Origins in Eurasian Comparison
- 16-17 Nov Workshop: Towns as Living Spaces – Static and Dynamic Aspects of Medieval Communities: A Comparative Topographical Approach
- 4-6 Oct Workshop TWG Urban Communities: Comparative Perspectives on Urban-Rural Relations. Social Practices and Symbolical Representations of Community in Central Europe, Dalmatia, South Arabia and Tibet (1000-1600)
- 2018**
- 18-19 Jan Conference: Ethnicity and Religion
- 19-22 March Workshop and lecture: Per Sørensen – Historicizing Tibetan Genealogies
- 27 March Workshop: Rethinking Scholastic Communities across Medieval Eurasia I: Scholastic Communities
- 26-27 April Workshop TWG *Urban Communities*: Practicing Community in Urban and Rural Eurasia (1000-1600) – Comparative Perspectives
- 2-5 July Session Strands at the International Medieval Congress: Global Practices of Memory and Exchange, I: Maritime Transfer and Communication in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, c. 1200-1550, Global Practices of Memory and Exchange, II: Acts of Remembering in Central European Towns and Cities, c. 1200-1550, Visions of Community, I: Adventures in Comparison, Visions of Community, II: Comparative Perspectives on Medieval Biographical Collections, Visions of Community, III: Tales of Two Cities - Urban Identities and Biographical Collections in the High Middle Ages Integrating the Sasanians, I: Identities and Politics in Late Antique and Medieval Iran, Integrating the Sasanians (Leeds)
- 10-12 Oct Workshop: Categorising the Church II. Clerical and monastic communities in the Carolingian World (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries)
- 24 Oct Workshop: Rethinking Scholastic Communities across Medieval Eurasia II: Authority and Authorship
- 21-23 Nov Workshop: The Social and the Religious in the Making of Tibetan Societies: New Perspectives on Imperial Tibet
- 2019**
- 24-25 Jan Workshop TWG *Tribes & Ethnicity*: Ethnic Terminologies in the Early Middle Ages
- 21-23 Feb Final Conference: Adventures in Comparison: the Global Middle Ages
- 27 March Workshop: Rethinking Scholastic Communities across Medieval Eurasia III: Intellectual Methods and Practices



## VISCOM TEAM MEMBERS

Pohl, Walter	project speaker, project leader: coordination project, Early Medieval Europe
Gingrich, Andre	deputy project speaker, project leader: South Arabia
Kellner, Birgit	project leader: Tibetan Empire
Lutter, Christina	project leader; Late Medieval Central Europe
Schmitt, Oliver Jens	project leader: Late Medieval Dalmatia
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Apostle, Katharine	Coordination
Attia, Sascha Hescham	Late Medieval Dalmatia
Bianchini, Francesco	Tibetan Empire
Borri, Francesco	Early Medieval Europe
Brandt, Marieke	South Arabia
Cikán, Ondřej	Early Medieval Europe
Corradini, Richard	Early Medieval Europe
Diesenberger Maximilian	Early Medieval Europe
Donecker, Stefan	Early Medieval Europe
Dörler, Philipp	Early Medieval Europe
Drongshar, Tsering	Tibetan Empire
Eltschinger, Vincent	Tibetan Empire
Fermer, Mathias	Tibetan Empire
Frey, Daniel	Late Medieval Central Europe
Gneiß, Markus	Late Medieval Central Europe
Goda, Károly	Late Medieval Central Europe
Gretzel, Peter	Late Medieval Central Europe
Grifoni, Cinzia	Early Medieval Europe
Gruber, Elisabeth	Late Medieval Central Europe
Gruber, Sophie	Coordination
Haltrich, Martin	Late Medieval Central Europe
Haoran, Hou	Tibetan Empire
Hartl, Ingrid	Coordination
Hazod, Guntram	Tibetan Empire
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Heydemann, Gerda	Early Medieval Europe
Hidas, Gergely	Tibetan Empire
Horníčková, Kateřina	Late Medieval Central Europe
Hovden, Eirik	South Arabia
Hugon, Pascale	Tibetan Empire
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Kiss, Csaba	Tibetan Empire
Kommer, Odile	South Arabia
Kramer, Rutger	Coordination, Early Medieval Europe
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Kümmeler, Fabian Benedikt	Late Medieval Dalmatia
Langelaar, Reinier	Tibetan Empire
Liccardo, Salvatore	Early Medieval Europe
Lyon, Jonathan	Late Medieval Central Europe
Mahoney, Daniel	South Arabia
Mair, Maria	Late Medieval Central Europe
Majorossy, Judit	Late Medieval Central Europe
Mirnig, Nina	Tibetan Empire
Moorthy Kloss, Magdalena	South Arabia
Nezbeda, Maria	Early Medieval Europe
O'Hara, Alexander	Early Medieval Europe
Ó Riain, Diarmuid	Late Medieval Central Europe
Opitz, Christian Nikolaus	Late Medieval Central Europe
Orlando, Ermanno	Late Medieval Dalmatia
Petrovsky, Konrad	Late Medieval Dalmatia
Radhakrishnan, Manu	Early Medieval Europe
Rai-Sharma, Sukanya	Early Medieval Europe
Rastelli, Marion	Tibetan Empire
Regourd, Anne	South Arabia
Stampfer, Elisabeth	Late Medieval Central Europe
Schedl, Barbara	Late Medieval Central Europe
Tropper, Kurt	Tibetan Empire
Vocino, Giorgia	Early Medieval Europe
Ward, Graeme	Early Medieval Europe
Wieser, Veronika	Coordination, Early Medieval Europe

## PROJECT SPEAKERS & LEADERS

## PROJECT INVESTIGATORS

For more details, please go to  
<https://viscom.ac.at/project-team/overview/>

## COORDINATION

## KATHARINE APOSTLE



**Walter Pohl** is VISCOM project speaker and project leader of the coordination project and of *Early Medieval Europe*. See more details under [Early Medieval Europe](#)

**Katharine Apostle** studied Japanology, English and Comparative Literature and has worked as a translator and proofreader for German and English. She was part of the VISCOM coordination at the Institute for Medieval Research in the second phase of the project. She now works as office administrator at the Institute for Urban and Regional Research at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

## SOPHIE GRUBER



**Sophie Gruber** graduated in Theatre-, Film-, and Media Studies, German Philology and History at the University of Vienna. Next to her position in the coordination of the SFB VISCOM at the Institute of Medieval Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, she also has been working as project coordinator of the ERC CoG 9 SALT (2015-2020) at the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Vienna. Her research focuses on early Medieval Southern Italy, identity research, political and pastoral power.

## INGRID HARTL



**Ingrid Hartl** graduated in English and German Philology at the University of Vienna, specialising in medieval vernacular literature (monograph *Das Feindbild in der Kreuzzugslyrik*). She coordinated two ERC grants at the Department of History at the University of Vienna, and joined the coordination team of VISCOM at the Institute of Medieval Studies in the final phase of the project. She is now executive editor of the open-access journal *Medieval Worlds*.

**Rutger Kramer**, see his details under [Early Medieval Europe](#)

**Veronika Wieser**, see her details under [Early Medieval Europe](#)

## EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

## WALTER POHL

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**Walter Pohl**, VISCOM project speaker and project leader of the coordination project and of *Early Medieval Europe*, is Professor of medieval history at the University of Vienna and director of the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. He has also taught at Los Angeles (UCLA), Leiden, Budapest (CEU) and Ishevsk (Russia). He is fellow of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and was awarded the Wittgenstein Prize (2004) and the ERC Advanced Grant (2010). His fields of study cover the role of ethnicity and identity in late antiquity and the early middle ages, the transformation of the Roman world and the development of the post-Roman kingdoms, early medieval historiography and its manuscript transmission, early medieval lawcodes, the history of the Eurasian steppe peoples and Italian cultural and political history until c. 1000 AD.

## FRANCESCO BORRI



**Francesco Borri** is postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. From 2009 to 2018 he worked at the Institute for Medieval Research in Vienna. During his time as VISCOM investigator, he investigated the traditions on King Alboin's death and the role of social memory in the Lombard kingdom between 600 and 900. His overall research interests are the development of identities and narratives of origin in early Medieval Dalmatia and Italy, framing the identification discourse in the broader history of society, communications and political structures.

## ONDŘEJ CIKÁN

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**Ondřej Cikán** writes his doctorate at the University of Vienna on the development of Byzantine novels, with special attention being given to the perception of strangers. His research concentrates on the Byzantine and ancient Greek novels and narratology. Among other works, he published the surrealist and Byzantine-style novel *Menandros und Thaïs* (Vienna 2011) and directed and produced its film version *Menandros & Thaïs* (CZ/AT 2016, 129 min.)

## RICHARD CORRADINI

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**Richard Corradini** works at the Institute of Medieval Research since 2000. He has written his Habilitationsschrift on Walahfrid Strabos's *Vademecum*. His research focuses on the transmission of knowledge in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, especially in the field of historiography, natural science, time perception and philosophy. Currently, he is co-organizer of the international research network *The Transformation of the Carolingian World* (<http://postcarolingianworld.ac.at/#network>). He is Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe*.

## ALBRECHT DIEM

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**Albrecht Diem** is tenured associate professor at Syracuse University (NY). His research focuses on the history of monasticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. He published on monastic rules, female monasticism, gender and sexuality, the history of emotions, pastoral care, and monastic education, and developed the Monastic Manuscript Project. He is Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe*.

**Maximilian Diesenberger** is head of the division “Historical Identity Research” of the Institute for Medieval Research. He has written a book on early medieval sermon collections and their political function in the beginning of the ninth century. Currently he is working on a book on the Western perspective of Hungarians in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. He is principal investigator of the HERA Joint Research Programme *After Empire: Using and Not Using the Past in the Crisis of the Carolingian World, c. 900-1050*. The focus of his interest is group formation and solidarities in the early middle Ages. He is Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe*.



**MAXIMILIAN  
DIESENBERGER**

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**Stefan Donecker** studied history and Scandinavian Studies at Vienna, Umeå and Florence and received his doctorate from the European University Institute in 2010. After postdoctoral fellowships in Greifswald and Constance, he has been affiliated with the Institute for Medieval Research since 2012. His research interests focus on the history of historiography in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, particularly in relation to concepts of migration, mobility and genealogy, and the Baltic regions. He is Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe*.



**STEFAN DONECKER**

**Cinzia Grifoni** is a postdoctoral researcher within VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe* and a member of the Department of History at the University of Vienna. She investigates the development of understanding and use of Latin ethnic designations in the Medieval West and is responsible for the contents of the online resource *GENS – Group Terminology and Ethnic Nomenclature: a Semantic Database (Latin Europe c. 400-1200)*. The output of the early medieval scriptorium of the Wissembourg monastery forms a further focus of her activity. She has published with Brepols the first edition of the *Glossae in Matthaeeum* ascribed to Otfrid of Wissembourg and written several contributions on early medieval exegetic production at Wissembourg and St Gall.



**CINZIA GRIFONI**

[https://ucris.univie.ac.at/portal/de/persons/cinzia-grifoni\(3e5ce6fc-4072-4945-ac81-ba1a9196b919\).html](https://ucris.univie.ac.at/portal/de/persons/cinzia-grifoni(3e5ce6fc-4072-4945-ac81-ba1a9196b919).html)

**Gerda Heydemann** is postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at Freie Universität Berlin. Her research concentrates on how the Bible contributed to the formation and legitimation of a new political order in the post-Roman kingdoms in the Latin West. Within VISCOM, she focused on ethnic and political models in early medieval biblical exegesis. A special area of interest lies in the language of community used in exegetical texts (esp. terminology related to peoples and political entities, such as *populus*, *gens*, *natio*, *civitas*, etc.), and in the connection between religious, ethnic and political discourses about community.



**GERDA HEYDEMANN**

**Rutger Kramer** received his PhD from the Freie Universität Berlin, and has been working as project coordinator and later as researcher for VISCOM since 2011. His work focuses on the interaction between courtly, episcopal and monastic ideas of authority, the debates ensuing from conflicts within elite communities of the Carolingian world, and the role of religious communities across Medieval Eurasia. Additionally, he has worked on the adaptation of comparative methodologies for the VISCOM project.



**RUTGER KRAMER**

**Salvatore Liccardo** has studied History at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. His research interests include the ethnical interactions between Roman and Barbaric communities, the gradual formation of the national identities in Early Medieval Europe and the social role assumed by the ecclesiastical institutions during the last centuries of the Roman empire and after.



**SALVATORE LICCARDO**

**Maria Nezbeda** studied history and ancient history at University of Vienna. In 2013 she received her MA and joined VISCOM in order to start her PhD thesis, which is about perceptions of kinship among peoples in late antique historiography, with a strong focus on ethnic terminology and Jordanes' *Getica*.



**MARIA NEZBEDA**

**Alexander O'Hara** is an Honorary Fellow of the Department of Mediaeval History, University of St Andrews and a Visiting Fellow of the Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, National University of Ireland, Galway. From 2009 to 2016 he was a research fellow at the Institut für Mittelalterforschung where he was involved in a number of research projects, including VISCOM. He is the editor of *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe* and the author of *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus: Sanctity and Community in the Seventh Century*, both published by Oxford University Press in 2018.



**ALEXANDER O'HARA**

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**Manu Radhakrishnan** studied Economics at Harvard and History first at the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York (MA 2004) and then at Princeton University (MA 2006, PhD 2012). His research centres on the Liber Vitae collection of Latin monastic hagiography from Late Antique Egypt and its late medieval vernacular lay reception, primarily in Italy (Domenico Cavalca, *Vita dei santi padri*). He is working on the Latin and vernacular hagiographical dossier of the Egyptian hermit Onuphrius, as well as the *Legendarium Austriacum Minus*. He is Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe*.



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**SUKANYA RAI-SHARMA**

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**Sukanya Rai-Sharma** moved from her PhD position in VISCOM to a doctorate at the University of Oxford funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council, Bibliographical Society London, and St John's College Oxford. Her thesis primarily explores trust and conflict in monastic communities in late antique and early medieval Gaul. She has an undergraduate degree from the University of Cambridge and a masters degree from the University of London/University College London.

**GIORGIA VOCINO**

**Giorgia Vocino** is postdoctoral researcher at the University of Orléans. The overarching theme in her research centres on the transmission of classical and late antique literature in the early Middle Ages, a phenomenon that is particularly prominent and well-documented in the Italian peninsula. As Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Early Medieval Europe* she edited together with Daniel Mahoney, Diarmuid Ó Riain the cross-publication *Medieval Biographical Collections: perspectives from Buddhist, Christian and Islamic worlds*.

**GRAEME WARD**

**Graeme Ward** first studied History at Glasgow before receiving a PhD from Cambridge in 2014. Between 2013 and 2017 he was an associated VISCOM member at the Institute for Medieval Research, working primarily on Carolingian historiography and intellectual culture. Graeme is currently a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Jesus College, Oxford.

**VERONIKA WIESER**

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**Veronika Wieser** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Medieval Research (Austrian Academy of Sciences) and a Lecturer in medieval history at the University of Vienna. She has published on eschatology, ascetic communities, historiography and literary traditions in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

**SOUTH ARABIA****ANDRE GINGRICH**

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**Andre Gingrich**, VISCOM deputy speaker and project leader of *South Arabia*, is Director of the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and a Member of the Royal Swedish and Austrian Academies of Sciences. His research focuses on the anthropology and history of south-western Arabia (Saudi Arabia and Yemen); Theories and Methods in Anthropology; and the History of Anthropology.

**JOHANN HEISS**

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**Johann Heiss** is Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) of the Austrian Academy of Science. His main areas of study are religious and political developments in Yemen between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and the visible impact of the Ottoman Conquest of Central Europe.

**DANIEL MAHONEY**

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**Daniel Mahoney** completed his PhD in 2014 in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, where he has focused on the history and archaeology of South Arabia. His research interests include historical anthropology and geography, medieval historiography, and Islamic archaeology.

**EIRIK HOVDEN**

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**Eirik Hovden** is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bergen's Department of Foreign Languages. His research interests are geography, history and ethnography of Yemen, Islamic (Zaydi) law, religious endowments (waqf), and local water management.

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**Magdalena Moorthy Kloss** is a PhD candidate in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. She holds a M.Sc. in Anthropology and Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Magister in Anthropology from the University of Vienna.

**ODILE KOMMER**

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**Odile Kommer** is a PhD candidate at the University of Vienna's Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology and was recipient of a DOC-team-fellowship of the Austrian Academy of Sciences at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA). She holds a Magister in Anthropology from the University of Vienna.

**NOURA KAMAL**

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**Noura Kamal** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She holds a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the University of Vienna and a master's degree in Sociology from Birzeit University in Palestine.

**Anne Regourd** holds a PhD in Philosophy (1987) and teaches at the University of Paris 4-Sorbonne. She is the Academic Supervisor of the Programme for Safeguarding manuscripts in private libraries of Zabid (Yemen) and published on Divinatory and Magic practices in Mediaeval Islam and contemporary Yemen.



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## LATE MEDIEVAL CENTRAL EUROPE



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**Daniel Frey** studied History and Archival Studies (2014-2018) at the University of Vienna (IÖG). He is currently working on his PhD thesis that examines practices of community-building in Central European hinterland towns with a focus on interactions between "secular" and "ecclesiastical" communities (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.). He is Fellow of the Vienna Doctoral Academy (VDA) Medieval Academy and Associate Project Investigator of VISCOM *Late Medieval Central Europe*.



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**Elisabeth Gruber** studied History and German Studies at the University of Salzburg. Her dissertation dealt with urban public building in late medieval Austria. From 2009-2014 she was PostDoc at the University of Vienna with a focus on Austrian history; since 2015 she is a Senior Scientist (PostDoc) at the Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture, University of Salzburg. Her postdoctoral research in VISCOM *Late Medieval Central Europe* covered the role and quality of personal and institutional relationships within and between late medieval Central European towns along the Danube (1300-1600). Since 2017 she is co-editor of *MEMO – Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture Online*.



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**Martin Haltrich** studied German Studies, History and Archival Studies at the University of Vienna. He worked as a project employee at the IMAFO (AAS), and was librarian and archivist at the monasteries of Melk and Zwettl. At present he is head of the library at Stift Klosterneuburg. His research interests involve palaeographical and codicological analyses of medieval manuscripts and late medieval administrative source material. As a postdoctoral researcher in VISCOM *Late Medieval Central Europe* he was involved in the development of the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum* web project as an Associate Project Investigator.



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## KATEŘINA HORNÍČKOVÁ



**Kateřina Horníčková** studied Art History and Classical Archaeology in Prague and Medieval Studies at the CEU, Budapest, and Oxford. Her PhD focused on church treasures and religious practice in late medieval Bohemia. Project collaborations on cultures of knowledge and medieval saints' cults were based at Oxford University, the Czech Academy of Sciences, and at Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture, University of Salzburg. Within VISCOM Late Medieval Central Europe her research focused on visual representations of religious and urban communities in Austria, Bohemia and Hungary, hagiography narratives and post-Hussite visual culture. Currently she is a lecturer in art history at the University of České Budějovice.

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## JONATHAN LYON

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## JUDIT MAJOROSSY



**Judit Majorossy** graduated in History and English at the University of Pécs, received a second diploma in interdisciplinary medieval studies at the Central European University in Budapest, where she also defended her PhD on urban testaments and civic donations late medieval Hungary. Her research covers late medieval urban, social and economic history, everyday life and social topography. She worked in Bratislava (Slovak Academy of Sciences), Budapest (Eötvös Lóránd University, Ferenczy Museum), Edinburgh (Advanced Studies Institute), and Münster (Institute for Comparative Urban Studies). Since 2015 she holds a PostDoc position at the University of Vienna, associated with VISCOM *Late Medieval Central Europe*.

## DIARMUID Ó RIAIN



**Diarmuid Ó Riain** studied law (BCL 2000) and archaeology (HDip 2002) at University College Cork before completing his PhD at University College Dublin in 2009. His doctoral research concerned the *Schottenklöster* or Irish Benedictine monasteries of Central Europe, on which subject he has since published extensively. He joined VISCOM *Late Medieval Central Europe* in 2013, where his work has focused on the largest hagiographical collection of the high-medieval period, the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum* and on related hagiographical collections from Central Europe, their transmission and social context.

## BARBARA SCHEDL



**Barbara Schedl** studied Art History at the University of Vienna. She was a staff member at the Commission of Art History and the Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture (AAS, 1993-2002), at the Technical University of Darmstadt, and project manager at the UCLA (2005-2009). Funded by a Charlotte-Bühler Habilitationsstipendium (FWF, 2003) she wrote her habilitation thesis on women's monasteries in medieval Vienna (2007). Currently she is a lecturer at the University Vienna, Department of Art History and since 2011 PI of the project "St. Stephen's in Vienna", funded by the FWF and associated with VISCOM *Late Medieval Central Europe*.

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**Fabian Kümmeler** graduated with a master's degree in Medieval and Modern History and Musicology at the University of Bonn (2010) and a master's degree in Peace and Security Studies at the University of Hamburg (2011). As VISCOM member, his research focused on late medieval Venetian Dalmatia and comparative urban history. He received his PhD at University of Vienna (2018) and published several articles on socio-cultural, economic, judicial and administrative practices of rural communities in late medieval Dalmatia. Currently, he is co-editing the forthcoming VISCOM volume on *Practicing Community in Urban and Rural Eurasia (1000–1600): Comparative Perspectives And Interdisciplinary Approaches*.

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**Konrad Petrovsky** (PhD from Humboldt University, Berlin) is Research Associate at the Institute of Modern and Contemporary Historical Research at the Austrian Academy of Science. His research areas include the history of culture, religion, and law in early modern Southeast Europe. He has authored *Geschichte schreiben im osmanischen Südosteuropa: eine Kulturgeschichte orthodoxer Historiographie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (2014) and co-edited *Das osmanische Europa: Methoden und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung zu Südosteuropa* (2014).

**Sascha Attia** studied History, Archaeology and Philosophy in Switzerland and Austria (Berne, Fribourg and Vienna). In 2008, he graduated at the University of Vienna with a diploma thesis on 'Trade and Economy of the City of Trogir in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century', based on export licences for sea trade from the Dalmatian city of Trogir. As a VISCOM member from 2011-2014, he carried out research on the urban societies of the Dalmatian cities of Korčula and Split in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## LATE MEDIEVAL DALMATIA



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## THE TIBETAN EMPIRE

## BIRGIT KELLNER

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**Birgit Kellner**, leader of the *Tibetan Empire* project part 2016-2019, is director of the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (since 2015). She is Adjunct Professor at the University of Heidelberg, where she served as full professor in Buddhist Studies (2010-2015), member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, and Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation. She directed projects in Buddhist Studies, Transcultural Studies and Digital Humanities with funding from the FWF, the DFG, and the Excellence Initiative of the German Federal and State Governments, and currently serves on a DFG-Fachkollegium. Her main area of research is the intellectual history of Buddhism in premodern South Asia and Tibet, where she has contributed in-depth studies exploring new sources in Sanskrit and Tibetan relating to logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of mind.

## FRANCESCO BIANCHINI



**Francesco Bianchini** studied at the Institute for South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies of the University of Vienna and at the University of Oxford. Currently, he is a PhD student in Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford. As a VISCOM associate member, he researched the role of Tantric rituals in the formation and consolidation of communities.

## VINCENT ELTSCHINGER



**Vincent Eltschinger**, leader of the *Tibetan Empire* project part 2014-2016, was a research fellow at the IKGA from 2003 to 2015 and currently holds the position of Directeur d'Études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Mondes Iranien et Indien, in Paris. For VISCOM, he has been investigating late Indian Buddhist philosophy and scholasticism with regard to both its socio-religious background (e.g. apocalyptic expectations, competition for patronage) and its intellectual genealogy (including the works of the poet Aśvaghōṣa).

## MATHIAS FERMER

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## PASCALE HUGON



**Pascale Hugon** studied Indology and Tibetology at the University of Lausanne and has been active at the IKGA of the Austrian Academy of Sciences for most of the last decade. Her current research examines the early development of the Tibetan scholastic tradition in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c., focusing on newly recovered texts.

## HELMUT KRASSER



**Helmut Krasser** († 2014), leader of the *Tibetan Empire* project part 2011-2014, was director of the IKGA of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and Lecturer at the Institute for South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies of the University of Vienna. As a researcher, he was involved in several FWF-projects covering the cultural history of the western Himalaya from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, religion and philosophy in brahmanical orthodoxy, tradition and transformation in Indian and Buddhist logic, and Buddhist literature in context.

## REINIER LANGELAAR



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## NINA MIRNIG



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22	Book cover: Rutger Kramer, <i>Rethinking Authority in the Carolingian Empire: Ideals and Expectations during the Reign of Louis the Pious</i> (The Early Medieval North Atlantic, Amsterdam: University Press 2019).	34	Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, HA Urk 46: Donati- on charter of the Viennese townswoman Margarethe Preusslin, 1306, Vienna (photo: monasterium.net)	52	Rubin Museum of Art collection, New York © Photo: Himalayan Art Resources, no. 65848: The monastery of gSang-phu-Ne'u-thog, detail of thangka-painting.
		35	Stadarchiv Weitra, Urk. 1371 06 19: Town seal of Weitra (photo: monasterium.net).	53	A newly erected, 4 metre tall statue of an ancestor of the Rlangs clan, Nang-chen, southern Qinghai, PR China © Photo: Reinier Langelaar, 2018.
		36	Weitra castle, Zwettl Book of Founders (1310/14) fol. 69r. (photo: manuscripta.at).	page	<b>VISCOM Results</b>
		36	Book cover: Judit Majorossy (ed.), <i>Piety in Practice. Urban Religious Life and Communities in Late Medieval Pressburg (1400–1530)</i> (CEU Medievalia, VISCOM Books; Budapest, Vienna: CEU Press 2018).	59	Logo: Medieval Worlds, <a href="http://www.medievalworlds.net">www.medievalworlds.net</a>
				page	<b>Appendix</b>
				61	Booklet cover: <i>Visions of Community – Publications of the Special Research Programme</i> (SFB F42-G18).
				74	Logo: Medieval Worlds, <a href="http://www.medievalworlds.net">www.medievalworlds.net</a>
				74	<i>Menandros &amp; Thais</i> (CZ/AT 2016, 129 min., <a href="http://www.menandros.cz">www.menandros.cz</a> ): scene picture
				75	Screenshot: VISCOM:visible ( <a href="http://www.viscom.ac.at/map">www.viscom.ac.at/map</a> ).
		80-86	If not indicated otherwise, the image rights are with the person depicted.		
		80	Photo Walter Pohl © ÖAW/ Daniel Hinterramskogler		
		86	Photo Birgit Kellner © ÖAW/ Daniel Hinterramskogler		
		88	If not indicated otherwise, the image rights are with the person depicted.		



1. Conference venue of *Making Ends Meet: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the End of Times in Medieval Christianity, Islam and Buddhism*, 24-26 Sep 2015

2. from left to right: Immo Warntjes, Marc Tiefenauer, Bernhard Scheid, Walter Pohl, Domenico Agostini, Christina Lutter, Jelle Wassenaar, Pia Lucas, Veronika Wieser at the conference *Making Ends Meet*, 24-26 Sep 2015

3. from left to right: Faustina Doufkar-Aerts, Vincent Eltschinger, Marc Tiefenauer, Ann Crystals at the conference *Making Ends Meet*, 24-26 Sep 2015

4. from left to right: Christina Lutter, Sita Steckel, Pascale Hugon, Rutger Kramer, Constant Mews, Birgit Kellner, José Cabezón at the workshop *Scholastic Communities: Texts, Sites and Interactions*, 26-27 March 2018

5. from left to right: Judit Majorossy, Salvatore Liccardo, Walter Pohl, Oliver Schmitt, Christina Lutter, Birgit Kellner, Cinzia Grifoni, Andre Gingrich, Maria Nezbeda, Odile Kommer, Kateřina Horníčková, Rutger Kramer, Veronika Wieser, Diarmuid Ó Riain, Károly Goda at *Landpartie XVI* in Reichenau an der Rax, 24-25 Sep 2018

6. from left to right: Daniel König, Walter Pohl, Daniel Mahoney, Vincent Eltschinger, Johann Heiss, Marta Sernesi, Diarmuid Ó Riain at the conference *Medieval Biographical Collections Perspectives from Buddhist, Christian and Islamic Worlds*, 12-13 Jan 2017

7. Johann Heiss at the conference *Ethnicity and Religion*, 18-19 Jan 2018

8+9. Meeting of the VISCOM project part *Late Medieval Central Europe* in the Klosterneuburg Monastery, 8 Feb 2016

10. Reinier Langelaar at the conference *Medieval Biographical Collections*, 12-13 Jan 2017

11. from left to right: Ingrid Hartl, Daniel Mahoney, Maria Nezbeda, Mathias Fermer, Christina Lutter, Salvatore Liccardo, Odile Kommer, Walter Pohl, Reinier Langelaar, Birgit Kellner, Fabian Kümmeler, Kateřina Horníčková, Károly Goda, Diarmuid Ó Riain, Johann Heiss, Veronika Wieser, Cinzia Grifoni at *Landpartie XV* in Kirchschlag in der Buckligen Welt, 1-2 March 2018

12. Participants of the conference *Tantric Communities in Context: Sacred Secrets and Public Rituals*, 5-7 Feb 2015

13. Walter Pohl at the conference *Ethnicity and Religion*, 18-19 Jan 2018

14. from left to right: Walter Pohl, Oliver Schmitt, Christina Lutter, Károly Goda, Kateřina Horníčková, Sophie Gruber, Diarmuid Ó Riain, Reinier Langelaar, Fabian Kümmeler, Mathias Fermer at *Landpartie XIV* in Kirchschlag in der Buckligen Welt, 28-29 Sep 2017



# 4 The Tibetan Empire and the Formation of Buddhist Civilisation in the Highlands

VISIONS OF COMMUNITY

SFB – Spezialforschungsbereich

PL: Vincent Eitschinger

Cluster 1: Religious Landscapes: Between Local Interest and Imperial Identity

Cluster 2: Kinship, Governance and Ethnicity in Medieval and Pre-Modern Tibetan Communities

Tibet After Empire  
Region: Central Tibet (TAR, PRC)  
Investigators: Guntram Hazod, Haoran Hou

This sub-project focuses on the period immediately after the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the 9th century – the so-called “period of fragmentation” (*sil bu’i dus*).

The classical description of this time in later sources as a general phase of decline has today been revised to some extent, as for a time local rulers retained and religious reconstructions in the period, which again are to be seen as preconditions for the implementation of the Tibetan renaissance period (*phal dar*). A special focus was on the appearance of the competing schools of the old and new Tibetan traditions (*byang ma pa* and *Gar ma pa*) in the case of the early polity and the specific formation of Tibetan “indian” identities connected to these religious developments.

For VISCOM, this sub-project will be for the first time a significant component in that it is not only concerned with the relationship between historiography and the “making of history”.

Sa skya Monastic Communities  
Region: Central Tibet (TAR, PRC)  
Investigator: Mathias Farmer

Featuring monasteries in present-day Lhoka (TAR, PR China), this sub-project focused on processes of community building and monastic formation in late medieval Tibet.

Largely unedited and unpublished ethnographic sources were subjected to literary analysis in view of tracing the evolution of these elite communities that had formed from local and regional monastic founders. Conducted in close cooperation with Tibetan language scholars, the project benefited in terms of processing the unedited source material, producing digital editions and contributing new historical insights to the field.

Combining textual analysis with ethnographic methods, enabled a “horizontal” geographical survey of the monastic landscape with its networks of mutual exchange. Observation and findings from fieldwork provided complementary data for the research, and stimulated methodological considerations in the transnational working group of the SFB. The subsequent combination of the project benefited in terms of providing insights on the self-perception and organization of monastic communities on the Tibetan plateau, drawing common features with other forms of religious community life studied in other parts of VISCOM.

The use of both literary research and ethnographic research had led to a broad palette of sources as possible in order to address this broader region’s social history. Through comparative research of the eight monasteries and functional roles and operations of communities (local) and their subgroups (*pho-ba*), the study used the high on local conceptions of “community” as well as on the applicability of larger-scale theoretical issues such as “tribes”, “class” and “gender” in Tibetan context.

The line of inquiry will directly tie in to the transnational group “Tribes and Ethnicity” where it could contribute to the VISCOM project in that it will be able to add to the project in order to reach the ethnographic fieldwork on the case. The Tibetan polity by exploring and mapping the social network of (sub)topographies, genealogy, and narratives, and their own sources.

Kinship, Religion and Ethnic Boundaries  
Region: Amdo (Qinghai, PRC)  
Investigator: Reimer Langelaar

This dissertation homes in on the area of Rebgong (Qinghai, PR China) and the origins of its Tibetan communities and their social subdivisions.

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Tantric Communities  
Region: North India, Kashmir, Nepal  
Investigators: Vincent Eitschinger, Nina Miring

This sub-project, a recently added geographical extension of P04, addresses the role of Hindu and Buddhist Tantric initiatory communities in early medieval India and their contribution to the formation of Tibetan Buddhist identities.

The focus was to develop approaches through which the presence of Tantric Buddhism can be contextualized by complementing their study with non-Tantric sources and geographical evidence that throw light on the underlying social reality. This included a study of the Buddhist Tantric culture that developed in monastic circles in the context of the well-established traditional monasticism and the rise of new Tantric movements. Further, the ritual systems of the latter, in particular death rites, were examined to recover modalities of the construction of being as well as specific socio-cultural Tantric identities.

Making use of the conceptual categories developed in the framework of VISCOM, the sub-project continues in an interdisciplinary conference on “Tantric Communities in Context: Sacred Sites and Public Rituals” (27-28 February 2015).

Our Cooperation within VISCOM:  
• Tribal Identities  
• Spiritual Visions of Community  
• Urban Communities  
• Pastoral Governance  
• Narratives of Community  
• Kinship and Gender  
• Empire, States & Communities

# 6 Social and Cultural Communities in High and Late Medieval Central Europe

VISIONS OF COMMUNITY

SFB – Spezialforschungsbereich

PL: Christina Lutter

Entangled Social Spaces  
Core – City – Cloister

What were contemporary notions of identification and belonging?  
How do textual, pictorial or performative strategies of cultural representation operate with communities?  
Which cultural, spiritual or political forms and processes of identification can be traced across county, urban and monastic environments?  
Which effects do visions of community and praxis of community building have on personal relations and on social behavior?

What can the products of the scriptorium reveal regarding the inner concerns and outer concerns of monastic communities?

Geographical locations or experiences were an essential element of any monastic identity. The study of the scriptorium provides the members of a community with diverse models of paths to which to refer in late 13th-century Austria. A hierarchy of representation was created: a three-volume compendium containing 150 Latin texts in general order from early Christian apostles and fathers, to high medieval kings and bishops, the contents of the 16th-century editions of a vocal of a universal history (1508-1510).

As the compilation and dissemination of the Latin text is a cooperative effort on the part of those monastic scribes, Austria, its study sheds light on the intricate networks that characterize the contemporary monastic landscape. The strong religious conviction of the monastic medieval text, the study of the text, as demonstrated by a number of the study, is a potential product of the interaction of text and image. The content of the text is a transcription of the content of the text, and the content of the text is a transcription of the content of the text.

What do historiographical and literary texts tell us about processes of identity and representation, particularly of political agency and community building?

Historiographical and literary texts as well as literary and pictorial on the one hand, and social and cultural representation on the other, were a focus of these studies because they reveal the specific making of political and social identity in the region, their relation to religious and urban institutions, and its function for the social processes of identification and community building.

Material Culture  
Hagiography / Monastic Landscapes  
Spiritual Visions of Community  
Urban Communities  
Tribes & Ethnicity  
Qualitative Comparison  
Historiography  
Urban Networks

Historical images used to visually express the ideas and ideals of community and the nature of belonging to a community?

Large-scale visual media such as wall paintings were a popular means for the self-representation of such as St. Vitus in Bohemia, St. Ladislaus in Hungary and, to a lesser extent, St. Elizabeth in Austria, communities, e.g. through group portraits, heraldry or depictions of patron saints. The study, in particular, was an exercise in the study of ethnically labeled cases.

Historians and artists frequently employed images in monastic structures, especially in those of the newly founded Benedictine Order. Thus, these portraits were not only a means of self-representation, but also a way to link the monastic community to the wider world and to the Franciscan church in terms of shared liturgical and social practices.

These portraits of the founder of the order and his family were a means of self-representation, but also a way to link the monastic community to the wider world and to the Franciscan church in terms of shared liturgical and social practices.

How did religious, administrative or economic institutions and practices affect or be affected by communities?

Various hours and times in the border regions of Austria and Styria in Bohemia and Hungary provided and required the infrastructure required for regional and cross-regional for legal and cultural exchange. Based on diverse cultural material, the study of these institutions reveals a complex interplay of legal and economic, political, economic and religious forms of belonging.

Internal Cooperations within VISCOM's TWGs

Qualitative Comparison using the concept of entangled social spaces

Spiritual Visions of Community comprising several concepts of community within and beyond Central European monastic landscapes

Urban Communities drawing Central European examples within a more general ethnographic matrix of urban settlements

Tribes & Ethnicity examining tensions between categories of region and ethnicity in narrative sources and material culture

# 7 Society, Statehood and Religion at the Fringe of the Late Medieval Balkans: Case Studies from Dalmatia

VISIONS OF COMMUNITY

SFB – Spezialforschungsbereich

PL: Oliver Jens Schmitt

Research Design

Focus: Rural and urban communities in late medieval Dalmatia and their daily life structures and discourses on community.

Two regional case studies: Korčula and Šibenik

Time frame: Region of the Adriatic coast in Dalmatia (1420-1499) by the change by the Ottoman Empire (1499).

Material base: Extensive archival wealth of late medieval primary sources from Korčula and Šibenik, as well as secondary sources on the region and the area of Dalmatia.

Micro-historical approach combined with an interdisciplinary integration of medieval social-cultural practices and individual agency, a community and an individual concept of identity, experience and agency, requirements, personalities and larger structural dimensions.

Anthropological approach: History as help to reconstruct historical communities, as explicitly or implicitly identifiable social structures, in a more extensive and to offer new contributions to the study of social, cultural, political and economic structures and dynamics of past communities.

Comparative interest: pursuing a broader goal, that compared with other areas and regions and to compare the two study cases, the island of Korčula and the city of Šibenik.

Questions and Interim Results

P07's questions touched upon:  
• How was community enacted in the everyday social practices and discourses of rural and urban areas?  
• Were the communitarian boundaries between social and conditional categories permeable?  
• What were the patterns for definitions of belonging to a community: political and socio-cultural status, and symbols of segregation, cohabitation, and gender?  
• How did individuals refer to those and deal with them in their every-day community life?

Interim results show:  
• High awareness of various levels of social and conditional belonging in daily life – knowledge and being loyal to communal structures and their own social, political and socio-cultural status, and symbols of segregation, cohabitation, and gender.  
• High importance of conventional and socio-cultural patterns of community building.  
• Community boundaries were permeable and objects of discursive negotiation – many social and economic transactions and situational alliances across communitarian boundaries in daily life.  
• Particular and multiple relations to different aspects of community were substantially regulated.  
• Only belonging to the communitarian structures and conditional categories was not negotiable in daily life, but individuals could accept the conditional social boundaries.  
• No major role of ethnicity or religion in community building in Dalmatia – neither religious and ethnic major migration movements were focal in the source material.

Archival Research

P07 analyzed a vast and hitherto nearly unexplored collection of primary source material on late medieval Korčula in the Croatian State Archives in Zadar (DZAZ) regarding and analyzing thousands of original late medieval archival records containing a mixture of usually three different languages in both an opportunity and a challenge at the same time. Working with unedited sources involves not only handling by the archival staff but also a systematically organized working routine and a well structured methodological approach.

To investigate immense quantities of such records without falling into, to select, to index, and to structure and compare the findings involves the exploration of evidence from difficult and highly complex sources.

Benefits and New Insights: Interdisciplinary Cooperation between VISCOM and P07

P07 has been the first to use a VISCOM approach to analyze and interpret the archival sources of the late medieval Balkans. The interdisciplinary cooperation between VISCOM and P07 has been particularly fruitful in the following areas:  
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How to Approach a Community?

Spatially: Social boundaries did not separate conditional or normative communities. Thus, for example, different administrative and territorial boundaries often crossed separate the same social and conditional categories of community on the one hand, and the other hand, the same social and conditional categories of community on the other hand.

Symbolically: Symbols were used to mark communitarian spaces. A logic served also as a focus where socio-cultural patterns of belonging were affirmed. A logic also highlighted material aspects of inclusion and exclusion by offering a well-defined space for the community and its members.

Anthropologically: Social “visual” as well as “audible” structures and habits uncover forms of belonging to a community and can be investigated and compared using a micro-historical and comparative approach.

Case Studies on Community

Three ethno-historical case studies to answer the research objectives of VISCOM:  
1. Social structures and dynamics of rural communities on Korčula, especially the particular dynamics of the island of Korčula, to study forms of community building, conditional life, and social conflict at the margins of both communitarian and social boundaries of community (Christa Jürgens).

2. Personal boundaries and the Drablog brothers – a study of the social network, political agency and agency of a woman and two peasant leaders to explore the non-political and non-urban self-definition of social status and their struggle for social advancement (Doris Schwanitz).

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IMPRINT  
SFB VISCOM  
Responsible for the content: Walter Pohl  
Editorial director: Ingrid Hartl  
© Vienna 2019  
Art director, design, concept and production: Dagmar Giesriegl  
Printing: DGS GmbH, BuchDrucker.at

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