

'CARA-Europe' Initial Exploratory Meeting

Minutes of a meeting held on 13 July 2006 in the Headingley Room, Weetwood Hall (University of Leeds).

Present:

- Robert Bjork (Director, ACMRS, Arizona State University, and Chair, CARA [standing committee on centers and regional associations of the Medieval Academy])
- Melanie Brunner (Bibliographic Editor, International Medieval Bibliography, Institute of Medieval Studies, University of Leeds)
- Toby Burrows (Digital Services Director, NEER – see below under 'Lynch')
- Margaret Clunies Ross (Director, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney)
- Dick de Boer (Wetenschappelijk Directeur, Onderzoekschool Mediëvistiek – representing the six universities affiliated to this nationally-funded research school: Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, Groningen, Leiden, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, and Utrecht)
- Simon Forde (convenor and moderator of the meeting)
- Michael Harrison (Managing Director, Manuscripti Ltd, Kettering)
- Pam King (Director, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Bristol)
- Christian Krötzel (Historiatieteen laitos / History Department, Tampereen Yliopisto / Tampere University)
- Anne Lawrence (Director, Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Reading)
- Andrew Lynch (Member of Board, Network for Early European Research – representing the universities and scholars affiliated to this nationwide Australian Research Council-funded network)
- Richard Morris (Director, Institute of Medieval Studies, University of Leeds)
- Lars Boje Mortensen (Team Leader, Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies – representing the five affiliated institutions: University of Gothenburg, the Finnish Literature Society & the University of Helsinki, the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, and the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen)
- Balázs Nagy (Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University – Budapest)
- Nils Holger Petersen (Director, Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals, Københavns Universitet)
- James Weldon (President, Canadian Society of Medievalists / Société canadienne des médiévistes)

Those not present at the meeting but having presented their views during the Leeds conference, or earlier in writing:

- Graham Caie (Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of Glasgow)
- Hans-Werner Goetz (Präsident, Mediävistenverband – representing the 950 individual members from, largely, the German-speaking countries of Europe)
- Jacqueline Hamesse (Président, FIDEM / Fédération internationale des Instituts d'études médiévales)
- Stephanie Hollis (Director, Centre for Medieval and Early Modern European Studies, University of Auckland)

- Gerhard Jaritz (Institut für Realienkunde, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems)
- Raluca Radulescu (Director, Canolfan Astudiaethau Canoloesol / Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Wales - Bangor)

Apologies for absence:

- Ingrid Bennewitz (Zentrum für Mittelalterstudien, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg)
- Mario Costambeys (Liverpool Centre for Medieval Studies)
- Clare Downham (School of Languages and Literature, University of Aberdeen)
- Bill Kent (Monash University Prato Centre)
- Linne Mooney (Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York)
- Yolanda Plumley (Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Exeter)
- Sarah Alyn Stacey (Director, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Trinity College Dublin)
- Martina Stercken (Projektstelle Mittelalter, Universität Zürich)
- John Thompson (Head of Department, Queen's University Belfast)
- Elaine Treharne (President, the English Association)

The meeting opened at 14.00 and the following matters were discussed and agreed:

1. Introductions

- a. Bob Bjork explained the origins, activities, and aims of the 'Centers and Regional Associations (CARA),' a standing committee of the Medieval Academy in North America. The purpose of this meeting was to gauge whether there was interest in Europe for establishing a similar pedagogically-focused body for European medievalists.
- b. Simon Forde outlined his role as facilitator at the start-up of such a possible organisation in Europe, and stressed that he was doing so independently, but with the formal approval of the Medieval Academy. He emphasised that the list of organisations invited had not been in any sense comprehensive, since this was intended as an exploratory meeting.
- c. Michael Harrison volunteered to serve as minute-taker for this meeting.
- d. All those present introduced themselves and the organisations that they were representing.

2. Absentees and reports on their views

Simon Forde summarised the oral and written opinions expressed by those (see list above) who could not be present at the meeting:

- a. Graham Caie and Raluca Radulesca both volunteered to help in any capacity whatsoever, but particularly in the recruiting of members.
- b. Stephanie Hollis emphasised the need to cater for institutions in countries outside Europe (such as New Zealand) who wished to participate in such an international body.
- c. Gerhard Jaritz submitted various proposals on financing to ensure maximum, but equitable and fair, participation from institutions in central and Eastern Europe.
- d. Hans-Werner Goetz reported that the Board of the Mediävistenverband had recently met to discuss the present initiative. The Board was largely supportive, though a few members had expressed some anxiety over the level of US input. Prof. Goetz explained in full his and the Mediävisten-

verband's aspirations for the future and hoped that a truly pan-European body could be formed. He believed that this initiative could play a useful role. However, he wished the meeting to reflect further on how a grouping of institutions could be integrated with a largely member-based organisation such as the Mediävistenverband. Prof. Goetz had also informed his partner organisation in France, the Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public (via Prof. Régine Le Jan), about this initiative.

- e. Jacqueline Hamesse had circulated a letter in advance of the meeting arguing that the current initiative had no authority or legitimacy within Europe, and was duplicating the aims and work of FIDEM. Prof Bjork summarised the latest discussions that had taken place with Prof. Hamesse since this letter had been circulated.

3. Purposes

A lengthy discussion was held about the possible purposes of a 'CARA-type' organisation in Europe. The discussion was launched by outlining three scenarios that had been raised in the period since November 2005 when the initial invitation was sent out: (i) the original notion of a CARA-like grouping of institutions which restricted itself to pedagogical and practical matters, but which was formally linked to the Medieval Academy; (ii) a committee devoted solely to pedagogical issues which should apply to serve as a standing committee within FIDEM; (iii) either of the above, but also with a major focus on encouraging pan-European research projects and funding applications.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- a. Concerning the purposes of any European network of institutions and medievalists:
 - 1. Richard Morris emphasised that duplication of effort and the creation of additional organisations should be avoided wherever possible.
 - 2. Several participants emphasised the pressures of existing academic bureaucracy and argued that the proposed organisation could only survive if it delivered clear benefits to the participants.
 - 3. All participants were highly enthusiastic about a body that could focus on **promoting and supporting research, maximising collaboration and minimising conflicts, and encouraging funding applications for largescale pan-European projects to the ESF and other funding bodies**. Many participants spoke about the difficulties in getting the critical mass of institutions necessary to support an ESF project.
 - 4. There was an overall consensus that any body must be **light and unbureaucratic, of actual practical benefit** and essentially **voluntary**.
 - 5. Several participants argued for a lobbying function, to support medieval studies at a local (university) or national (ministry) level.
 - 6. Pam King spoke of the benefits of sharing best-practice and knowledge of digital resources for teaching.
 - 7. A brief discussion was raised about possible membership dues (€40 p.a. had been mentioned) and Bob Bjork explained that the majority of the equivalent annual dues for CARA in the US was spent on scholarships or prizes for doctoral students, or on sponsoring

medievalists (students and staff) to attend specialist summer schools (e.g. in Latin, or codicology). Participants considered this a useful precedent that could be copied in Europe.

- b. Concerning the relationship with FIDEM:
 1. Several participants had not heard of FIDEM; others believed that its remit *in effect* (even if its constitution stated otherwise) did not cover pedagogical issues; while other members expressed dissatisfaction with the scholarly agenda of FIDEM or the benefits that they perceived from membership.
 2. The work of FIDEM in running its MA programme in Rome was praised. Some speakers suggested that the present network could help promote this programme.
 3. The meeting recognised the strength of contacts that FIDEM had, in particular, in France, Italy and Iberia which were key countries that were not represented at this meeting.
 4. A number of participants argued that it was essential to avoid duplication of effort, or to bring about a split amongst medievalists, perhaps on a North-South basis.
 5. Bob Bjork undertook to continue efforts to forge a collaborative way forward with FIDEM, one that would maximise benefits for medievalists and avoid any unnecessary splits (see 5.c.2 below).
- c. Concerning the relationship with the Mediävistenverband and other bodies of individual scholars:
 1. All speakers were extremely enthusiastic about participation in the network by the Mediävistenverband.
 2. Richard Morris remarked that the International Medieval Congress had a database of over 10,000 medievalists, and also a body of Associate Members, which (though much smaller) was comparable in intent to the Mediävistenverband.
 3. Other speakers spoke in favour of welcoming national bodies, even if they were not fully multidisciplinary – the Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public was named, as were specific bodies for archaeologists and literary scholars.
 4. Likewise, several people argued that representatives of European or global single-disciplinary bodies, particularly where they had distinct medieval sections (such as ESSE), should be welcomed.
- d. Concerning the development of a European medieval network:
 1. Dick de Boer volunteered to establish a website, to be hosted by the Dutch Onderzoekschool, to serve as an information point to encourage collaboration and non-duplication of effort in research-funding bids.
 2. Prof. De Boer also offered the assistance of the secretary of the Onderzoekschool Mediëvistiek (Martin de Ruyter) to maintain this website and to facilitate the development of the current network.
 3. Bob Bjork also volunteered the resources of the CARA-Database and website to facilitate student and staff exchanges and the exchange of information on the academic programmes of partners.
 4. Richard Morris volunteered the resources of the IMC database as a means of identifying persons and institutions to participate in such a network.

5. There was widespread enthusiasm and a general consensus that this group should press ahead and explore further the possibilities of establishing a **truly European medieval network**, in association with the bodies named elsewhere during this meeting. Notwithstanding, it was essential to gain participation and input at the earliest possible moment from representatives from medieval organisations in, *inter alia*, France, Italy and Spain.
6. The representatives from Canada and Australia spoke strongly of their need to be closely linked to Europe (for cultural and funding reasons, *inter alia*); the Canadian Society of Medievalists in fact had previously explored membership of CARA in the US but had rejected this, and would prefer a partnership with a European network. Pam King mentioned other non-European organisations that might think likewise. The meeting agreed **that the European network should be open, as appropriate, to organisations outside Europe.**
7. The meeting **agreed** that a representative from CARA in the US would be welcome to participate fully in the European network. However, in the prevailing spirit of minimum formality and bureaucracy, an explicit link to the Medieval Academy might be superfluous.

4. Organisational principles

It was **agreed** that it was premature to discuss any formal constitution (specifically the draft that had been circulated prior to this meeting). Indeed, the meeting's preference for a light, unbureaucratic structure argued strongly against any such formality. Instead, a number of organisational principles were discussed and the following were **approved**:

- a. Representatives on any Steering Committee should be balanced between the four areas of Europe (for a description of these areas see 5.a below).
- b. In the initial years annual meetings would be important; these would take place on a rotational basis around the four areas. Participants would pay for their own travel and accommodation costs, so as to minimise costs for the host. Moreover, to further minimise expense of money and time, as far as possible these meetings should dovetail with existing major gatherings, such as the Leeds IMC, the annual meeting of the Mediävistenverband, the five-yearly FIDEM conference, and so on. In later years it may not be necessary to meet annually.
- c. Key functions in the organisation should be balanced around the four areas.
- d. Membership fees should be as low and affordable as possible, to reflect the light structure of the organisation. There was a short, inconclusive discussion about appropriate rates for 'federations of centres' (e.g. national groups), disciplinary bodies, or societies of individuals (such as the Mediävistenverband).
- e. The meeting firmly **rejected** the idea of certain languages being given official status. The meeting argued powerfully that an open policy whereby any languages were valid should be pursued.
- f. The meeting **agreed** that 'CARA-Europe' as a working-title was unsatisfactory for many reasons (the absence of 'regional associations' in Europe; the feeling that a term imported from America was inappropriate; the recognition that a 'network' was the essence of this venture; the acknowledgement that in Europe the partners would not solely be 'centres

and institutions' but societies, national or international groups, and be far more varied in type than the American model allowed). Some possible names or acronyms were suggested; this topic would be deferred till further discussion with bodies such as FIDEM had been conducted.

5. Electing a temporary working-group to take things forward:

- a. Recruitment officers for northern, central, southern and eastern Europe were nominated as follows:
 1. North (Britain and Ireland, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the Baltic States): Christian Krötzl, Lars Boje Mortensen, and Raluca Radulescu.
 2. Central (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland): this would be deferred till further discussions had taken place with the Mediävistenverband.
 3. East (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and countries eastwards): Gerhard Jaritz and Balázs Nagy.
 4. South (Greece, Italy, France, Belgium, and Iberia): this would be deferred till further discussions had taken place with FIDEM.
- b. Secretary and Website officer for grant applications (including drawing up lists of possible names for the network, if necessary): Martin de Ruiter.
- c. Negotiators with the Mediävistenverband and FIDEM:
 1. with the Mediävistenverband: Simon Forde and Bob Bjork.
 2. with FIDEM: Bob Bjork, Gábor Klaniczay, Christian Krötzl, and Nils Holger Petersen.

6. Next meeting(s)

The meeting **agreed** that a second, exploratory meeting should be held as soon as possible. Nevertheless, it should allow sufficient time to conclude the necessary, further discussions with the Mediävistenverband and FIDEM, and the other parties named.

- a. The offer of Budapest to host a meeting in March 2007 was accepted, the host organisation being the Central European University (the date and programme to be confirmed in due course).
- b. If, at Budapest or subsequently, it were decided to go ahead and formalise this network, subsequent annual meetings (see the principles in 4.b above) would be identified.

The meeting closed at 16.30.

Simon Forde and Bob Bjork

3 August 2006