

# CONFERENCE NEWS

## **SMFS-SPONSORED SESSION AT THE AHA**

The SMFS hopes to sponsor one or more sessions at the American Historical Association meeting in January 1999. Any historians—or historically-inclined scholars in other fields—who are interested should contact Ruth Karras (E-mail: rkarras@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu) and Mary Suydam (E-mail: suydam@kenyon.edu) before October 1, 1997.

## **QUEER MIDDLE AGES, NOVEMBER 5–7, 1998**

The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS), the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages (SSHMA), and the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship are pleased to announce Queer Middle Ages, November 5–7, 1998, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, (CUNY). Co-Sponsor: New York University.

This conference is dedicated to “queering” the Middle Ages: to the pursuit of methodologies of interpretation and documentation of the same-sex choices of women and men who resisted heteronormativity in their sexual and affective bonds during the period we have come to call the “Middle Ages.” We seek to expand knowledge of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality in a wide range of the globe’s cultural areas, such as the Arab and Islamic worlds, China, and the pre-colonial Americas. We understand “Middle Ages” to be a flexible, not prescriptive term, which can begin, depending on the area under consideration, as early as the 4th century CE and end as late as the end of the 16th century CE.

The conference aims to articulate the reasons why the “Middle Ages” has remained separate from far-reaching inquiries in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies. While queer studies has made a significant impact in the study of the early modern period, the Middle Ages has only sporadically been the object of “queering,” and we have only begun to document lives shaped by same-sex and queer desire. This period plays a potentially critical role in current debates over the historical parameters of the construction of homosexuality, offering a counterpoint to theories that deny the possibility of its existence before the modern age. The particularities of same-sex, non-heteronormative behaviors in the Middle Ages also provide rich material for a better understanding of many aspects of gendered identities.

Four plenary speakers have agreed to participate in the conference: Judith Bennett, Michael Camille, Carolyn Dinshaw, Everett K. Rowson. Sessions are already being organized in the following areas: Medieval China; French

Literature and History; Medieval India; Pre-Colonial Americas; Medieval Judaica; Medieval Religion and Spirituality; German Literature; Pedagogy; Islam and Middle Eastern Studies; Brooten's Work and the Middle Ages, Contemporary Queer Appropriations of Medieval Texts; Sexuality and Subcultures; Cross-Dressing; Transgender Experience. Further topics will be added. We welcome paper proposals in the above and in other areas; all work on the Queer Middle Ages will be considered.

DEADLINES: Session proposals, September 15, 1997; Two-page abstracts for papers, December 30, 1997

**TWO-PAGE ABSTRACTS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE CONFERENCE CO-CONVENERS:**

Francesca Canade Sautman, Departments of French & Women's Studies, Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center, E-mail: fsautman@shiva.Hunter.CUNY.edu

Steven Kruger, Department of English, Queens College and CUNY Graduate Center, E-mail: steven\_kruger@qc.edu

### **SPECIAL SESSION, SOUTH CENTRAL MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION**

The South Central Modern Language Association will hold its 1998 meeting in New Orleans (November, 1998). Robert Sturges proposes a special session on "Heterosexual Desire as Cultural Construction" in literature, medieval to modern. Send papers or proposals to the address below by November 1, 1997. The session is not intended to be exclusively medieval, so please pass this information on to other interested parties.

Robert Sturges, Dept. of English, Univ. of New Orleans, New Orleans LA 70148  
E-mail: rsseg@uno.edu  
Fax: (504) 280-7334  
Phone: (504) 280-6273

### **SMFS-SPONSORED SESSIONS OR PAPERS FOR 1997 CEMERS CONFERENCE, BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY**

The Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship has been invited to organize sessions at this conference. SMFS welcomes sessions/papers on all aspects of identities, "colonial desire" or multicultural discourses as they intersect with gender/sexualities. Deadline: June 10; Paper proposals must be in by June 30. Any individual who would like to organize a feminist session (under the aegis of SMFS) or who

has a paper to propose, please contact Marilynn Desmond, fax: (607) 777-4222; phone: (607) 777-6408; E-mail: MDESMON@Bingsuns.cc.Binghamton.edu

## **SESSION PROPOSALS FOR 1997 CEMERS**

### **"Visual Constructions of National Identity/Ethnicity and Gender: Pre Modern Europe Constructs the Other"**

The Medieval Feminist Art History Project seeks papers for a special session at the 1997 CEMERS Conference, Binghamton University, entitled "Comparative Colonialisms: Preindustrial Colonial Intersections in Global Perspective" to be held October 31 and November 1. Papers should address the intersection of gender and national identity in the visual cultures of medieval or early modern Europe. Send one-page abstracts to Pamela Sheingorn (E-mail: pams@panix.com) or RR # 1, Box 104, Enfield NH 03748 AND to Paula Gerson, 604 West 115 St., Apt. 5C, New York NY 10025. Deadline: June 30. All submissions will be acknowledged at the end of June.

### **"Converging/Converting Identities: Gender, Community, and Nation in Religious Texts and Images"**

SMFS-Sponsored Session at the CEMERS Conference, Binghamton University, "Comparative Colonialisms: Preindustrial Colonial Intersections in Global Perspective," October 31 and November 1, 1997

Medieval religious texts and images often explore the convergences of self and other, gender and race, conversion and identity, and body and community/nation. This session will consider the ways in which medieval religious texts and images discuss notions of community and nationhood, especially the way these notions are enacted on bodies. The overlapping intersections of gender and nationhood illustrate how texts and images embrace and/or demonize the religious other, particularly through the use of bodies as signs of conversionary moments and sites for community politics. Thus the community or nation defines itself not only through its beliefs, but through bodily transformation, trauma, racial or gender difference, or similarity. Under the rubric of medieval religious texts and images, papers could explore a wide variety of cultural productions, viewpoints, and cultures in keeping with the larger conference focus on "comparative colonialisms." Possible topics of exploration include definitions of community and otherness, conversion and martyrdom narratives, and transvestism and other symbolic bodily transformations.

Please contact the session organizer at the address below to express interest or ask questions. She will be happy to respond to your queries. Abstracts of 1-2 pages (300-500 words) should be sent (by E-mail or regular mail) to the session organizer, C. Annette Grise, by MONDAY, JUNE 23, 1997 for consideration. The

session will be finalized and passed on to the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship contact person for the June 30 deadline.

Session Organizer: C. Annette Grise, Department of English, University College, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada N6A 3K7; phone: (519) 673-5121; E-mail: cgrise@julian.uwo.ca

## THE THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL CEMERS CONFERENCE

October 31 and November 1, 1997 (Note: Revised Date)

### Comparative Colonialisms: Preindustrial Colonial Intersections in Global Perspective

Recent American attitudes and even US policy toward Bosnia have been driven in part by a seductive image, that of Sarajevo as a model of a tolerant and sophisticated multicultural society, disrupted and perhaps destroyed by nationalism and fanaticism. The resonances of this image in a society concerned with the fact of multiculturalism—David Dinkins's "gorgeous mosaic"—and its various implications are inescapable. Closer to home, the values associated with Sarajevo have been sustained in the recent celebration, notably in a well-attended exhibition in New York, of the *convivencia* of diverse populations in the Arab states of medieval Spain. Such historical accounts resonate with frankly fictive representations, from the Cartagena of Garcia Marquez to the Bombay of Rushdie, the Cairo of Mahfouz, or even Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria.

The coexistence associated with places like Sarajevo and Granada was of course enabled, safeguarded, and exploited by colonial power. We are confronted, therefore, by a paradox: positive conceptions of at least distant colonial cultures are emerging in our own culture against the background of postcolonial discourse, which is often still rooted in—though often also critical of—forms of nationalism developed in the anti-colonial struggles of the present century. This conference is designed to explore the diversity and complexities of demographic and cultural intersections (and resistance to intersection) in a range of colonial settings and historical periods. The conference will coincide with the 1997 New York State Conference on Asian Studies.

We invite submissions on colonial formations from the 11th to the 16th century. We envisage sessions on medieval Eurasia; on the early modern Americas and the Atlantic world, perhaps reviewing the outcomes of the debates of "Columbus year"; on the Ottoman Empire, both in and beyond Europe; and on regions relatively remote from European influence. We encourage comparative discussions and presentations directed to the role of representations—of "image"—

both in the constitution of colonial cultural formations and in modern descriptions of them.

Plenary Speakers: John Van A. Fine (University of Michigan): Balkans, Ottoman Rule in Europe; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (Rutgers): Louisiana and W. Indies, Africans in New World; Walter Mignolo (Duke University): Colonial and Pre-Colonial S. American Cultures; Anthony J.S. Reid (Australian National University, Canberra): South East Asia; Patricia Seed (Rice University): Colonial Regimes in the Americas.

Deadline: for submission of abstracts: July 1, 1997

For information please contact Charles Burroughs, Director, CEMERS  
Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CEMERS)  
Binghamton University, Binghamton NY 13902-6000  
E-mail: [cemers@binghamton.edu](mailto:cemers@binghamton.edu)  
phone: (607) 777 2730



## CONFERENCE REPORT: NEW TRENDS IN FEMININE SPIRITUALITY: THE EUROPEAN IMPACT OF HOLY WOMEN OF LIÈGE

From December 11-14, 1996, as part of the commemoration of the anniversary year of Juliana of Mt. Cornillon, the holy women of medieval Liège were discussed, analyzed and celebrated in modern Liège by academic women (and a couple of men) of varying degrees of holiness. The first plenary lecture was given by Luce Irigaray, who spoke on "Le Souffle des Femmes"; further plenary lectures were offered by Alexandra Barratt on the holy women of Liège, and Barbara Newman on the phenomenon of medieval demoniacs. The conference was interdisciplinary, and papers ranged from a survey of the art and architecture of Belgian beguinages to a consideration of the representation of beguines in late-medieval French literature. There was also a Round Table session on Modern Readings of Medieval Feminine Spirituality which included a poem inspired by Margaret of Ypres, an Irigarayan reading of Catherine of Siena, and a deconstruction of "Medieval Women" calendars and address books.

The conference participants came from many parts of Europe, from North America and from New Zealand. For me the most remarkable and enjoyable aspect of the conference was the open, ardent and engaging discussions which followed all the papers and overflowed into coffee sessions and tea breaks, discussions where ideas flowed as readily as the vin d'honneur served at the reception. The conference ended with a visit to a former beguinage, and to Elizabeth of Spaalbeek's chapel, where the bone-chilling cold convinced us that medieval holy women were made of sterner stuff than modern academics. The organizers were Juliette Dor of the Université de Liège, Lesley Johnson of the University of Leeds, and Jocelyn Wogan-Brown of the University of Liverpool; their imaginative and careful planning was responsible for a stimulating conference. A volume of selected papers from the conference is to be published by Brepols early next year.

*Rosalynn Voaden*  
*St. Anne's College, Oxford*