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# Home

This is the home page for the NEER Research Cluster entitled **Literary, Monastic and Intellectual Culture in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Europe**.

This research cluster contains members dedicated to the study of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe, with a particular interest in all aspects of the 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance', including literary and pedagogic studies, family history, religious history, politics, law, theology, and gender studies.

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## **Cary J Nederman, Twelfth Century Renaissance, ODMA**

By Cary J. Nederman

Forthcoming in *Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Robert Bjork

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#### **Renaissance: Twelfth Century**

The twelfth century was a period of exceptional cultural and intellectual vitality, characterized by a renewal of literary, philosophical, theological, legal and artistic pursuits compared to preceding centuries. Although scholars long recognized this transformation, the idea of a "renaissance of the twelfth century" crystallized with the publication of the book of the same title by Charles Homer Haskins in 1927. The so-called "Haskins thesis" was formulated in reaction to the use of "renaissance" by the historian Jacob Burckhardt to denote an exclusively modern and primarily Italian phenomenon. The view that a renaissance like that described by Burckhardt also occurred during the twelfth-century soon became a near article of faith among medievalists in the wake of Haskins' scholarship, and it remains one of the most widely accepted precepts of medieval historiography up to the present.

Haskins viewed the twelfth century renaissance as primarily a revival and flourishing of the Roman Latin classics, grounded in monastic learning and spread by the rise of the cathedral schools. He acknowledged that the chronological boundaries of the renaissance are not precise; its roots lay in the eleventh century and its death-knell is assigned to the gradual emergence of the scholastic curriculum of the universities established by c.1250. Yet Haskins claimed that the most vigorous expressions of a secularizing literary humanism, similar to that ascribed to fifteenth-century Italy, occurred between 1100 and 1200. Unlike the renaissance discussed by Burckhardt, however, its twelfth-century predecessor was geographically diffuse, with contributions originating in France, England, Germany, and the Iberian peninsula as well as Italy. The twelfth-century renaissance may be understood as the cultural manifestation of an emerging, broadly trans-European social order and identity.

Challenges to the "Haskins thesis" have generally been of two sorts. First, it has been pointed out that the twelfth century was not exceptional, since other medieval "renaissances" (both earlier and later) must also be considered. Thus, the revival of learning during the Carolingian era and the "humanistic" features of scholasticism may be set side-by-side with the accomplishments of the twelfth century. In this way, the cultural and intellectual history of the Middle Ages as a whole should be conceived as one wave of "renaissance" after the next, each with its own special characteristics, yet all sharing certain common elements and concerns in both form and content.

Second, many efforts have been made to elaborate on Haskins's insights by applying them to aspects of twelfth-century culture that he did not investigate. For example, scholars have examined how specific regions of Europe produced particular types of literary or philosophical contributions to the overall phenomenon of the twelfth-century renaissance. England, to cite one instance, has been viewed as the focal point of certain modes of historical and political writing that were uncommon elsewhere in Europe. Moreover, the geographic reach of the renaissance has been expanded to encompass Central and Eastern Europe as well as the far northern regions of the continent. In addition, the impact of Jewish and Islamic texts and traditions, transmitted through cross-cultural contact in Spain and the Middle East, is now considered to be central to recounting the history of twelfth-century thought.

Two other dimensions of twelfth-century culture that Haskins left mainly unexamined (by his own explicit admission) were the appearance of vernacular languages and literatures and the development of artistic creation. More recent scholars have argued that the emergence of vernacular literacy throughout Europe during the twelfth century was not parasitic upon or ancillary to Latinity. Rather, vernacular tongues and texts occupied an independent place in European culture and stood in a dynamic and interconnected relation to the Latin elements of the twelfth-century renaissance. Furthermore, architecture and the "figurative" arts reflected a considerable fascination with classical antiquity, especially Rome. This was so not only in Italy, but across Europe, to the extent that art historians have come to speak of the later eleventh and twelfth centuries as a "protorenaissance" (in Edwin Panofsky's meaning of that term).

Finally, while Haskins allotted some role to rhetoric, philosophy and the natural sciences in the twelfth-century renaissance, he treated these fields as tangential or derivative to classical Latin language and literature. Subsequent scholarship has concentrated attention on how the circulation of the rhetorical, philosophical and scientific writings of antiquity (by Roman authors such as Cicero as well as by Greek and Arabic writers) strongly influenced the period's intellectual history. For example, although most of Aristotle's corpus was unknown until after 1200, there were key intermediary pagan and early Christian texts that transmitted many of his important teachings to a twelfth-century audience.

CJN

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## **Creation and Regulation....**

Hello Everybody,

For the information of those not at NEER, our session tentatively planned a book with the title "Creation and Regulation," which would be concerned with evaluating the current state of the long 12th century.

In terms of format, it was decided to embark on a dialogue format. The vague idea was that cluster members might contact a scholar in their field with whom they would like to engage on a key issue for their discipline. So, for example, I could write an article on Peter Lombard's legacy and ask Marcia Colish to respond/debate.

See below the model for this idea. A member of the audience suggested that this might be a good format.

[http://www.amazon.com/Voices-Dialogue-Reading-Women-Middle/dp/0268037175/ref=sr\\_1\\_3/104-1573241-4000723?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183727667&sr=8-3](http://www.amazon.com/Voices-Dialogue-Reading-Women-Middle/dp/0268037175/ref=sr_1_3/104-1573241-4000723?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183727667&sr=8-3)

We talked about meeting again as soon as possible to continue these thoughts, but it all depends on Cary's availability.

Please add to this summary...

Clare

#### **NOTES BY JOHN WARD ON NEER TWELFTH-CENTURY RENAISSANCE SESSIONS (JULY 2007)**

I found the wide range of topics and angles very refreshing and holding out the prospect of a really valuable contribution to the study of the unique significance of this century in European history, and hence, perhaps, world history. I think it crucial that we recognise the many-sidedness (cf. Lehmann!), the open-ness, the imaginative aspects of twelfth century culture, an imaginativeness reflected as much in politics (crusades, the Empire, the papal vision, the plantagenets, Philip Augustus as emperor in his own kingdom, etc) as in literature and culture (the more traditional focus of the 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance'). I think that whatever we do, we should keep in mind the unique status of this period (which should be defined at least as the period between the Investiture Controversy and the Fourth Lateran Council) in European history (which lands us with R.I. Moore, who came out well enough in our sessions though insufficiently cognisant of what Godman, Jaeger, Otten, Southern and Wetherbee were on about - the 'lost vision' of the intellectual elite in the period). We usefully discussed how Moore's 'control' element should be balanced by a 'creativity' element, to cover everything from the Grail and the Metamorphosis Goliae to the foundations of the Inquisition and the 'nation-state'.

In terms of a publication, I would myself prefer to see a genuine 'aid' to the study of the period, rather than a set of essays with a pretty cover which can be lost amongst the Brill and the Brepols publications and former theses of the year in question....

**Title:** something like 'A Companion to Twelfth-Century European Studies' or 'A Companion to the Twelfth-Century Renaissance'. I prefer the latter because it reduces the anticipated compass of the volume, and is more in keeping with the pattern of western historiography for the century. It also challenges a total comparative assessment of the period.

**Introduction:** establishing the significance of the period, the evolution of the historiography concerning it and the range and compass of the volume / subject.

**Section I: Paired Essays:** existing or commissioned. These paired essays should set up conflicts and contrasts in the historiography; for example:

Haskins versus Munro on the relevance of the term 'Renaissance'.

Jaeger / Mews versus Von Moos on the Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard.

Jaeger versus almost anyone else on pessimism / optimism 'renovatio' in the twelfth century.

Cary Nederman and R.I. Moore on tolerance vs the persecuting society.

Clare Monagle and R.I. Moore on the relevance of 'revolution' to the period.

Munz and Gillingham on why Rahewin stopped writing the Gesta Frederici.

Women in the older historians and the more recent.

Alan of Lille according to Jaeger and Godman.

Humanism according to Godman and Southern.

William of Malmesbury versus John of Salisbury.

Me vs almost all the others on William of Malmesbury.

Feudalism in the Twelfth Century (Reynolds, Bisson and others).

Gillingham and Barraclough on the nature of the German Empire.

ETC.

**Section II: approaches and topics:** see for a sample here the second attachment to my NEER submission on the website. The idea here is to set possible classroom / essay questions with bibliography and, where relevant, comment. Possible further topics could range widely: crusades; the vision of empire; the foundation of Portugal; the reconquista; economic expansion, patronage and culture; Henry II, Philip Augustus and the origins of the nation-state; was the German Empire the only appropriate form of government for the regions it encompassed or should contemporaries have aimed at institutions closer to those developed by Henry II and Philip Augustus? Parliamentary institutions in Spain; how far and why is the term 'Reformation' appropriate to the twelfth-century? Did women have a 'Renaissance' in the Twelfth century? What significance did the concept of the *vita apostolica* have for twelfth-century religious aspirations? Was 'heresy' created in the period? Explain the origins of 'witchcraft' in the twelfth century. Or the origins of the inquisition. Was the Investiture Controversy, as Manitius maintains, the greatest event of the middle ages? To what extent does the 'twelfth-century renaissance' owe its origins to the Investiture Controversy? Compare twelfth-century philology and humanism with (a) Italian Renaissance century philology and humanism, or (b) modern century philology and humanism; how far was 'Gothic' the greatest achievement of the twelfth century? What attitudes towards the Roman past are implicit in Romanesque architecture? To what extent and why was the Norman kingdom of Sicily a most outstanding example of a multicultural society? Discuss the relevance of Heer's division between the 'open' twelfth century and the 'closed' thirteenth. To what extent did the burning of Marguerite Porete, the Council of Vienne and the dissolution of the Templar order represent the reversal of major trends in twelfth-century Europe? Why? Should the recent Christian immigrants and the longer standing Christian residents of the Holy Land have taken radically different paths than those that were actually taken during the years just prior to the Battle of the Horns of Hattin? How? Why? Which paths? The Bayeux Tapestry is a unique document; what does it tell us about its society that is unique? When and why do government and monarchy in England cease to be 'Norman'? Why is the Reconquista so called and why are the crusades so called? Are they the same phenomenon? Why did the pursuit of the Holy Grail not get persecuted as a 'heresy'? What are Innocent III's claims to be the greatest of popes? Was Frederick Barbarossa a 'modern' ruler for his times? What is the modern equivalent of 'the seven liberal arts'? Why did the classics play so great a role in the study of these arts? Compare the role the classics play in modern education. How far is baptism the key to an understanding of the notion of 'rebirth' in the twelfth century? Compare the achievements of the twelfth century with those of the eleventh and / or the thirteenth? How far does the history of Europe in the twelfth century confirm the positive benefits that Christianity brought to western society? How far did Christianity understand 'Islam' in the twelfth century and how far did the century's understanding lay the foundations for the modern western view of Islam? If the twelfth century was overlain with an apocalyptic 'end of the world' viewpoint, what possible relevance can the concept of a 'twelfth-century Renaissance' have to the period? Contrast Christianity and culture at the peripheries of Europe (Eastern Europe? Russia? Scandavia?) with the same phenomena at the centre. Define 'centre' and 'periphery' in this regard. Did the twelfth century invent the concept and practice of Christian political thought? Evaluate the notion of Venetian greed as a reason for the turning of the fourth crusade against Byzantium. Compare western and Byzantine culture in the twelfth century. How far did the twelfth century enable the west to significantly narrow the cultural gap with Islam? Assess the impact of the crusades on the development of western medicine. Assess the view that the unique feature of the twelfth century was the search for law and order. What comparable features may be pointed to between the European west and (a) China, (b) India, (c) Japan, (d) Meso-America in the same period?

ETC.

**Bibliography:** see the first attachment in my NEER contribution on the website. 'Reviews' could be asked of students for key books in this list.

Members of the cluster could be invited to contribute to each of the above sections and to evaluate what is selected for the sections. One member submitted the following plan: ***Sic et non: dialogues on the twelfth century***. Revolution: *sic et non*; Renaissance: *sic et non*; Reformation: *sic et non*; *renovatio: sic et non*.

#### **Comment by Juanita:**

Thanks to all involved for two great sessions at the NEER conference: there was much to discuss and we should look to add summaries of these discussions to this site. Thanks to Clare for getting us all started on Confluence and the discussion of our forthcoming edited volume on the Twelfth-Century Renaissance. I am very keen on the idea of the paired dialogue format, with a provisional title along the lines of *The Twelfth Century in Dialogue* as proposed, if I recall correctly, by Constant. I myself would be interested in writing on experience in the twelfth century, with particular regard to autobiography and didactic literature; I would be interested in dialoguing with a scholar who has worked on experience as an aspect of monastic spirituality in the twelfth century (Ineke van 't Spijker's monograph, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Brepols 2004, comes to mind as a good starting point). Looking forward to hearing others' suggestions for their own dialogues, or indeed for dialogues that could be commissioned from scholars not in our cluster. Juanita.

Dear all

First, can I reiterate Juanita's thanks to everyone. it was a great couple of days in Melbourne on 16/17 Dec.

Second, on the structure of the book - yes, Juanita raises a point worth considering. I don't really have an opinion on this yet, other than to say that of course the book needs some structuring element. I do like the idea of having the 3 internal introductions (ie the 1500-2500 word introductions by Constant, myself, and Clare), since having internal introductions will stop the book seeming like just another collection of totally separate essays. Whether these internal introductions should be based on chronological periods or thematic categories or something else is the question. Maimonides and Alan of Lille (and perhaps Waldo) would all seem to fit not illogically at the end of the book. What are others' ideas?

I have downloaded Cary's dictionary entry - thanks. I've also posted this comment to confluence.

Best wishes, Liz

## **Members**

The members of this Research Cluster are:

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