

20th international conference of
the AUSTRALIAN EARLY MEDIEVAL ASSOCIATION

tempestuous times:
crisis, change, and allegory
in the early medieval and
medieval world



programme

2 – 4 october 2025

australian catholic university,
melbourne, *and* online



20th international conference of
the Australian Early Medieval Association

2–4 October 2025, hosted in person *and* online at the Australian Catholic University,
Melbourne

conference committee

Convenors:

Erica Steiner
Darius von Güttner Sporzyński
with
The AEMA Committee

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2024–25

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Programme – Thursday

LIGHT GREEN SESSIONS = ONLINE

MID GREEN SESSIONS = IN-PERSON

AEST	Thursday	
0900		
0930	Conference Open + Refreshments	
	Keynote	
	Chair: Dr Matthew Firth	
1000	Tempests of the Soul: Emotion, Education, and Ethical Transformation in Late Antiquity	
	Prof Michael Champion	
	Australian Catholic University, Melbourne	
1030	Prof Michael Champion	
1100	Refreshments	
	SESSION 1A	SESSION 1B
	Chair: Dr Stephen Joyce	Chair: Dr Christopher White
	Gildas and Mount Badon: Resisting the Saxon storm	Across the Tumultuous Seas: Slavery, Discretion, and Sovereignty in Early Medieval Southern Italy
1130	Dr Bernard Mees, Bangor University	Asst. Prof Sarah Whitten, Hobart and William Smith Colleges
	The Tempest Within: Culture Erasure and Identity Crisis in Early Medieval England	Vox Tempestatis : Voicing the Divine Storm
1200	* Mariel González Sáez, Instituto Superior del Profesorado "Dr. Joaquín V. González"	Dr Carol Williams, Monash University
	The Lash of Legacy: Migration-Age Trauma in Old English Poetry	The Formation of Gregorian Chant and Carolingian Political Crises
1230	Dr Bob DiNapoli, Scholar at Large	Ted Krasnicki, Independent Scholar
1300	Refreshments	
1330	SESSION 2A	SESSION 2B
	Chair: Dr Matthew Firth	Chair: Dr Sarah Corrigan
	Gallus Anonymus and Stanisław Orzechowski: the Sea and State-forming	Frozen in Fear: the paradox of anxiety in Byzantine devotion
1400	Mariia M. Katkova, National Research University Higher School of Economics	* Olympia Nelson, University of Sydney
	Did ethnicity matter? Ethnic background of political actors in medieval historiography of Central Europe (12th century)	Love couples in crises: Benoît de Sainte-Maure and his <i>Roman de Troie</i>
1430	Prof. dr hab. Przemysław Wiszewski, University of Wrocław	* Maria Sandali, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
	<i>Chronica Polonorum</i> as a Literary Composition and Political Testimony: Bishop Vincentius's Vision of Grief, Rule, and Renewal	Caught in a Storm: The Irony of Jonah's Story in Patience
1500	Assoc. Prof Darius von Guttner, Australian Catholic University, Canberra	Assoc. Prof Kseniia Vielchieva, Alfred Nobel University
1530	Refreshments	
	Performance	
	Chair: Dr Bob DiNapoli	
1600	The <i>Beowulf</i> Manuscript - A Performed History	
	Dr Felix Nobis	
1630	Monash University	
1700	Reception @ ACU	
1730		
1800		
1830		
1900		

* Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher presenters eligible for the Best Paper Prize are marked with an asterisk.

australian early medieval association

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Programme – Friday

LIGHT GREEN SESSIONS = ONLINE MID GREEN SESSIONS = IN-PERSON

AEST	Friday	
0900		
0930		
1000		
1030		
1100		
	Excursion - The Galloway Hoard @ The Melbourne Museum	
1130		
1200		
1230		
1300	<i>Refreshments</i>	
1330		
	<i>SESSION 3A</i>	<i>SESSION 3B</i>
	<i>Chair: Erica Steiner</i>	<i>Chair: Julian Calcagno</i>
	Forging Warriors in a World Unmade: Saxon Migration, Warrior Identity, and Cybernetic Archaeology in Post-Roman Britannia	The 1066 Collapse of St. Gottschalk's Realm in a Comparative Perspective
1400	Dr Ash Lenton , Australian National University	Dr Rostyslav Vateba , I. Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
	An Echo of a Crisis: The Paternus Plate From Tomis to the Steppes	The Kaivarta Revolt: Crisis, Resistance, and Transformation in Pala Bengal (c. 1075 – 1080 CE)
1430	Asst. Prof Yanko Hristov , South-West University "Neofit Rilski"	* Sayantika Biswas , University of Calcutta & * Saikat Mondal , University of Calcutta
	Resurrecting a cross in tempestuous times: Rev Henry Duncan, the Masonic Lodge and the Ruthwell Cross	The Eye of the Storm: Gunnhildr <i>konungamóðir</i> in Norwegian Dynastic History
1500	Dr Pamela O'Neill , University of Sydney	* Dr Matthew Firth , Flinders University
1530	<i>Refreshments</i>	
	<i>SESSION 4A</i>	<i>SESSION 4B</i>
	<i>Chair: Prof Michael Champion</i>	<i>Chair: Carol Williams</i>
	Penitence in pieces: how to shatter your soul for good in Byzantium	The best desert is made of water: nature and mission in the <i>Vita Columbae</i> (7th century)
1600	Assoc. Prof Robert Nelson , University of Melbourne	* Dr Rocío Suárez Vallejo , Universitat de Málaga
	From Conquest to Devout: the Afterlife of Prostration in Early Christian Iconography	Comparing Narratives: Violent Conflict or Environmental Disasters as Causes for the Emergence of the Peace of God
1630	* Camilla Marraccini , IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca	* Christine Grundy , Australian National University
	"Do you feel me?": <i>Consolatio</i> and Lament as a response to religious upheaval in fifth-century Vandal North Africa	Notes for an Art History of Catastrophes: Earthquakes in Italy during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period
1700	* Jennifer Budd , Australian Catholic University, Melbourne	Dr Leonardo Colicigno , Università degli Studi di Firenze
1730		
1800		
1830		
1900		
1930		
2000		
2030		
2100		

* Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher presenters eligible for the Best Paper Prize are marked with an asterisk.



Programme – Saturday

LIGHT GREEN SESSIONS = ONLINE MID GREEN SESSIONS = IN-PERSON

AEST	Saturday	
1030		
1100	<i>Refreshments</i>	
	<i>SESSION 5A</i>	<i>SESSION 5B</i>
	<i>Chair: Dr Sarah Corrigan</i>	<i>Chair: Dr Ash Lenton</i>
1130	Malicious Meteorology: Understanding the weather, whether natural or not * Dr Christopher White, University of Queensland	"In the streets corpses, and in houses the dead; in the streets a revolting stench": A 7th – 8th Century Byzantine Antichrist Dr Shawn McAvoy, Independent Scholar
1200	Aqueous Whirlwinds: Storms on the Water, Tempests in the Heart in Early Medieval Latin Literature Prof June-Ann Greeley, Sacred Heart University	Literal or allegorical? Gildas and the 'famous plague' Dr Stephen Joyce, Monash University
1230	Storms, Shipwrecks, and Human Destiny Dist. Prof Albrecht Classen, University of Arizona	Violence in the Time of Tranquillity: Art, Religion and Political Issues in Early Medieval Odisha Asst. Prof Sujata Rakshit, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan
1300	<i>Refreshments</i>	
1330		
	<i>SESSION 6A</i>	<i>SESSION 6B</i>
	<i>Chair: Erica Steiner</i>	<i>Chair: Dr Matthew Firth</i>
1400	Devotion and Disability: The Impact of Christ's Suffering on Medieval Attitudes Toward Individuals with Impairments Dr Ananda Majumdar, North Central Theological Seminary	Terrible Storms and Turbulent Seas – shaping the <i>Vinland sagas</i> ' world view * Kerry Kirwan, Independent Scholar
1430	Extreme Asceticism in the East Roman Empire: A Product of its Time * Sybil Wong, Macquarie University	<i>Thi Wilde Witsing</i> – Vikings in Old Frisian Texts: Wild Memories or Wild Imaginations * Hilbert Bryn Gysbert Vinkenoog, Independent Scholar
1500	Women in the Frankish Era: Exploring the Lives of Western Women in the Principality of Achaia * Dr Katerina Kiltzanidou, Democritus University of Thrace (Komotini)	Art versus Script: an Exploration of Modern Applications for Historic Runes * Tobin Miles, Independent Scholar
1530	<i>Refreshments</i>	
	<i>SESSION 7A</i>	<i>SESSION 7B</i>
	<i>Chair: Dr Christopher White</i>	<i>Chair: Dr Sarah Corrigan</i>
1600	The Zanj Rebellion (869 – 883) in the Arab medieval sources: The Conflict between the Centre and Margin Assoc. Prof Amina Boukail, University of Jijel	ὥσπερ ἀστραπήν: Natural Imagery of Disaster in the Miracles of Saint Demetrios * Miltiadis Paikopoulos, Independent Scholar
1630	The Poetics of Affective Ecology in Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry * Sumera Saleem, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne	When the Dead Came Riding: Crisis, Memory and the Supernatural in Polotsk, 1092 * Evgeny Podvalnov, Yelets State University of Bunin, Yelets & * Dagmar Vyslouchilová, Masaryk University, Brno
1700	Rupture and continuity in the epigraphic discourse of early medieval northwestern Hispania (8th – 10th centuries). * Dr Álvaro Lorenzo Fernández, Universidad Complutense de Madrid	"The sun hid its own light, it mourned its lord": The agency of the elements in the Old Irish poems of Blathmac Docent Alexandra Bergholm, University of Helsinki
1730	<i>Conference Close</i>	
1800		

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2024 Conference Keynote Speakers

Tempests of the Soul: Emotion, Education, and Ethical Transformation in Late Antiquity

Professor Michael Champion

Keynote

Australian Catholic University, Melbourne (Australia)

Late antiquity has been characterised in multiple conflicting ways – a period of decline, emergence, transformation, tradition, of dynamism or conservatism, of conflict or collaboration. ‘Tempests’ might seem to align with the more pessimistic readings of the period but might also speak to the ways that storms reshape landscapes, wash away accretions, or enable new life. Through this talk, I will reflect on these larger characterisations of late antiquity by taking education as a case study for changes into the early middle ages. I will investigate how education of different types – ascetic, philosophical, and ascetic – was supposed to form souls and communities. Imagery of storms, tempests, and upheavals are used in different educational contexts both to underline the necessity of ethical formation through education as a means of control and also as an image of the power of education to shape individuals and societies. Taking education as a ‘laboratory of culture’, I will explore how storms in education can figure wider cultural dynamics.

Michael Champion is Professor of Late Antique and Early Christian Studies at ACU Melbourne. He is the author most recently of *Dorotheus of Gaza and Ascetic Education* (Oxford University Press, 2022) and co-editor (with Matthew Crawford and Lewis Ayres) of *The Intellectual World of Christian Late Antiquity: Reshaping Classical Traditions* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). He is currently working on studies of ancient Gaza and Palestine, and the work that emotions do in ancient to Byzantine education.

The *Beowulf* Manuscript – A Performed History

Dr Felix Nobis

Performance

Monash University (Australia)

Created and performed by Felix Nobis.

Drawing from his own translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem, Dr Felix Nobis tells a story spanning a thousand years of pillage, fire, neglect and survival. Felix has toured internationally with his own translation of *Beowulf* (2002). Now, he brings together his historical understanding of the manuscript and intertwines it with the telling of parts of the tale.

Felix Nobis is a poet, playwright and actor. He is a Senior Lecture in Theatre & Performance at Monash University. He completed his studies in Old and Middle English at University College Cork, and holds a PhD in medieval storytelling traditions. He has received the Vice Chancellors Award for Teaching Excellence. Felix’s television credits include ongoing roles in *MDA* and *JANUS* (both ABC). He has worked with most Australian Theatre Companies and toured Australia and USA as the narrator of the arena spectacular *Walking with Dinosaurs – the live experience*. He has toured internationally with his translation of *Beowulf* (published 2002). His poetical narrative *Once Upon a Barstool* premiered in Cork, Ireland and has toured extensively. His verse play *Boy out of the Country* (Currency Press) toured Melbourne and Regional Victoria and was included in the VCE syllabus. In 2025 he was nominated for a Green Room Award for Most Outstanding Performance.



2024 Conference Presenters

“The sun hid its own light, it mourned its lord”: The agency of the elements in the Old Irish poems of Blathmac

Docent Alexandra Bergholm, University of Helsinki (Finland)

Session 7B

In the Bible, the events of the Crucifixion and the Second Coming of Christ are surrounded by terrifying and disruptive natural phenomena, signalling the cosmic repercussions of His sacrificial death and triumphant return. This paper examines the poetic treatment of these themes in the Old Irish text known as the poems of Blathmac, a lengthy devotional composition of approximately 300 stanzas written around the mid-eighth century. Since the publication of this text six decades ago, the poems have garnered considerable scholarly interest for their linguistic and socio-historical value, but many aspects of their theology remain less systematically explored. The analysis illustrates how Blathmac draws on his own native tradition to highlight the active agency of the natural world in the unfolding events of the redemptive drama, allowing him to craft a unique rendering of the biblical narrative that underscores the role of Christ as Creator and Redeemer.

Alexandra Bergholm (PhD, title of Docent) is University Lecturer in the Study of Religion at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She is currently on research leave working as a senior researcher in the project *Whose Angels? Art, Research, and Enchantment* (Kone Foundation, 2023–26). Her research interests include Celtic studies, early medieval religious cultures, death and commemoration, memory studies, and the materiality of religion.

The Kaivarta Revolt: Crisis, Resistance, and Transformation in Pala Bengal (c. 1075 – 1080 CE)

Sayantika Biswas, University of Calcutta (India)

Session 3B

The Varendra rebellion, commonly known as the Kaivarta revolt, stands as one of the most significant tempests to engulf early medieval Bengal, fundamentally transforming the socio-political landscape of the Pala Empire. This paper examines how the revolt during the reign of Mahipala II (c. 1075–1080 CE) resulted in his death and the loss of Varendra (north Bengal) to the Kaivarta chief Divya, representing a critical moment of crisis that challenged established hierarchies and reshaped regional power dynamics.

The revolt emerged from a confluence of factors including oppressive taxation, administrative tyranny, and the strategic exploitation of the Kaivartas' maritime expertise. As the Kaivartas were very expert in boating, they capitalized on naval war. Mahipala II was killed by the rebels and the Pala armies were forced to fall back, demonstrating how traditional skills became instruments of political transformation. The rebellion's success in establishing an independent Kaivarta state under Divya's leadership represents a rare instance of successful subaltern resistance in early medieval India.

Drawing on Sanskrit sources, particularly the *Ramacharitam*, this paper explores how the revolt functioned as both literal and metaphorical tempest – disrupting established order while creating space for new forms of political organization. The rebellion's aftermath, including the eventual restoration of Pala authority under Ramapala, illustrates the complex negotiations between crisis and continuity that characterized medieval Bengal's political evolution.



The Kaivarta revolt serves as a compelling case study for understanding how moments of upheaval could temporarily invert social hierarchies and challenge imperial authority, while also revealing the limitations of such transformations. By examining this ‘tempestuous time’ through the lens of resistance and recovery, this paper contributes to broader discussions about the dynamics of political change in early medieval South Asia.

Sayantika Biswas is currently in the final year in her MA programme at the University of Calcutta where she is pursuing postgraduate degree University Modern History. Her academic interests like the intersections of films and History, reflective of the deep passion for these subjects. Additionally, Sayantika holds a passion for Literature and music.

The Zanj Rebellion (869 – 883) in the Arab medieval sources: (The Conflict between the Centre and Margin)

Assoc. Prof Amina Boukail, University of Jijel (Algeria)

Session 7A

The Zanj Rebellion was not just a revolt against the Abbasid Caliphate (869 – 883) but also an important resistance against a long misrepresentation of the black slave in Arabic culture for a long time.

This paper aims to follow the representation of the Zanj Rebellion in Arabic medieval sources. It will attempt to show literature’s power to represent the Other (Black slaves) and its impact on writing this historical event, then we will try to analyse discursive practices of the Black poets to resist against this misrepresentation during the Zanj Rebellion.

Amina Boukail is an Associate Professor of comparative literature and Arabic Medieval literature at the University of Jijel, She received her Ph.D. from the University of Annaba (Algeria) in 2016 with a dissertation titled *Arabic elements in Hebrew andalusian literature*. Her research interests include Arabic medieval literature, Judeo-Arabic, Iberian studies, Algerian literature, and minorities in the Arabic world. Her publications include: *Arabic Maqamat in Universal Literatures* (2022, in Arabic), and *The representation of the Other in Hebrew Andalusian literature in Arabic* (Damascus 2023).

“Do you feel me?”: *Consolatio* and Lament as a response to religious upheaval in fifth-century Vandal North Africa

Jennifer Budd, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne (Australia)

Session 4A

In modern parlance, asking “Do you feel me?” is a way of seeking empathy and understanding. It expresses a desire to know that one’s feelings and emotions matter to another. This is what Victor of Vita did in the closing of his fifth-century text, *The History of the Vandal Persecution*. He asked for consolation, for someone who would grieve alongside North Africa in their time of trial. Speaking of the Arian Vandals in his final paragraphs, Victor of Vita writes that “the storm of their rage has been like the wind of a tempest”. He then concludes his work with a heart-rending lament, pouring forth emotion and seeking consolation. Often viewed as a culturally divisive text marred by invective and bias, the *Historia Persecutionis* should be re-examined and can be better understood as a work of lament – one which deals with significant cultural trauma. Victor composed his work at the peak of religious violence and oppression of the Nicene North African Christians under Arian-Vandal rule. His response was to craft a lament recounting traumatic events and exhorting communal adhesion in the face of opposition. Unlike many scholars who have viewed the conclusion of the *Historia* as evidence that Victor’s main



goal in writing was to plead for military aid from outside, I argue that his text is a representation of the very human need to grieve and express emotion in community.

Jennifer Budd is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry, ACU, Melbourne. Her research looks at the representation of women in Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis Vandalorum Africanæ Provinciae*. Through the lens of attachment theory, her work examines the ways in which the female martyr and confessor narratives in the *Historia* demonstrate Victor of Vita's narrative aims of encouraging religious orthodoxy.

Storms, Shipwrecks, and Human Destiny

Dist. Prof Albrecht Classen, University of Arizona (USA)

Session 5A

While we tend to associate storms, horrible weather conditions, earthquakes, and the like with nature's onslaught on humans, as an existential threat, many medieval poets, fully aware of the dangers involved, interpreted those natural disasters commonly as symbolic interventions in human life bringing about radical changes in the protagonist's destiny. For a framework, see the examples of St. Brendan's voyage (early Middle Ages) and Christine de Pizan's *Mutation de la fortune* (late Middle Ages). For this talk, I will focus on concrete examples of mighty storms that divert protagonists away from their original goal (if they chose it in the first place) to new places or localities where they are really destined to go. This is best exemplified in the pre-courtly Herzog Ernst (ca. 1170), Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan and Isolde* (ca. 1220), and in the unusual heroic epic poem, *Kudrun* (ca. 1260). We can observe each time the hand of God, so to speak, although these narratives are mostly secular. In particular, these Middle High German poets emphasized that a natural catastrophe, or crisis, served highly constructive purposes allowing the protagonist to rediscover his true destiny in life.

Dr. Albrecht Classen, University Distinguished Prof. of German Studies at the University of Arizona, works on medieval and early modern literature and culture. He has published currently 125 books and close to 800 articles. He is the editor of the journals *Mediaevistik* and *Humanities*. He has received numerous awards for teaching, service, and research, such as the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Band (Order of Merit) from the German President in 2004 as well as being bestowed the title of Grand Knight Commander of the Most Noble Order of the Three Lions in 2017.

Notes for an Art History of Catastrophes: Earthquakes in Italy during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period

Dr Leonardo Colicigno, Università degli Studi di Firenze (Italy)

Session 4B

Italy is a country that has historically exhibited signs of fragility. This concept is recognised not only by geologists and historical seismologists, but also by painters, whose works from ancient times until the advent of photography have depicted natural disasters in various ways. Since the 11th century CE, seismologists have recorded almost 5,000 major destructive events. In the context of religious thought, earthquakes are depicted in the sixth seal of Revelation as a symbol of the overthrow and destruction of the human world, signifying divine judgement. The following paper aims to examine pictorial representations and frescoes depicting earthquakes that had a devastating impact on Italian territory. In this regard, the frescoes of Nicolas Wurmester in Karlstein Castle, Czech Republic, will be considered. These frescoes, which depict the aftermath of the earthquake that struck Carinthia, are of significant



historical and artistic importance. Friuli and part of the Veneto region were documented by the Sienese “earthquake painters” in 1348, who were responsible for the depiction of earthquake damage in the biccherne panel paintings.

Leonardo Colicigno (post graduated student – Scuola di Specializzazione in Beni Storico Artistici University of Florence, Italy, last year) was awarded his degree with honours in 2020, having presented a thesis in Art History which focused on a 14th-century lintel. This was subsequently published as an article in the *IX Ciclo di Studi Medievali*, edited by NUME – Gruppo di Studio sul Medioevo Latino Association, in 2023. Since 2022, he has been employed as a museum operator at the Natural History Museum of the University of Florence.

The Lash of Legacy: Migration-Age Trauma in Old English Poetry

Dr Bob DiNapoli, Scholar at Large (Australia)

Session 1A

Any reader of Old English poetry becomes quickly acquainted with its tendency to regard the past as a zone of value and authority. Kings, heroes and weapons are routinely valorised as *ær-gōd* (literally, ‘before-good’), perhaps ‘pre-eminently good’, but also ‘good as of old’. The modern phrase ‘old school’ catches a glimmer of the same notion. Heirloom artefacts and worthy individuals, whose substance or aura has withstood time’s assaults on everything else, represent proven, durable value.

At the same time, a very different sensibility haunts the temporal backdrop of most major Old English poems. Nearly every digression and allusion to past events in *Beowulf* references historical trauma of one kind or another. *The Wanderer* is, in large part, a case-study in PTSD. The deeply ingrained heroic virtues of courage, good faith and social solidarity seem likely to have condensed out of the historical circumstances of the so called ‘Age of Migration’, during which the Germanic populations of northern Europe responded to the collapse of Roman authority and pressure from Huns, Avars and others from the east in a mix of westward displacement and inter-tribal predation that eventually landed the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons on the shores of post-Roman Britannia.

My talk will discuss select passages from Old English poems (and possibly a homily or two) that collectively suggest a deep strain of historical trauma that simultaneously challenges and drives the literature’s most deeply felt values.

Bob DiNapoli has lectured in Old and Middle English literature at universities in North America, England and Australia. He now conducts a weekly poetry discussion-group and works with a number of individual students, translating and discussing Old English poems in their entirety. His books include *A Far Light: A Reading of Beowulf* (2016), *Reading Old English Wisdom: The Fetters in the Frost* (2021), and *Reading Old English Riddles: The Dark Glass* (2024) a translation and discussion of the *Exeter Book* riddles, as well as three books of poetry, *Engelboc* (2019), *The Gnostic Hotel* (2021), and *Museum* (2024).

The Eye of the Storm: Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* in Norwegian Dynastic History

Dr Matthew Firth, Flinders University (Australia)

Session 3B

The kingships of Eiríkr *blóðøx* (blood-axe) are defined by turmoil. Ascending the Norwegian throne upon the death of his father c.931, by 934 Eiríkr had been overthrown by his half-brother, Hákon *góði* (the Good). Fleeing to England and King Æthelstan, Eiríkr was given authority over Anglo-Scandinavian



Northumbria; but, here too, his rule was deeply unpopular. It was in England that he likely met his fate in the 950s. His legacy of political turmoil, though, passed to his sons, who fled Northumbria to Orkney, taking control of the islands as a base for raiding. Subsequently, the brothers headed to Norway, determined to overthrow their uncle Hákon. This they did, but not without the loss of several of their number. Haraldr *gráfeldr* (grey-cloak) was the brother who emerged victorious, but his reign too ended in violence nine years later c.970. In short order, the line of Eiríkr *blóðox* was extinguished as the remaining brothers failed in their royal aspirations.

Interestingly, despite the many men that feature in this story, they are not the catalyst for it. Rather, that role is given to Eiríkr's wife, Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* (the mother of kings). She is, in the language of this conference, the eye of the storm. Described as 'villainous', 'evil', and 'wicked', Gunnhildr is the font of the council that foments discontent with Eiríkr's kingships. This paper will examine Gunnhildr's centrality to the political fortunes of Eiríkr's dynasty, negotiating the fundamentally literary nature of our sources to posit remnant historicity where it can be observed.

Matthew is Research Fellow in Medieval History at Flinders University, supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award: 'Contesting Conquest: Pre-Modern Attempts to come to Terms with the Past'. His research focuses on historiography, cultural memory, and the transmission of historical narrative across time and place. His published works include the books *Early English Queens, 850–1000* and *Remembering England: Cultural Memory in the Sagas of Icelanders*. The proposed paper draws on research for his current book project that unites the themes of both these prior publications: *Gunnhild, Mother of Kings: A Critical Biography*.

The Tempest Within: Culture Erasure and Identity Crisis in Early Medieval England

Mariel González Sáez, Instituto Superior del Profesorado “Dr. Joaquín V. González” (Argentina)

Session 1A

The arrival of the Germanic tribes in Britain has been studied through different lenses. Initially thought to have been a full-blown invasion in which these tribes decimated the Britons living in the territory, more recent archeological and material evidence has shifted scholarly interpretation toward a model of gradual settlement and assimilation. By the 9th century, one of the goals of the Anglo-Saxon kings was to forge a homogeneous kingdom, but by this time, the enemy, the “other”, were the Scandinavian peoples. This paper re-centers the experience of the Britons during these transformative centuries, asking whether their marginalization can be understood within frameworks of colonization and cultural erasure. In this context, was there a process of invisibilization of the Britons? Is there any evidence that there was a process of social unrest perceived to be as a tempestuous upheaval not only at the institutional level but also as a deeper disruption of identity? Drawing on recent theoretical work – including colonial theory and the politics of language – this paper aims to interrogate the extent to which British identities were overwritten, both materially and discursively, in the formation of English polities and how these experiences were perceived, recorded, interpreted and re-interpreted.

Mariel González Sáez holds a BA in English Education from Instituto Superior del Profesorado “Dr. Joaquín V. González”, where she is currently completing a specialization course in Medieval English History. She is also pursuing her BA in Linguistics at Universidad Nacional del Litoral. Mariel has been teaching English to adults and at university level for over ten years.



Aqueous Whirlwinds: Storms on the Water, Tempests in the Heart in Early Medieval Latin Literature

Prof June-Ann Greeley, Sacred Heart University (USA)

Session 5A

For people living during the early medieval centuries, the physical world which they inhabited could elicit a range of attitudes and perceptions. Generally, the world seemed to be a place of terror and volatility, and terror, real or imagined, took the form of wild animals, wild men and uncompromising weather. Weather, especially in the form of storms, floods and other watery manifestations, was a force of dynamic autonomy and boundless mystery. At best a nuisance, at worst a menace, weather did inform daily decisions, even the most mundane. For example, as chronicled in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, heavy rains were not simply obstructive to extended travel or a bother for daily chores: a significant downpour often caused the swelling and the rapid flooding of lakes, rivers and streams, and such flooding would usually either wash out the few, fragile bridges or wooden crossings that had been constructed, or would make impassable the many earthen roads and muddied byways that wove through the kingdom as terrene branches from the extant Roman roads. For the common people and their leaders, fraught experiences with meteorological incidents easily persuaded them that climatic events like downpours, flooding and watery storms, could either foreshadow misfortunes waiting along the road or act as punishing corrections for misguided or iniquitous behaviors. My paper will examine the conditions of storms or tempests in early medieval Latin literature (Fortunatus to Gottschalk) as such episodes actually occurred and were explained, and also as such episodes became literary metaphors for spiritual and moral disruption in the individual soul/heart.

Note: all translations from the original Latin texts will be my own.

June-Ann is a (Full) Professor in the Department of English and the Department of Catholic Studies at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT USA. Areas of scholarship and publication include: late antique and early medieval (Carolingian) Latin literature (poetry); late antique and early medieval spirituality; comparative medieval mysticism (Christianity and Islam); early medieval hagiography (women); medieval Celtic literature (Irish and Welsh); eco-criticism and medieval Latin literature, and medieval angelology.

Comparing Narratives: Violent Conflict or Environmental Disasters as Causes for the Emergence of the Peace of God

Christine Grundy, Australian National University (Australia)

Session 4B

This paper explores contrasting accounts of the origins of the Peace of God movement in 11th century Burgundy. Rudolphus Glaber attributes the movement to responses to widespread climate-induced famines in 1033, 1041, and 1047, highlighting ecclesiastical efforts to restore peace and protect the vulnerable during times of environmental crisis. In contrast, the anonymous author of the *Geste Eveques d'Auxerre* places the emergence of the Peace of God within the context of regional violence and political unrest. In 1003, Bishop Hugh of Auxerre besieged the monastery of St Germain d'Auxerre to support King Robert II of France's claims to the county of Burgundy. The monks of St Germain were forced to evacuate, leaving only eighteen to guard the body of the revered saint. After the conflict ended, Bishop Hugh convened the Peace Councils. Despite being present at the siege, Glaber omits these councils in his account of the Peace of God movement's origins.



Through comparative textual analysis, this study examines why Glaber emphasises climate and famine as triggers – overlooking the role of violence – and why the *Gesta* focuses on political violence while downplaying environmental factors. The findings shed light on differing interpretations of social order and crisis within medieval political and church discourses.

Christine Grundy entered history as a mature-aged student after a long career as an Environmental Engineer. She completed an Honours degree at Monash University's School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies. Her Honours thesis, *Migration and Violence in the Middle East: Climate Change in the Eleventh Century*, examined the impact of the Medieval Climate Anomaly on the timing of the First Crusade. Her paper, 'Eleventh Century Climate Change in the Context of Eschatological Themes', explored the historicity of claims of environmental disaster in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Presented at the Australian Early Medieval Association Conference in 2023, it won the award for best paper, equal first, and will be published in the *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association* in 2025.

An Echo of a Crisis: The Paternus Plate From Tomis to the Steppes

Asst. Prof Yanko Hristov, South-West University "Neofit Rilski" (Bulgaria)

Session 3A

The large silver disc from the treasure hoard discovered in 1912 near the Ukrainian village of Malaya Pereshchepina continues to evoke scholarly interest more than a century later. The artifact is attributed to Paternus, Bishop of Tomis (present-day Constanța, Romania) in the early sixth century. Its original Eucharistic function is generally undisputed, and in fact there is no significant scholarly disagreement regarding its date of manufacture, decorative features and inscriptions. However, the uncertainties and accumulation of hypotheses arise in attempts to explain how and why a vessel with such clearly Christian liturgical purpose came into the possession of a barbarian chieftain from the steppes north of the Black Sea. No less debated is the role the Paternus plate may have played within a non-Byzantine context. The efforts for plausible answers provide insights into crisis management strategies in the vulnerable Imperial Balkan provinces during the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

Yanko Hristov currently holds the position of Chief Assistant Professor in Medieval History at South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria). He is a member of the editorial board of *Studia Iuridico-Historica* and *Acta Mediaevalia Magnae Tarnovae*, a foreign member of the Medieval Association of the Midwest (USA), and a member of the Balkan Association of History and Philosophy of Medicine. His research interests are focused on Early Medieval hagiography in the Orthodox world, Byzantine law and jurisprudence, the influence of the Roman and Byzantine legal tradition on the so-called *Slavia Orthodoxa*, Medieval captivity, prisoners of war, human trafficking, enslavement, and manumission in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Literal or allegorical? Gildas and the 'famous plague'

Dr Stephen Joyce, Monash University (Australia)

Session 5B

Attempts to connect Gildas's report of a *famosa pestis* in fifth-century Britain with possibly concurrent plagues mentioned in continental sources have generally failed to align his historical vision with that of other contemporary chroniclers and historians. This has meant that Gildas's historical vision (and that of his audience) is still seen as suspect. This paper will explore Gildas's report and its connection to the prophecy in *Isaiah* 22. In aligning Gildas's vision with exegesis on *Isaiah* 22 and an allegorical use of *pestis* as meaning heresy, this paper will argue that *famosa pestis* referred not to a literal plague in Britain but to



an allegorical plague, that of the well-documented fifth-century British crisis involving the heresy of Pelagianism.

Stephen Joyce is an affiliate researcher with Monash University. His research concentrates on political and theological developments in early medieval Britain and Ireland c. 400–750, and their subsequent impact within continental Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. A monograph, *The Legacy of Gildas*, was well received in 2022, as were contributions to the ARC Discovery Project led by Constant Mews and Kathleen Neal, *Addressing Injustice in the Medieval Body Politic: From Complaint to Advice*, published in 2023. An edition (with Constant Mews) of the influential seventh-century Hiberno-Latin text, *De duodecim abusivis*, is forthcoming with Corpus Christianorum. Stephen specialises in the close reading of late antique and early medieval Latin texts and manuscripts in order to unpack political and theological perspectives as they pertain to contemporaneous (and often opaque) debates and arguments.

Gallus Anonymus and Stanisław Orzechowski: the sea and the state-forming

Mariia M. Katkova, National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russia)

Session 2A

This presentation aims to study the possible reception of the prologue of *Gesta principum Polonorum* (Deeds of the Princes of the Poles) by Gallus Anonymus in Stanisław Orzechowski's *Quincunx, to jest wzór Korony Polskiej na cynku wystawiony* (Quincunx, that is the image of the Polish Crown made on zinc exposed). The reasons for the reception are studied, particularly the use of the metaphor of the sea and the ship, as well as the possible influence of such reception on the perception of *Quincunx* in 16th century Polish society and in the context of Polish Sarmatian Republicanism. Additionally, the reception is examined in the context of the final formation of the Polish Republic (Rzeczpospolita), for which *Quincunx* was a foundational theoretical work. Finally, the presentation studies the differences between prologues and possible reasons for those differences, namely the opposite roles of the authors on their metaphoric ships and the distinct emphasis of the tempest in the sea.

Ms. Mariia M. Katkova is an Assistant Director of the UNESCO Chair on Copyright, Neighboring, Cultural and Information Rights in the National Research University Higher School of Economics. M. Katkova graduated with distinction from the Faculty of Law of HSE University in 2023 and received an MA with distinction in Medieval Studies in 2025 at the Faculty of Humanities of HSE University. M. Katkova studies the questions of law and state of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th-17th centuries, especially the *szlachta*'s law culture and political institutions. Additionally, M. Katkova works in the field of cultural rights and heritage preservation and has participated in several UNESCO consultations.

Women in the Frankish Era: Exploring the Lives of Western Women in the Principality of Achaëa

Dr Katerina Kiltzanidou, Democritus University of Thrace (Komotini) (Greece)

Session 6A

After the Fall of Constantinople in 1204 by the Franks and the Venetians, the Peloponnese was divided according to the *Partitio Terrarum Imperii Romaniae*. Specifically, Boniface of Montferrat shared the peninsula with the Venetians. In 1205, the knight William I of Champlitte founded the Principality of Achaëa. The establishment of this Frankish principality led to the arrival of women from the West in the Peloponnese.



The aim of this paper is to present the wives and daughters of the princes, knights, aristocrats, and members of their broader environment who lived or grew up in the Principality of Achaea until its collapse in 1432. The main goal is to explore their obligations and rights, their choices in marriage (including second and third marriages), and their influence on Byzantine women. The study relies on rich sources, such as the *Chronicle of Morea* and the *Assizes of Romania*.

By examining the Western women of the Principality of Achaea, we gain a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the social structure and daily life in the region during the Frankish rule. This work contributes to a better understanding of an unknown aspect of medieval Greece, shedding light on individuals who shaped their era.

Katerina pursued her undergraduate studies from 2010 to 2014 and postgraduate studies from 2015 to 2018 at the Department of History and Archeology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She completed her PhD thesis from 2019 to 2023 at the Department of History and Ethnology of the Democritus University of Thrace, with scholarships from the Melina Merkouri Foundation (2019–2020) and the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) (2022–2023). In November 2023, she started postdoctoral research at the same university. Her research primarily focuses on late Byzantine and early Post-Byzantine art, dedicatory portraits and inscriptions, female studies, and gender studies. Katerina has contributed to this field of research by publishing articles and participating in international scientific meetings, conferences, and workshops.

Terrible Storms and Turbulent Seas – shaping the *Vinland sagas*’ world view

Kerry Kirwan, Independent Scholar (New Zealand)

Session 6B

One of the most formidable, dangerous voyages of the medieval Norse world was the journey west across the vast, turbulent waters of the North Atlantic, to Greenland. The first major expedition set out from Iceland to Greenland in 985 AD. As recounted in the thirteenth-century *Landnámabók* (the Book of Settlements), only fourteen out of twenty-five ships that began the voyage made it to the other side. From as early as the twelfth-century, Icelandic writers identified Greenland as a peripheral space in the Norse world, connected with Iceland, but markedly distinct and remote. However, it is the *Vinland sagas*, written in the thirteenth-century, that are our major written source about the settlement of Greenland and Vinland and of the travellers who journeyed west to explore and colonise new lands. Greenland and Vinland were considered to be literally at the ends of the earth, and the risks and dangers presented by the voyage itself is at the forefront of saga narrative. There has been much scholarly debate over the veracity of these tales, with most modern research concentrating on harmonising the evidence of the sagas with a narrative that the journeys were directed towards North America. However, the *Vinland sagas* can also be studied as a source of evidence for the history and culture of the seafarers themselves, or of those who wrote the accounts of these journeys to what was considered a frontier space. This paper will explore how these stories were used to define and advance both Icelandic identity and personal self-interest.

Kerry completed a BA and BA(Hons) in History through Massey University in New Zealand, and a Masters of Historical Research through Monash University in Melbourne, graduating in 2021. Her area of study interest is Medieval Iceland and her MA thesis title is “There and back again: the significance of far-travel and far-travellers in the Icelandic sagas”. Kerry will be enrolling to undertake a PhD through Flinders University commencing in 2026, where her thesis focus will again centre on the Icelandic sagas.



The Formation of Gregorian Chant and Carolingian Political Crises

Ted Krasnicki, Independent Scholar (Canada)

Session 1B

At the start of the Carolingian renaissance of the late 8th century, the musical practices of contemporary Rome were imported into the Frankish empire, while the native Gallican chant was suppressed, particularly by Charlemagne. But the more recent discovery of three ancient manuscripts – self-described as the chant of Rome with one also containing Greek chant – revealed something quite different from what is found in extant 10th century Frankish manuscripts. We discover that in Frankish lands, the Roman melodies mysteriously underwent great changes becoming the Franco-Roman chant known today as Gregorian Chant.

I argue that these changes mainly originated during the reign of Charlemagne's successor, Louis the Pius, who was embroiled in various political crises which kept him from other duties. These distractions allowed Frankish musicians, who had long resented the imposition of Roman liturgical chant and who preferred their own more tonal and lyrical styles over the meandering Greek-influenced Roman melodies, to find their moment. Louis and his successors' political distractions created opportunities for the singers in Aachen and Metz to be freed from royal intervention regarding chant. By modifying the Roman melodies to suit their Frankish musical tastes, while subtly incorporating Gallican melodies, these musicians believed they had "restored" the inspired chant of St Gregory the Great to its true form, which, they argued, the Romans had corrupted. In doing so, the Franks also introduced theological musical allegory and symbolism into their melodies, in line with those found in the Carolingian visual art of the time.

Ted Krasnicki is a Ph.D. graduate of l'Université de Montréal, and has written and given conferences on Gregorian Chant as well as directing Gregorian scholas, and playing the organ. His latest publication is "On the Offertory verses of Gregorian Chant" in the pending William Mahrt memorial edition of *Sacred Music journal*. His paper "On Microtones in Gregorian Chant" was presented at the Dom Pothier conference at St. Wandrille Abbey, France, in 2023.

Forging Warriors in a World Unmade: Saxon Migration, Warrior Identity, and Cybernetic Archaeology in Post-Roman Britannia

Dr Ash Lenton, Australian National University (Australia)

Session 3A

This paper explores aspects of the archaeology of Saxon warrior migration to southern Britannia (England) in the 5th and 6th centuries CE, contextualizing material evidence from a south-coast cemetery site within broader cultural frameworks of crisis and displacement. The arrival of these seafaring groups coincided with the fragmentation of post-Roman polities and dynastic collapse, a period marked by social unrest, and health and environmental instability and systemic breakdown.

Drawing on burial assemblages, weapon typologies, and funerary patterns, this study examines how martial identities were forged in response to perceived chaos. This interdisciplinary approach employs digital recording techniques and 3D photogrammetry models to create virtual-environment interactive interpretation schemes collectively attributed as cybernetic archaeology systems. Bridging archaeology, medieval studies, computing studies, and environmental humanities, this paper is drawn from a larger research project that recasts the Saxon warrior as both agent and symbol of a world in flux, navigating



the literal and metaphorical storms of Early Medieval Europe.

Ash Lenton is an archaeologist. His PhD is in the archaeology of medieval urban spaces, architectural design, semiotic communication, ethnic and community identities. He spends his time directing archaeological research and teaching programs, digging up Medieval castles, Roman towns, and Saxon cemeteries. Most recently he has been learning how to use computers (properly).

Rupture and continuity in the epigraphic discourse of early medieval northwestern Hispania (8th – 10th centuries)

Dr Álvaro Lorenzo Fernández, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain)

Session 7A

After the fall in 711 of the political structures of the Visigothic kingdom, which had dominated the Iberian Peninsula for the previous two and a half centuries, an apparently polarised period began between the Christian kingdoms of the north and Al-Andalus in the south. The sources available to study the early stages of this new scenario are scarce, fragmentary and often partial. We propose to analyse one of these sources, the epigraphy produced between the 8th and 10th centuries in northwestern Spain, because of its double interest as a cultural act and as a politico-social act of exposed writing. We believe that it offers important first-hand information on the rupture and/or continuity with respect to the Visigothic world that these societies integrating the new kingdom of Asturias may have had. The intensity of the epigraphic habitus, the focus, themes and lexis of their discourse or even the geographical and chronological variations detected may well be explained by issues such as the advance of the kingdom's borders, the existence of local elites on the fringes of the kingdom, the arrival of influences from beyond the Pyrenees, changes in political discourse or even changes in liturgical practices.

Álvaro graduated in Classical Philology (2016) at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, the same university where he finished a PhD in October 2024 entitled “Corpus epigraphicum of the asturleonese kingdom (711-1037). Critical edition and study”. His academic activity has focused on the study of the epigraphic testimonies of the Iberian Peninsula, with special attention to those of Early Medieval and Late Antique chronology. Álvaro works in the Department of Classical Philology (UCM) and collaborates with the Archivo Epigráfico de Hispania. He has enjoyed research stays at the University of Coimbra and at the University of Poitiers (CESCM).

Devotion and Disability: The Impact of Christ's Suffering on Medieval Attitudes Toward Individuals with Impairments

Dr Ananda Majumdar, North Central Theological Seminary (USA)

Session 6A

This essay examines how the glorification of Christ's suffering contributed to the marginalization of individuals with disabilities during the medieval period, reflecting the prevailing theological and cultural attitudes of the time. The main objective is to analyze devotional practices that focus on Christ's bodily pain, while identifying barriers that prevent people with impairments from being seen as active participants in spirituality. It aims to unpack the implications of these portrayals for understanding human suffering and the concept of the divine image. The study employs historical and cultural analysis of primary texts and artworks from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, examining how these works portray bodily suffering and notions of disability. The findings highlight five key obstacles that contributed to the marginalization of individuals with impairments: societal views on holiness, the



idealization of physical perfection, theological interpretations of suffering, the significance of miraculous cures, and the nature of charity at the time. The central question guiding the exploration is: How did veneration of Christ's suffering shape medieval attitudes toward individuals with bodily differences, and what effect did this have on their role in religious discourse? Through this investigation, the essay aims to provide valuable insights into the relationship between devotion, disability, and humanity, particularly in the context of the concept of the *Imago Dei*.

Ananda Majumdar holds a Ph.D. in Divinity from North Central Theological Seminary. Ananda is currently an early educator with the Brander Garden After School Parents Association. In addition to these roles, he is furthering his education as a professional educator at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Norquest College. His passions encompass the social sciences, education, humanities, and medieval studies. I have conducted field research and have received global recognition for my contributions in these areas. Currently, I serve as a professor of practice in social science at both Kennedy University of Saint Lucia and QAHE.

From Conquest to Devout: the Afterlife of Prostration in Early Christian Iconography

Camilla Marraccini, IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca (Italy)

Session 4A

In the visual rhetoric of empire, prostration is a gesture of defeat. On imperial sarcophagi and triumphal columns from the 2nd-3rd century of the Empire (eg, Trajan's Column), the bent figure – kneeling, humiliated, grasping the victor's hand – functions as a visual shorthand for conquest, submission, and the self-representational choreography of power. Yet by the 4th century, amidst the upheavals of religious transformation and the anxieties of an empire in economic crisis and with borders corroded by the so-called barbarian invasions, this familiar motif undergoes a profound redefinition.

Christian sarcophagi from this period retain the iconography of the prostrate body, but the figure's meaning is no longer anchored in the vocabulary of war. Instead of anonymous captives, we find individualized, named figures – biblical women (Mary of Bethany), the believers (Apostles, Magi), the sick (The Hemorrhagic Woman) – whose gestures of prostration signal not defeat but faith, a voluntary subjugation preceded by a miraculous encounter. The gesture is not erased but re-coded, part of a broader Christian reimagining of authority, devotion, and the body's role in spiritual transformation.

This paper examines the iconographic mutations of prostration in early Christian Rome, tracing how an image born of violence is reactivated within a new theological and emotional regime. It reads these visual scenes alongside epigraphic and theological *formulae* – such as the Christian redeployment of *servus*, *doulos*, and the Augustinian definition of *servus Dei* – to map the semantic volatility of submission across media. Central to this analysis is the question: how does the affective turbulence of these images reflect or dissonate from a broader reflection over the meanings of power, history, and authority in the Late Antique world?

Camilla Marraccini is a PhD candidate in the Analysis and Management of Cultural Heritage program at the Scuola IMT Alti Studi Lucca, specializing in Christian archaeology. Her research, supervised by Maria Luisa Catoni, examines early Christian sarcophagi workshops in Rome, focusing on the adaptation of pagan iconography within Christian funerary contexts. Currently, she collaborates with Verity Platt at Cornell University and is preparing for a research visit to Leiden in 2025 (September 2025 – January 2026).



“In the streets corpses, and in houses the dead; in the streets a revolting stench”: A 7th to 8th Century Byzantine Antichrist

Dr Shawn McAvoy, Independent Scholar (USA)

Session 5B

Composed in Koine Greek sometime during the seventh to eighth centuries, *On the Antichrist* (CPG 3946), traditionally attributed to Efreem the Syrian (c.306-373), features an Antichrist who is very difficult to locate in history. In this early Byzantine monastic sermon, Nature herself reacts against the Antichrist, who is accepted by the majority of the Earth's population, including the majority of Christians. The devastation he visits upon the world is ghastly, and results in Nature battling the Antichrist more fiercely than does humanity.

Shawn McAvoy has taught History and Religious Studies at Patrick & Henry Community College in Martinsville, Virginia, and at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. His research in Religious Studies explores the irruption of lived religion into 'official' Christian eschatology and doctrines, along with subsequent reinterpretations of those doctrines and eschatologies. Little studied patristic and early Byzantine texts on the afterlife and the eschaton form the basis of the research, with a particular research interest in the *telonia* (*mytarstva* in Russian). The *telonia* are aerial tollhouses in early Christian monastic traditions, at which the recently dead must submit to multiple judicial trials by demons to continue on the road to paradise. This construct has survived into the modern Orthodox Christian world. In History, he is completing a book on Reconstruction in Hanover County, Virginia, after the American Civil War.

Gildas and Mount Badon: Resisting the Saxon storm

Dr Bernard Mees, Bangor University (Wales)

Session 1A

In his *De Excidio Britanniae*, Gildas describes the Anglo-Saxon arrival in Britain as a storm (*tempestas*). But the onslaught was followed by a period of British resistance that seems to have culminated in a battle described by Gildas as occurring at a place known as the Badonic Mount. When the Battle of Mt Badon occurred, however, and when Gildas wrote his description of it have been the subject of much controversy. Bede records in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* that the battle occurred some 44 years after the arrival of the Saxons, implying a date of 493, although earlier in his *Chronica Majora* he seemed to limit the period of British resistance to the reign of the emperor Zeno (474–491). In contrast, the *Annales Cambriae* place the Battle of Badon in 516, a date much later than that deduced by Bede from Gildas's account. Yet more evidence is preserved in two Breton chronicles and they suggest how the disagreement in the surviving sources may be resolved.

Bernard Mees has taught history, linguistics and business at the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and the University of Tasmania, and he has held visiting positions at the University of Cambridge, Monash University, Uppsala University and Bangor University in Wales. His most recent books are *The English Language before England* (2023) and *King Arthur and the Languages of Britain* (2025).

Art versus Script: an Exploration of Modern Applications for Historic Runes

Tobin Miles, Independent Scholar (Australia)

Session 6B

Can a medieval writing system have modern utility? Unlike many other scripts of the past which are unfamiliar to all but a few experts, Germanic runic scripts are known and used in a number of contexts



in contemporary society, from Viking-style tattoos to the ubiquitous Bluetooth logo. But although runes are fundamentally a system of writing, these modern applications are primarily artistic or esoteric rather than linguistic. In keeping with broader cultural trends in popular medievalism, runes serve as visual elements heavily associated with fantasy and divination, often divorced from strictly historic contexts. But is such usage inevitable? Can there be practicable applications beyond that of the aesthetic? While examining historic usage from the Middle Ages to the present and drawing on my own experiences of runes as both art and script, I explore the theoretical question of whether these medieval runic writing systems can be used in the modern world as a functional, serviceable alphabet.

Tobin holds a BA (Honours) and a Masters of Publishing from Sydney University with a Graduate Diploma in ESL teaching from Western Sydney. When not working his desk-job in Parramatta, Tobin is interested in medieval languages and manuscript traditions, with a particular focus on research into cross-cultural elements in the lawbooks of Scandinavia and the British Isles.

The Kaivarta Revolt: Crisis, Resistance, and Transformation in Pala Bengal (c. 1075 – 1080 CE)

Saikat Mondal, University of Calcutta (India)

Session 3B

The Varendra rebellion, commonly known as the Kaivarta revolt, stands as one of the most significant tempests to engulf early medieval Bengal, fundamentally transforming the socio-political landscape of the Pala Empire. This paper examines how the revolt during the reign of Mahipala II (c. 1075–1080 CE) resulted in his death and the loss of Varendra (north Bengal) to the Kaivarta chief Divya, representing a critical moment of crisis that challenged established hierarchies and reshaped regional power dynamics.

The revolt emerged from a confluence of factors including oppressive taxation, administrative tyranny, and the strategic exploitation of the Kaivartas' maritime expertise. As the Kaivartas were very expert in boating, they capitalized on naval war. Mahipala II was killed by the rebels and the Pala armies were forced to fall back, demonstrating how traditional skills became instruments of political transformation. The rebellion's success in establishing an independent Kaivarta state under Divya's leadership represents a rare instance of successful subaltern resistance in early medieval India.

Drawing on Sanskrit sources, particularly the *Ramacharitam*, this paper explores how the revolt functioned as both literal and metaphorical tempest – disrupting established order while creating space for new forms of political organization. The rebellion's aftermath, including the eventual restoration of Pala authority under Ramapala, illustrates the complex negotiations between crisis and continuity that characterized medieval Bengal's political evolution.

The Kaivarta revolt serves as a compelling case study for understanding how moments of upheaval could temporarily invert social hierarchies and challenge imperial authority, while also revealing the limitations of such transformations. By examining this 'tempestuous time' through the lens of resistance and recovery, this paper contributes to broader discussions about the dynamics of political change in early medieval South Asia.

Saikat Mondal holds a postgraduate degree in history from the University of Delhi, Delhi. He has a passion for reading history and exploring various aspects of military, economic, and memory studies both in medieval and modern times. He is also an avid sports fan and a food lover.



Frozen in Fear: the paradox of anxiety in Byzantine devotion

Olympia Nelson, University of Sydney (Australia)

Session 2B

Fear was a powerful and complex emotion for the Byzantines. At once, one was taught to fear God, to fear sin and to fear judgment. Fear, to an extent, shaped devotion, worship and perhaps even communal or monastic life. Fear was cultivated in ritual as both a moral safeguard and a way of deepening the believer's relationship with God.

Today, we may see fear as a basic, instinctive emotion. Byzantine culture, however, recognised a range of responses that fell under the language of fear, from terror and dread to awe, reverence and even a form of spiritual love. So what did it mean to fear God? How did the church – through its teachings, rituals or images – encourage people to experience or cultivate fear, especially considering that Christian teaching also promotes trust in God and hope in salvation?

Iconography depicting horrific scenes such as the *Forty Martyrs of Sebaste* extend these questions, where the terror of a horrible death seems to frighten us more than the martyrs who endure it. For the viewer to see such images in the church, it would be hard not to feel psychologically inadequate.

Fear in Byzantium was not just about eschatology. It was a complex and constructive, even helpful force, as I will reveal in art and ritual, that had a paradoxically creative impact on faith.

Olympia Nelson is a PhD candidate in Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies at the University of Sydney, specializing in the history, representation and management of emotion in Byzantium. Her research explores emotional expression through various contexts, including visual art, literature, gender, monasticism and food culture.

Penitence in pieces: how to shatter your soul for good in Byzantium

Assoc. Prof Robert Nelson, University of Melbourne (Australia)

Session 4A

Penitence in Byzantium required the pious to cultivate compunction (κατάνυξις) and also practice contrition (συντριβή). In Greek as in Latin, both terms have violent connotations, the first with the image of pricking and the second with the image of crushing or shattering, which persisted in its physical sense throughout Byzantium. This paper investigates how such brutal and disruptive motifs came to express positive psychological processes. Tracing the history of crushed souls, this paper suggests that instead of being a method to demean yourself before God, contrition is seen as rewarding and salutary. You earn positive thoughts about God by entertaining negative thoughts about yourself; but the ability to dismiss complacency in the soul is thereby understood as empowering, as well as opportune in inviting God's forgiveness. You willingly undergo unpleasant emotions in order to flourish in a devotion whose final proof is the ability to shatter your own heart.

A/Prof Robert Nelson is a Principal Honorary Fellow at Melbourne University. He trained in art history at La Trobe University with an MA in baroque art and PhD in Hellenistic art. Robert taught in Art, Design and Architecture at Monash University where he became Associate Dean Research & Graduate Studies. His most recent books are *A history of inspiration* (Routledge 2022) and *A visceral history of bread: from First-Nations Australia to Byzantium* (museum of innocence, Mildura 2023). Robert was art critic for *The Age* and the scene painter for Polixeni Papapetrou.



Resurrecting a cross in tempestuous times: Rev Henry Duncan, the Masonic Lodge and the Ruthwell Cross

Dr Pamela O'Neill, University of Sydney (Australia)

Session 3A

The early medieval cross as Ruthwell was thrown down as an idolatrous monument in or soon after 1642. The Reverend Henry Duncan became Church of Scotland Minister of Ruthwell Parish in 1799. Duncan was a Mason, a 'distinguished Member of the Craft'. When the Royal Arch Chapter, St John of Ruthwell no 165 was formed in 1812, Duncan was named in the application. In 1823, Duncan had the Ruthwell Cross reconstructed and erected in the Manse garden. In order to complete the cross shape, Duncan had a new piece fashioned and carved with symbols whose likeness to Masonic symbols has often been noticed. This paper enquires more closely into lingering iconoclasm in the Scottish church, Lodge symbolism, Duncan's background, and the decisions made in the resurrection of the Ruthwell cross.

Dr Pamela O'Neill is the Sir Warwick Fairfax Lecturer in Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney. She is series editor of the *Sydney Series in Celtic Studies*, co-editor of the *Australian Celtic Journal*, and holds leadership positions in several Celtic community organisations. She teaches medieval and modern Celtic languages, and her research interests centre around the early medieval history, archaeology, law, language and literature of Scotland and Ireland, and the contribution of Celtic migrants to Australian history and culture.

Ὡσπερ ἀστραπήν: Natural Imagery of Disaster in the Miracles of Saint Demetrios

Miltiadis Paikopoulos, Independent Scholar (Australia)

Session 7B

In this paper I will consider the *Miracles of Saint Demetrios*, a 7th century collection of homilies recounting the miracles of the eponymous patron saint of Thessalonica, Demetrios ὁ Μυροβλήτης. Composed of two distinct books – the first attributed to Archbishop John of Thessalonica, and the other to an unknown author – the *Miracles* provide an insight into how the tumultuous events of the 7th century were received in contemporary Byzantine historiography and literary expression. The events of the *Miracles* (including, but not limited to: earthquakes, fires, plagues and Avaro-Slavic invasion) thus act as a microcosm, reflecting the broader experience of the early-medieval period in Eastern Rome. We can see that the physical, natural language of crisis evinced in the *Miracles* is suited to homily, both because: (1) they make plain the perceived existential threat posed by these critical events and changes, as well as (2) adding to the Saint's triumphalist hagiography by making clear that his miracles overcame these very same threats. Balancing adaptive reaction to novel threats, with the preservation of key tenets, disasters are averted, and the Romano-Christian order survives.

Miltiadis Paikopoulos graduated from the University of Melbourne with a BA in Classics and Ancient World Studies in 2020, and then as a Juris Doctor in 2023. He sits as a committee member of the IOC-A-RPM (International Organising Committee – Australia – for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles) and teaches Classical Greek.

When the Dead Came Riding: Crisis, Memory and the Supernatural in Polotsk, 1092

Evgeny Podvalnov, Yelets State University of Bunin, Yelets (Russia)

Session 7B



This paper examines the intriguing events described in the *Primary Chronicle* related to Polotsk in 1092, when “demons prowled the streets like men”. These occurrences provoked widespread fear and came to symbolize a profound social, political, and spiritual crisis. The authors approach this episode using a multidisciplinary framework that combines historical, literary, and mythological analyses. The investigation is structured around three main interpretative models: the naturalistic perspective, which views the narrative as a folklorization of natural disasters such as epidemics, droughts, and wildfires; the bookish-mythological approach, which interprets the events through common mythological motifs found in Judeo-Christian-Islamic medieval literature; and the ethno-mythological viewpoint, which emphasizes local folk traditions and beliefs. By comparing the text of the *Primary Chronicle* with the visual depictions in the miniatures of the *Radziwill Chronicle*, we argue that this episode serves as an allegory of the “dance of death”, reflecting the widespread anxiety generated by Cuman invasions and broader societal upheaval. This study enhances our understanding of how early medieval East Slavic societies utilized supernatural and tempestuous metaphors to interpret crises, articulate collective trauma, legitimize political authority, and construct communal identities. It sheds new light on the ways in which these communities turned to the supernatural to make sense of disaster, construct meaning, and preserve identity in times of upheaval.

Evgeny Podvalnov is a historian of medieval Rus’ and a PhD candidate, specializing in the interplay of power, relic cults, imagology, and eschatological imagination. His research examines how medieval societies invoked the supernatural during upheaval to interpret crisis and shape legitimacy. He has published widely in Russian and international journals and participates in collaborative projects on religious authority, trauma, and the invisible in early medieval political culture. Based in Russia, he plans to defend his thesis on the military campaigns of Andrey Bogolyubsky in 2026.

Violence in the Time of Tranquillity: Art, Religion and Political Issues in Early Medieval Odisha

Asst. Prof Sujata Rakshit, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan (India)

Session 5B

This work explores the paradoxical coexistence of violence and tranquillity in early medieval Odisha in the Indian subcontinent (sixth to twelfth centuries CE), focusing on the intersection of political authority, religious transformation, and artistic expression. The period is portrayed as the genesis of Puranic Brahmanical thoughts, often marked by temple buildings under Shiva, Vishnu or Devi cults.

This study will portray three threads of narratives based on textual, epigraphic and art historical sources revealing a more tempestuous reality. First, the rivalries amongst separate religious groups in Bhubaneswar are etched in the Ekamra Purana. This crisis led towards the act of violence where religious symbolisms were converted towards orthodox Brahmanism from Buddhism and Jainism. Second, the establishment of brahminical hegemony using religion as an instrument, in the period of ideological and political conflicts, and ritualistic unrest has also been addressed. Third, the chronicle of toppling the autochthonous Savaras from their territory to appropriate Jagannatha as a state-deity is evident from epigraphic record. Was this only assimilation, integration or simple violence? This coils in the turmoil within politico-religious systems and sees how they intervene in a metaphorical world of tempest. Challenging the recent writings, which are nearly silent on violence and forceful acculturation of religion and polity further, highlights the narratives based on nuanced dynamics that shaped the early medieval Odisha.



Dr. Sujata Rakshit is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India. She earned her M.Phil. and Ph.D. from the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, specializing in Odishan art history during the early medieval period. Her research interests encompass with a particular focus on the intersection of Brahmanical iconography and religious hegemony within the societal context of Odisha. Dr. Rakshit's recent work explores the relationship between Brahmanism and the 'other' through the study of temples, sculptures, and sacred texts.

The Poetics of Affective Ecology in Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry

Sumera Saleem, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne (Australia)

Session 7A

Medieval Arabic praise poetry introduces us to the paradigm of affect and ecology. Drawing on Ibn al-Rūmī's poetry, this paper engages with the poetics of ecology in relation to the role of the human through the lens of affect. The poetic worldview of Ibn al-Rūmī' (836–896), a prominent 9th century poet of the Abbasid era, brings to the fore the affective notion of ecology and emotionally layered idea of human subjectivity. This paper attempts to answer how the medieval Arabic praise poetry elucidates the notion of ecological agency and conceptualises environment in relation to the affective lens of the human. Building on Beatrice Gruendler's critical insights on medieval Arabic praise poetry and Ibn Al-Rumi (2003) and Alexa Weik von Mossner's reflections on affective ecologies (2017), this paper extends the notion of ecological agency with reference to the emotionally coded idea of the human.

Note: This paper will not be recorded.

Sumera Saleem is a PhD student at the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne. Her research interests involve colonialism, environment and religious identity in world literature. Her current research focuses on the representation of the ocean in Australian literature.

Love couples in crises: Benoît de Sainte-Maure and his *Roman de Troie*

Maria Sandali, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece)

Session 2B

This paper examines how Benoît de Sainte-Maure, in his *Roman de Troie*, portrays crises through deliberation and the intense focus on love stories, particularly those of Paris and Helen, and Troilus and Briseis. He uses these narratives to reflect the values and experiences of his own feudal and courtly world, while also exploring the psychological impact of conflict and loss. Benoît's characters spend a significant amount of time engaged in council and deliberation, particularly during the Trojan War. These discussions are not just about strategic planning, but also about navigating the moral and emotional complexities of the conflict. The love stories, particularly that of Troilus and Briseis, are not mere interludes but integral parts of the narrative, highlighting the disruptive and transformative power of love in the midst of war. These relationships, often with tragic outcomes, reveal the vulnerability and emotional struggles of even the most heroic figures. Benoît's portrayal of love and conflict reflects the values and concerns of his own time, using the Trojan War as a lens to examine feudal society, courtly love, and the challenges of leadership. Benoît delves into the emotions and motivations of his characters, providing insights into their psychological responses to the crises they face. This is evident in his portrayal of Briseis' shifting affections and the internal conflicts of characters like Troilus and Achilles.



Maria Sandali is a Ph.D. Student of the University of Athens. Her Bachelor Degree is in Classics and her Master Degree in Ancient Greek History. Her interests are focused on the period of the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages. In addition, she examines antiquity's reception in Roman Times. Her Ph.D. research is on "The cult and the image of Achilles in Roman time" which is an effort to prove the literary image of Achilles under the Roman Empire. She has gained a two-semester grant from A.G. Leventis Foundation.

The best desert is made of water: nature and mission in the *Vita Columbae* (7th century)

Dr Rocío Suárez Vallejo, Universidad de Málaga (Spain)

Session 4A

This paper examines how Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* constructs a spiritual landscape in which nature (especially the sea and the island of Iona) functions as a metaphorical "desert" to be conquered by the saint. Beyond physical aridity, the "desert" emerges as a space marked by paganism, natural chaos, and demonic threat. In response, Saint Columba acts as a mediator between divine order and wild creation, transforming hostile environments into sacralized spaces.

Through a close textual analysis of the *Vita*, the study focuses on key episodes in which Columba intervenes in nature: calming storms, defeating sea monsters or purifying pagan springs, revealing a spiritual geography where the natural world becomes a field of mission. In particular, the tempest (both literal and symbolic) functions as a site of spiritual confrontation, in which natural disorder becomes a medium for asserting divine authority.

The paper argues that nature in hagiography is not merely a backdrop, but an active setting and agent in the Christianization of Britain. In this context, the sea is not a boundary but an extension of the biblical desert: a radically other space where the forces of chaos, crisis, and conversion converge. By taming storms and sanctifying wild spaces, Columba embodies a model of spiritual resilience in the face of both the natural and spiritual crises of Late Antique Britain.

Rocío Suárez Vallejo holds a PhD in Ancient History and History of Religions (Universidad de Málaga – Università degli Studi di Padova, April 2025). Her research focuses on religious landscapes, iconoclasm and the transformation of sacred space, with a particular emphasis on the natural landscape, from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. She has conducted research stays at the University of Padua, the University of Franche-Comté, and the German Archaeological Institute in Rome. She is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Hamburg.

The 1066 Collapse of St. Gottschalk's Realm in a Comparative Perspective

Dr Rostyslav Vatseba, I. Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Ukraine)

Session 3B

The paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the political turmoil on the Obotrite lands, which broke out after the assassination of the prince Gottschalk on 7 June 1066. After briefly discussing the representation of the events in Adam of Bremen's and Helmold's chronicles, the author will try to reconstruct the nature of the political crisis, its stages, and the main driving forces. This will be based on consideration of the key features of political and social development of St. Gottschalk's realm on the eve of the dynastic collapse, with particular focus on the potential risks and challenges the prince's policy might cause. In addition, the paper will try to compare the analyzed events with the earlier 'pagan revolts'.



in the Obotrite principality, as well as to provide explanations for the particular phases of the 1066 crisis from the wider perspective involving the knowledge of similar developments that occurred in the contemporary West Slavic and Scandinavian worlds. Finally, the paper will suggest the possible connection between the assassination of St. Gottschalk and Harold Godwinson's coming to power in the Kingdom of England.

Dr. Rostyslav Vatscha is a Ukrainian medievalist. In 2015 he graduated from Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. There in 2019 he also received a Ph.D. degree after defending a thesis on the political organization of the Elbe Slavs in the late 8th–early 10th century and the formation of their early states, written under the supervision of Prof. Leontij Voitovych. From 2020 on, Rostyslav Vatscha works at the I. Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, being employed as a junior research fellow at the Department of Middle Ages History. His research interests are mainly focused around the issues of political development of the Slavs in early medieval East Central Europe, Slavic migrations during the first millennium AD, their relations with the Merovingian, Carolingian, and Ottonian states, as well as all aspects of the history of the Elbe Slavs, White Serbia, and White Croatia.

Caught in a Storm: The Irony of Jonah's Story in *Patience*

Assoc. Prof Kseniia Vielchieva, Alfred Nobel University (Ukraine)

Session 2B

As Edmond Reiss noted, “medieval irony may be understood as a necessary consequence of the Christian world view of the Middle Ages”, marked by humble recognition of human deficiency in the face of the Creator. At its core lies the biblical emphasis on the incompatibility of human logic and desires with divine will: “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (*Proverbs* 19:21), “Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 *Corinthians* 1:20). The *Book of Jonah* is another biblical example of addressing the theme of human fallibility. The story of the prophet Jonah, upon whom God imposed His will by sending a storm, was a popular subject among medieval poets, including the author of the alliterative poem *Patience*. In comparison with the fragment *De Iona et Ninive* (sometimes attributed to Tertullian), which might have influenced the *Patience* poet, it becomes evident that irony already present in the *Book of Jonah* is heightened in *Patience*. Its author reinforces the situational irony through the use of verbal irony, antithesis, and parallelism, and his description of the storm works towards this effect.

Kseniia graduated from Oles Honchar Dnipro National University in 2001. In 2017 she defended a thesis for the Candidate of Philology Degree (equivalent to Doctor of Philosophy) titled *William Langland's Piers Plowman: The Genre Poetics*. At present she is Associate Professor of European and Asian Languages in the Translation Department at Alfred Nobel University, becoming Acting Head of the Department in 2024. Selected academic articles (in Ukrainian) include: ‘The Poetics of Sermon in *Piers Plowman* by William Langland’ (2014); ‘Typology of allegorical images in *Piers Plowman* by William Langland’ (2016); and ‘Interpretation of the Religious Motive of the Harrowing of Hell in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*’ (2019).

***Thi Wilde Witsing* – Vikings in Old Frisian Texts: Wild Memories or Wild Imaginations**

Hilbert Bryn Gysbert Vinkenoog, Independent Scholar (New Zealand)

Session 6B

The oldest complete manuscripts in Old Frisian date to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. On grounds of both archaisms in the language and content, it is supposed that some of the texts contained within these manuscripts are (much) older. Content-wise, the frequent inclusion of ‘Vikings’ has been



used to argue for at least an eleventh-century date, with the last Viking raids on Frisia occurring in the first half of that century. Recently, this approach has received significant backlash on methodological grounds, with a rival interpretation positing the appearance of Vikings in High Medieval texts as a contemporary invention rather than the survival of Early Medieval memories of the Northmen. At the same time, a more nuanced counter argument sees these texts as multi-layered, combining both genuine facets of Medieval legal practice repackaged to suit High Medieval political realities.

This paper will look at these rival interpretations on the phenomenon of the Vikings in Old Frisian texts, bringing in historical and linguistic evidence to provide context to the arguments thus far put forward.

Hilbert read Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge for his BA, then progressed to doing an MA at the University of Oslo in Viking and Medieval History. As part of his MA, he spent time at the Fryske Akademy, working on maritime Frisian identity, and pre-Christian religion in Early Medieval Frisia. While in Oslo he hosted and presented at the pre-Christian Religions of the North in April 2023, November 2023, and April 2024. He attended the Old Frisian Summer School in 2021, 2023, and 2025, presenting papers at the latter two. He has further presented on Viking-Age Frisia at the International Medievalists Conference in 2024, and at the Frisian Humanities Conference in 2023. Hilbert currently lives in New Zealand.

***Chronica Polonorum* as a Literary Composition and Political Testimony: Bishop Vincentius's Vision of Grief, Rule, and Renewal**

**Assoc. Prof Darius von Güttner-Sporzyński, Australian Catholic University,
Canberra (Australia)**

Session 2A

This paper examines Bishop Vincentius of Cracow's *Chronica Polonorum* as both a historical source and a literary work, with a focus on the allegorical lament following the death of Duke Casimir II the Just. It explores how Vincentius uses rhetorical and personified dialogue – between Joy, Sorrow, Prudence, and others – to transform political loss into a moral reflection on rulership, grief, and renewal. The analysis highlights the chronicle's role in shaping Piast legitimacy, Polish political memory, and the development of Latin literary historiography in medieval Poland.

Darius von Güttner-Sporzyński is a historian of Central Europe with a particular interest in cultural aspects of transmission of ideas and identity. He is the General Editor of Brepols' series "East Central Europe", and his publications cover diverse aspects of history from the early medieval to the early modern and modern eras.

When the Dead Came Riding: Crisis, Memory and the Supernatural in Polotsk, 1092

Dagmar Vysloužilová, Masaryk University, Brno (Czech Republic)

Session 7B

This paper examines the intriguing events described in the *Primary Chronicle* related to Polotsk in 1092, when "demons prowled the streets like men". These occurrences provoked widespread fear and came to symbolize a profound social, political, and spiritual crisis. The authors approach this episode using a multidisciplinary framework that combines historical, literary, and mythological analyses. The investigation is structured around three main interpretative models: the naturalistic perspective, which views the narrative as a folklorization of natural disasters such as epidemics, droughts, and wildfires; the bookish-mythological approach, which interprets the events through common mythological motifs



found in Judeo-Christian-Islamic medieval literature; and the ethno-mythological viewpoint, which emphasizes local folk traditions and beliefs. By comparing the text of the *Primary Chronicle* with the visual depictions in the miniatures of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle*, we argue that this episode serves as an allegory of the “dance of death”, reflecting the widespread anxiety generated by Cuman invasions and broader societal upheaval. This study enhances our understanding of how early medieval East Slavic societies utilized supernatural and tempestuous metaphors to interpret crises, articulate collective trauma, legitimize political authority, and construct communal identities. It sheds new light on the ways in which these communities turned to the supernatural to make sense of disaster, construct meaning, and preserve identity in times of upheaval.

Dagmar Vysloužilová is a historian, slavist, and PhD candidate in Medieval History based in Central Europe, specializing in medieval ideology and religious culture of Rus'. Her research, partially funded by the Monumenta Germaniae Historica Foundation (Munich) and the Czech Grant Academy, focuses on rites of reverence, miraculous images, and eschatological visions in East-Central Europe. She collaborates internationally, exploring how medieval societies responded to crisis through sacred narratives. She is expected to defend her thesis in late 2025.

Malicious Meteorology: Understanding the weather, whether natural or not

Dr Christopher White, University of Queensland (Australia)

Session 5A

The weather is a capricious, often-perplexing thing. It can be perfect one day, and wild the next. Even with modern advances in meteorology and climatology, we all know that the weatherman is always wrong, and that Melbournites experience (at least) four seasons in one day. Without the benefits afforded to us through modern meteorology and contemporary climatology, early medieval Europeans relied on their own knowledge and experiences of the weather. This knowledge and experience meant that the weather was largely predictable, but, when something happened outside of the norm, blame needed to be assigned, and causes uncovered.

It is when experiencing these exceptions that people seek comfort, and need to attribute blame – and, in early medieval sources, this blame was often assigned to malicious actors and maleficent demons. This paper examines the powers and prowess of demons in affecting the weather, drawing on sources from across the Latin West, from the Venerable Bede to Burchard of Worms, and in hagiographies from as far afield as Britain and Egypt. In it, I argue that the widespread and consistent associations between wild weather and wicked beings spoke to an understanding of how the world worked for medieval Europeans – one that is perhaps not so far removed from our own as we might like to imagine.

Christopher White recently completed his PhD at the University of Queensland, studying medieval wonder tales and ghost stories, although he finds himself trending earlier and earlier in his research. This time next year, he'll be a Classicist.

Across the Tumultuous Seas: Slavery, Discretion, and Sovereignty in Early Medieval Southern Italy

Asst. Prof Sarah Whitten, Hobart and William Smith Colleges (USA)

Session 1B



The ninth-century monk and historian Erchempert described the princes that ruled early medieval southern Italy as not worthy of any praise. Erchempert deemed these men as praiseless, because they had only led the region to ruin, misery, decline, and potential conquest. Central to their failures of political leadership was their powerlessness in the face of the problems that came across the sea to harm southern Italians, namely foreign conquest and overseas slaving. To understand the role of the tumultuous seas, I will draw on the work of Paul Gilroy, who has written extensively about the Black Atlantic. Gilroy emphasizes how proximity to water can create special perils and demand also new politics of care, stating that “the composite of human frailty and interdependence becomes visible in the frame of maritime peril”. For Gilroy, the challenges of maritime uncertainty must be responded to with a politics of care in a diversity of historical contexts from the world of the Atlantic slavery to the current refugee crisis in the Mediterranean Sea.

Not all Lombard princes accepted the narrative that they lacked the political authority to resolve the troubles facing their people and developed a new politics of care. In order to assert their political sovereignty, the princes of Salerno in the late ninth and early tenth century utilized legal discretion in numerous legal disputes focused on punishing people who had participated in the overseas slave trade. Central to these cases was the performance of protection of vulnerable subjects, the punishment of violent criminals, and the re-assertion of Lombard authority creating alternative narratives of political sovereignty.

Sarah is an assistant professor of history at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate New York, USA. She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters about law, violence, slavery, and women within southern Italy, and is currently working on a manuscript entitled, *Law across Jurisdictions: Enslaved People, Women, and Political Authority in Medieval Southern Italy*, that explores how southern Italian princes utilized the protection and exploitation of vulnerable people in order to build their sovereignty in a region fraught by political violence.

Vox Tempestatis: Voicing the Divine Storm

Dr Carol Williams, Monash University (Australia)

Session 1B

Contrary to the common perception of plainchant as soothing and mesmeric, turbulence, both terrestrial and cosmic, is a common theme represented in both text and melody of liturgical chant. Perhaps the best-known example is the famous sequence from the Requiem Mass, “Dies irae” – Day of Wrath, which presents an apocalyptic vision of the Last Judgement with thunder, trembling and cosmic upheaval. There is also the chant associated with the Gospel account of Jesus calming the storm in *Matthew* 8:23-27. More complex is a considerable number of chants performed in Holy Week using storm metaphors to reflect spiritual upheaval – Christ’s Passion as a cosmic tempest. There are many examples, and this paper aims to study a small collection of them focussing on the musical techniques used to evoke the storm. These include melodic contour and range, modal colour, rhythmic flexibility, melismatic intensity and text painting.

Carol J. Williams is a Research associate of the School of Philosophical, Historical and Indigenous Studies at Monash University and taught for many years as a musicologist and cultural historian. One of the characteristics of her approach to both teaching and research is a fundamental reliance on primary sources, and naturally, manuscripts of all kinds. While captivated by the vernacular cultures of medieval France and England and the expression of *trouvères* and *minstrels*, she is also committed to close examination of the language in which most of the significant documents were written, Latin. As a musician in the medieval performance ensemble *Acord* she is able to use performance as a means to unite these various



interests.

Did ethnicity matter? Ethnic background of political actors in medieval historiography of Central Europe (12th century.)

Prof. dr hab. Przemysław Wiszewski, University of Wrocław (Poland)

Session 2A

I would like to look at two well-known Central European chronicles, written by Anonymus called Gall and Kosmas of Prague, in which visions of local pasts of Poles and Czechs were first codified in the course of the 12th century. The aim of the analysis is to discover how the chroniclers depicted the functioning of ethnically ‘other’ actors in the communities that were the protagonists of the chronicler’s story? And consequently, to what extent did ethnic group membership and associated stereotypes define the behaviour of individuals in these historiographical narratives? The two chroniclers’ takes indicate radically different approaches to the workings of ethnic diversity in Latin Europe in the 12th century. In part, this is certainly related to the chroniclers’ self-interest – the newcomer Anonymous emphasised the possibility of including the ‘other’ among ‘their own’, but Kosmas, a Czech-born man, was dubious about this. Thus, it is impossible to point to a coherent and common approach of Central European elites in the 12th century to the issue of multi-ethnic societies. Its members had several options at their disposal and their choice depended on the particular situation and the particular person. For, as chroniclers agreed, ethnicity did not determine an individual's character.

Przemysław is a professor of auxiliary historical sciences and medieval history at the University of Wrocław, focused on: heterogenous medieval societies; mechanisms of co-operation and conflicts within them; historiography of medieval Central Europe; and the regional comparative history of medieval Central Europe. His publications are listed [here](#).

Extreme Asceticism in the East Roman Empire: A Product of its Time

Sybil Wong, Macquarie University (Australia)

Session 6A

Religious doctrinal arguments and significant social and political upheaval were features of the tempestuous early fifth to the late seventh centuries in the Eastern Roman Empire. Amidst this turmoil, extreme ascetics emerged and flourished. This paper focuses on the stylites, whose distinctive method of worship illustrates asceticism in one of its most extreme forms. I seek to answer a series of interrelated questions: What drew people to practise such extreme methods of devotion? Why did people accept this behaviour as a manifestation of holiness? Why there? Why then?

To address these questions, I begin by using Maslow’s psychological theory, “Hierarchy of Needs”, as a heuristic tool to explore the extreme behaviour of the stylite. However, I find that their unusual nature necessitates a reinterpretation and adaptation of this model through a socio-religious lens to develop a more appropriate analytical device to complete the task. From that perspective, I argue that the emergence of unusual models of extreme asceticism in the late antique East Roman Empire was made possible by the distinctive geography of the Syrian landscape and fulfilled an existential need in both the practitioner and observer, caused by a combination of the unique sociopolitical context of Late Antiquity, the evolving Christian identity and Christian eschatological beliefs.

Sybil Wong is a PhD candidate at Macquarie University, specialising in Christianity in the East Roman Empire during Late Antiquity. She integrates the cultural, philosophical, and literary perspectives of theological discourses to explore religious



beliefs through the ethical, cultural, and existential dimensions of religion. Her PhD thesis adopts a socio-historical analysis of hagiographical models of extreme ascetics to demonstrate how the portrayal of these ascetics articulates a distinctive aspect of the values, tensions, and cultural narratives embedded in late antique society.

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