

# Conference Report

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## **CONFERENCE TITLE:** NETWORKS AND NEIGHBOURS II

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Held in the elegant city of Curitiba, in the state of Paraná, *Networks and Neighbours II: A Symposium on Early Medieval Correlations* was the second annual symposium of the international project, *Networks and Neighbours (N&N)*. Primarily based in the United Kingdom, this was the first international symposium for *N&N*, after their very successful inaugural symposium in Leeds. From the remarkable turnout at the second *N&N* symposium, and the extensive international and inter-disciplinary dialogues it generated, *N&N II* represents only the beginning of the project's collaboration with scholars and institutions in Paraná and around the rest of Brazil.

*N&N II* was held in early April, at the start of the autumn season in much of South America, and one month after Brazilian university students had returned from the long February break. The symposium was held on the vibrant Reitoria campus of the Universidade Federal do Paraná, in the heart of Curitiba, providing an exceptional venue for diverse and interactive engagement. The campus, at Rua Quinze de Novembro, is dedicated to the end of empire, a fitting stage, perhaps, for a group of early medieval historians, especially those who are so early they are considered 'late'.

The event was supported and funded by an international collection of universities working in collaboration with *N&N*. Institutions that contributed to the event include the Universidade Federal do Paraná, Universidade Federal do Amapá, Universidade de São Paulo and the School of History at the University of Leeds. The symposium could not have happened without the work of the *N&N* team and many others. Those especially worth mentioning are **Otávio Luiz Vieira Pinto**, **Vanessa Fronza** and **Priscila Scoville** whose outstanding organizational skills and donations of time and resources (and patience) were fundamental to the symposium's operation.

The symposium ran over the course of two full days. On each day there were two panels with three speakers, a moderator, and participant respondents, as well as a keynote speaker. Professor **Ian Wood** (University of Leeds) was the keynote on the first evening, while Professor **Ralph Mathisen** (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) effectively closed the symposium with his keynote on the following night. The entire symposium was impressively attended. The large room that held the entire event was regularly teeming with students and faculty, despite classes being in full swing on campus. Moreover, there were young researchers from all over Brazil that came specifically for the event, as did scholars from Argentina, Austria, Chile, Italy, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the US.

The symposium was formally opened with short remarks, in Portuguese and English, respectively, from two of the directors of *N&N*, Otávio Luiz Vieira Pinto (University of Leeds) and **Richard Broome** (University of Leeds). Following their comments, Dr. **André Szczawlińska Muceniecks** (Universidade de São Paulo) opened the first panel, *Methods of Capital*. This panel was constituted by **Tommaso Leso** (Università 'Ca' Foscari' Venezia), **Paulo Pachá** (Universidade Federal Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro & Núcleo Interdisciplinar de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Marx e o Marxismo) and **Janira Feliciano Pohlmann** (Universidade Federal do Paraná). In *Methods of Capital*, we heard about the uses of marriages, gift-exchange, and identity-construction to develop, secure, and promote authority in the present and the future. It was argued that these acts were not forms of hard capital, or of cultural capital, *per se*, but modes of creating capital for the sake of power and control, in early medieval worlds defined by pluralities of capital, pre-modern worlds without a singular, totalized figure of capital. Proliferations of power were performed within networks of neighbours, and capital was tied to the hard reality of such people and networks. Non-abstract capital made it difficult to sustain specific acts of capital production since they were 'cashed out' by the living reality. Thus, when specific acts of capital production, from marriages to gift-exchanges became inexpedient their whole form was abandoned, as in the case of Visigothic-Frankish marriage alliances after 614. A relevant topic that time constraints prevented us from discussing during the panel was the act of granting privileges, or 'rights' in modern terms, to individuals and groups, like bishops and churches, not to be part of this system of capital, that is, rights not to gift-exchange. It may be argued that these exemptions from the game of exchange were a weakness of the grantor, say, the king, in the face of the grantee, say, a church. Whatever the case, the recognition of the right not to exchange, not to gift, not to be part of marriages, adds significant depth to our understanding of the dynamics between the topographies of authority in early medieval Europe, and how a situation arose in which one-third of the land of Western Europe was owned by a single, religious institution.

After we all returned from lunch, Dr. **Alfonso Hernández** (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas) introduced the second panel, *Structures of Authority: from Text to Temple*. The speakers of this panel were **Jonathan Perl Garrido** (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso and Universidad de Santiago de Chile), **Renan Marques Birro**, Universidade Federal do Amapá and Universidade de São Paulo) and **Danilo Medeiros Gazzotti** (Universidade Federal do Paraná). In this panel we heard about constructions of opposition as methods for building consensus. Many questions came to mind about others vs. Otherness and the place of the same and Sameness, and how these relate to the ontological and perceptions of Other in other early medieval kingdoms such as Visigothic Hispania, where those who broke an oath were considered 'inhuman'. What too about being and being-ness? What did it even mean to *be*, let alone be other? In the talk about the Sueves, Danilo's research led us to reconsiderations about the concept of territoriality in Hispania, and about the contrasts between Iberian accounts of the Sueves. Overall, the collective papers of this panel show that modern historiography on certain subjects, like the use of the outsider or foreigner, should begin centuries earlier than they do. It is no coincidence that in his *Being and Nothingness*, where he lays out the theory of the Other, Sartre reaches back to early medieval Francia, nor why Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, and following them, Giorgio Agamben, see the relationship of theology and politics with pre-modern historiography as a constitution for the being and state of exception and unacceptable alterity in modernity.

The first day of the symposium closed with Professor Ian Wood's keynote discussion on the modern origins of Europe. Professor Wood's talk ended chronologically in 1971, with the publication of Peter Brown's, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750*. One wonders if it was not around this time – defined by radical deconstructions of the meta-narrative, the height of anti-Platonism and the discrediting of universal truths and ideas, the rise of particularism over communalism, and so on – that we see the beginnings of a historiography that may then be labelled the postmodern origins of Europe? It is from 1969 to 1975 that Foucault published *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the *Discourse on Language* and *Discipline and Punishment*. In 1975 Michel de Certeau published *Writing of History*, and in 1979 Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. It may be that Professor Wood's argument reflects his sense of the end of this historiographical moment. He alludes to an important turn, or re-visioned entanglement, that occurred in 2005 when Bruce Holsinger published *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory*. Sensing the pervading critique of postmodernism within medieval studies, Holsinger defended the former within the latter *not* by demonstrating how fundamental postmodernism and critical theory are to medieval history, but rather how grounded in medieval history the work of the famous critical and postmodern theorists is. The entanglement of the postmodern with medieval history, he shows, goes well back into the modern origins of both fields. In the same year as Holsinger's book, John Caputo and Michael Scanlon reinforced this point in their *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*. Also in that same year, Chris Wickham published his *Framing of the Early Middle Ages*, a massive treatise that encapsulates the postmodern imagination of the early medieval past. One wonders, then, if it was around 2005 that a historiography defined by the postmodern origins of Europe was not at its penultimate moment. The cultural theorist Frederic Jameson suggests that the consequence of

postmodernism is a sense of a loss of history, a never-ending present in which tradition is forgotten. One wonders if this postmodern condition is not what Professor Wood was attacking when he talked about the dangers of the pervasiveness of certain historiographical traditions and the falling out of fashion of others. Professor Wood, it would seem, called in this talk for a sort of ‘defense of lost causes’, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, warning historians not to be bound to the present’s discourses, to be open to encountering former and otherwise alternative historiographical traditions.

After an engaging and spicy symposium meal the evening before, the second and final day began with the panel *Matters of Eloquence: Writing in the Early Middle Ages*, led by **N. Kivilcim Yavuz** (University of Leeds). The first paper of the panel was presented by **Selene Candian dos Santos** (Universidade de São Paulo), who spoke to us about the reception and recasting of classical rhetoric in the Early Middle Ages. Following Selene was **Monah Nascimento Pereira** (Universidade Federal do Paraná) who discussed issues of authorship and royal practice in Anglo-Saxon England through an interrogation of King Alfred’s translation works. The final paper of the panel was by Dr. **Rodrigo Rainha** (Universidade Estácio de Sá, Rio de Janeiro) who took us through the significance of letter-writing in Visigothic Hispania in the seventh century.

The second panel of the day, and last of the symposium, *Hints of the Bible*, was led by Dr. **Paulo Duarte** (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro). The first paper was by **Gesner Las Casas Brito Filho** (Universidade de São Paulo), who spoke about codicological notes on writings between the images in MS Junius 11 (Bodleian Library, Oxford). Following him, **Philipp Dörler** (Universität Wien) discussed the topic of *conversus* and the Bible, using Biblical allusions in Jordanes’ works as a case study. The culminating paper of the panel was by **Vinicius Cesar Dreger de Araujo** (Universidade Cruzeiro do Sul), who assessed new readings of the ninth-century Biblical epic, *The Heliand*. In both of the panels on the second day, the speakers continued building on the themes, ideas and important avenues of critical interrogation that were presented and discussed the day before. They looked at questions of authorship and translation, forms of writing, and modes of communication, and opened up thought on the dialectics between wisdom and mind, knowledge and thought.

The final paper of the symposium was the second keynote, by Professor Ralph Mathisen. In his talk, Professor Mathisen was able to spin two distinct historiographical traditions around. One of these was about the so-called ‘Dark Ages’. The other was implicit in the sub-title to his talk, *How the Barbarians Saved Classical Civilization*. This method of constructing an historical argument based on ‘how X saved Y’ has become somewhat common over the past decade or so. However, in almost all cases of historians using this method, the historian claims to be initiating a new historiography. Professor Mathisen, however, takes on the much more difficult task of tearing apart a centuries-old historiography that is deeply engrained in the education - in the teaching, writing and rhetoric - of academics and intellectuals, but also in popular culture. In turning that historiography sideways, by making us reconsider the very principles upon which it is based, he provided important qualification to the transformation model, and answered the historiographical call made by Professor Wood.

There is plenty more one could say about all of the fantastic papers of the 2014 *N&N* symposium, but instead I will leave that potentiality as a friendly spectre guiding us for the next symposia. I will finish, then, with the following. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Critical theorists and philosophers today, from Avital Ronnell to Cornell West, make this a core theme of their activities, and I do not think we historians should act otherwise. *N&N* publishes reports of conferences, masterclasses and symposia which are meant not only to describe but also to criticize. *N&N*'s own events should be no exception. No academic project is worth living, is worth running, if it is an unexamined one. It should be examined by university, government and other officials, its public impact regularly interrogated, since it is to the public that we must answer and engage with in a democratic society dedicated to free and quality higher education. An academic project should also be openly examined by those that constitute its academic life, its being-in-the-world, from its own directors to scholars in the field, to all of the students and others that participate in it in any form. Thus, we encourage you, the readership and attendees of *N&N*, our network of neighbours, to send us your critical descriptions, suggestions and criticisms.

Finally, *N&N* would like to thank all that attended and participated in the 2014 *N&N* symposium. We hope that you continue to contribute to our communal effort to develop novel approaches to thinking about and representing the 'before now' of the Early Middle Ages, bringing scholars together regardless of current state boundaries, and making knowledge free to all, a core principle of a truly democratic world. We are encouraged by the success of the symposium, and look forward to deepening our collective actions with scholars and publics in Brazil and elsewhere.