

Gender and the Family

Posted on Thursday 21st January 2010

In January 2010, **Dr Philippa Semper** ([/staff/semper.shtml](http://www.historycultures.bham.ac.uk/staff/semper.shtml)) (School of English, Drama, American and Canadian Studies) and **Dr Simon Yarrow** (<http://www.historycultures.bham.ac.uk/staff/yarrow.shtml>) (School of History and Cultures) hosted the **Annual Conference of the Gender and Medieval Studies Group** (<http://medievalgender.co.uk/>). The conference was organised under the aegis of the Birmingham's **Centre for the Study of the Middle Ages (CESMA)** (<http://www.cesma.bham.ac.uk/>). The subject of this year's event was 'Gender and the Family'. The conference was wide-ranging in terms of the period covered – from late antiquity to the sixteenth century – and also in material and themes covered and research methods and disciplines invoked, including sessions on parenthood in the early Middle Ages, family and the Church, and the lifestyles and agency of medieval wives and mothers. Professor Guy Halsall from the University of York delivered the keynote lecture on 'Gender and the family: change around 600 AD', a tour-de-force in its range and perceptive analysis of material.



Birmingham itself was well represented through papers from staff members and postgraduates alike: from the Department of English, **Dr Gillian Wright** ([/staff/wrightg.shtml](http://www.historycultures.bham.ac.uk/staff/wrightg.shtml)) and Andy Hyde delivered interesting and provocative papers on sixteenth-century literature and uncle-nephew relationships in Old English texts respectively, while from the School of History Dr **Chris Callow** (<http://www.historycultures.bham.ac.uk/staff/callow.shtml>) and Emma Southon provided fascinating discussions of children in the Sagas of Icelanders and of early medieval fatherhood. **Professor Leslie Brubaker** (<http://www.iaa.bham.ac.uk/staff/brubaker.shtml>) and doctoral students Eirini Panou, Andriani Georgiou and Eve Davies from the **Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Greek Studies** (<http://www.iaa.bham.ac.uk/bomg/>) contributed equally stimulating papers on aspects of the Byzantine family. We are also grateful to the colleagues who chaired sessions throughout the conference (**Mary**

Harlow (<http://www.iaa.bham.ac.uk/staff/harlow.shtml>), **Anthea Harris** (<http://www.iaa.bham.ac.uk/staff/harris.shtml>), **Christina Pössel** (<http://www.historycultures.bham.ac.uk/staff/possel.shtml>) and **William Purkis** (<http://www.historycultures.bham.ac.uk/staff/purkis.shtml>)) and to the postgraduate students who acted as helpers: Mary Ward, Mike Rush and Louisa Taylor, and to Matt Edwards.

This was, however, an international conference, and in addition to scholars from across the UK we welcomed colleagues from mainland Europe and the US (despite extensive snowfall and temperatures that remained for the most part below zero). Some delegates put up with truly taxing travel arrangements in order to arrive at the conference, but the presence of researchers from across the world was invaluable in opening up the subject across the eleven panels which took place (for the full programme, see the GMS website at <http://www.medievalgender.co.uk/> (<http://www.medievalgender.co.uk/>)). The consequent exchanges of ideas, information, sources and suggestions were extremely productive, both within the panels themselves and during the breaks for tea, coffee, lunch and evening events. The quality of both the papers presented and the subsequent discussion was high. Emma Campbell (Warwick), Jennifer Brown (MMC, New York), Guy Halsall (York), Sarah Salih (King's) and Sheila Sweetinburgh (Kent) also provided expert chairing for sessions.

Those who attended also had the chance to relax a little at times during the conference, which lasted from 7th to 10th January. The School of English, Drama, American and Canadian Studies at Birmingham kindly sponsored a wine reception for the first evening. The second was taken up by an extremely enjoyable performance of medieval music delivered by students from the University's **Centre for Early Music Performance and Research (CEMPR)** (<http://www.music.bham.ac.uk/cempr/>) and a cheese-tasting session showcasing medieval methods of production, led by Birmingham tutor Linda Hutton (whose organisation of the catering was superb throughout). The conference dinner was held at the Hippodrome Theatre, where delegates mingled with the pantomime audience on their way in and had a very pleasant meal at a different kind of venue!

In sum, and despite the weather, the conference went extremely well; its organisers are working towards the publication of a selection of its papers. Meanwhile, the baton is handed on to the University of Swansea, which will host next year's Gender and Medieval Studies conference on 'Gender, Time and Memory' in January 2011.

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

