

Medieval Song Network Workshop 2010

The first of a pair of workshops hosted by the newly-established Medieval Song Network was held in the Senate House, London, on 6th and 7th September 2010. The Medieval Song Network was set up in order to enable discussion and collaboration across disciplines about all aspects of medieval song. Support for two workshops and a linked performance event in September 2010 and September 2011 was awarded by the AHRC in June 2010. This first workshop was organised and co-ordinated by Ardis Butterfield and Helen Deeming, and was attended by around fifty participants over the two days.

The workshop took the form of several thematically focused sessions, each of which consisted of a small number of short case-study presentations, usually from specialists in different disciplines, followed by an extended open discussion. Four sessions were dedicated to 'tools and resources': digital resources; lyrics in manuscripts: English, Dutch, French texts, and Music; liturgical and sermon contexts; and authorship and attribution. A further three sessions discussed 'interpretation and performance': circulation and transmission; music and poetry; interpreting and communicating song. The workshop concluded with a final discussion of possible ways in which the network may move forward. The Network will continue to reflect the interests among its members as broadly as possible, whilst keeping in mind the necessity to form coherent research directions..

A general theme which emerged over the two days was the question of how one defines 'medieval', 'song', 'lyric' and other such relevant terms. It became clear that these terms can have different usages in different disciplines, and may or may not be historically appropriate to the material to which they are applied. A suggestion was made that researchers should look at rubrics and sources in order to understand how medieval scribes themselves defined a lyric/song, etc. In discussion, it was emphasised that lyric, verse and song had a fluid existence with the same text open to reformulation, copied as musical or non-musical, and secular or devotional in different sources. Perhaps we should move towards a more plural understanding of how the elements of song and lyric interrelated and inter-influenced each other, informed rather than restricted by different disciplinary perspectives.

The aim of this initial Medieval Song Network workshop was to facilitate the development of ideas for manageable and workable projects for continued discussion next year. Participants were invited to consider offering proposals for projects and email Helen Deeming and Ardis Butterfield personally with any forthcoming ideas. It was felt that the following areas could be useful in order to enable new, cross-disciplinary ways of approaching medieval song:

- vocabulary and glossary, both in modern scholarly discourse and medieval terminology
- methodology for dealing with memory, a crucial part of performance and song
- authorship, locating individual authors, and going beyond authorship to think about collaboration and patronage
- the aspects of performance that make music important culturally
- dialect, to identify how and where songs were received

The Network will continue to work to promote medieval song, whatever that may be, and make it accessible to a wider audience. The Network also hopes to facilitate some form of discussion between scholars: the consensus was that this should be in a type of forum as opposed to by email distribution list.

It was agreed that the Network's website needs to be simple but without reifying potentially restrictive disciplinary categories. The website is hosted by the IMR. It currently contains a list of relevant databases (with links) and a bibliography, to which participants were invited to contribute. The website could also include a list of relevant organisations, and it would be useful if they in turn were to link back the Network's website. It was proposed that the website might provide audio or video recordings of relevant papers presented at other conferences. It was suggested that performers may also be drawn to the website should it provide pdf files of musical editions, and that the website could provide a practical list of willing performers.

With regards to the second workshop to be held in September 2011, it was agreed that the format of the first workshop worked well. Perhaps each session could be based on one case study examined from many different angles, allowing for an interdisciplinary approach to a single subject. The music of such case studies could also potentially be performed in the concert by the Orlando Consort planned for September 2011. It was suggested that it may be interesting to include researchers who are not directly related to medieval studies. The proposal of a performance master-class with the Orlando Consort was met with great approval.