



Goetz, Hans-Werner: *Moderne Mediävistik. Stand und Perspektiven der Mittelalterforschung*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1999. 412 pages. ISBN 14121-0.

Given our present understanding of the problematics of the periodisations, especially such simple categorisations such as "old – middle – modern", it is absurd, perhaps, that we as scholars still find ourselves discussing the Middle Ages and defining ourselves as medievalists. This way of defining the research field and period – not to be taken too rigidly nowadays - has its roots in the scholarly tradition of hundreds of years, still framing much of the 21st century historical research.

This scholarly tradition, as well as its present state and status - in Germany as well as internationally, are studied in *Moderne Mediävistik* (1999) by professor Hans-Werner Goetz (born in 1947). Professor Goetz is known for his studies in medieval history of mentalities and historiography, and even this book about "modern medieval studies" includes quite a profound look into the history of research and changing ideas about the Middle Ages. Professor Goetz also provides information about the influence of the "New Histories" to Medieval Studies, with contributions in special fields (such as *Alltagsgeschichte*, Oral History and others) by other German scholars – Steffen Patzold, Lorenz Sebastian Benkmann, Jan-Marco Sawilla, Hedwig Röckelein, Anja Romeikat, Markus Späth and Elke Petter.

The book is divided in two parts. The first one shows the development and present status of Medieval Studies as well as organizations and institutions connected to the research. After having been a source of

inspiration for the 19th century historians, Medieval Studies has lost its position in the focus of historical or at least main stream historical studies. It is illustrative that the period has been left aside in school classes and even university studies. To keep the world outside interested in Medieval Studies, Medieval Studies must retain contact to the world outside - and to questions pertinent to historical research as a whole. This is also the message of the author of *Moderne Mediävistik*.

In professor Goetz' book, the roots of the present situation are studied rather profoundly. The reader may sometimes wonder whether it would have been a good idea to focus more on the latest decades and on Medieval Studies. Every now and then, the book turns into a general historiographical presentation. This may also be illustrative of the present situation of the discipline. Even though historians still recognise that there is a period which might be called "the Middle Ages", the study of which requires special skills and knowledge, it is also increasingly clear that medievalists are nowadays interested in very differing points of view which have their roots in different fields and traditions of historical research. Therefore, it is also necessary to create some general background for specific fields.

It is also interesting to read about the history of Medieval Studies in Germany. Historiographical conditions of different countries are not very often compared with each other, so it is interesting to read about local and national differences and similarities in the same field of research. The way how some German historians of the 1930's wrote about the "true German spirit of Charlemagne", for example, has certainly had its counterparts elsewhere. In Finland, the contemporary historian Jalmari Jaakkola offered similar kinds of ideas about the "true Finnish spirit of the local medieval leaders". Other examples could undoubtedly be found elsewhere – an interesting option for comparative historiographical studies. Even the comparison between Medieval Studies in DDR and BDR respectively is enlightening and brings forth questions of connections between political situations and historical studies in general.

After having lost their central role as legitimising the national history and the birth of the European nations, medievalists have turned to very different historical approaches - as historians have done in general. Even the point of view has changed from that of the rulers to all levels of society. Perhaps it is the very loss of political and national importance which has allowed the historical research and Medieval Studies to develop into a freer and more varying field of points of views, leaving aside the unproblematic objectivity, the belief for a "one-size-fits-all" method, or other universally

accepted criteria for research. The lack of definite answers also leaves space for free discussion, and this is welcomed by Hans-Werner Goetz. On the other hand, it is becoming more and more difficult to get a general view into the field of historical research. Consequently, then, even the reader of a book like *Moderne Mediävistik* faces difficulties in writing a critique of the book, not being able to claim total expertise over the whole field.

Most of the second part of the book discusses the influence of various new waves of history in the field of the Middle Ages. It is not so much about new sources but new questions to be posed for sources that are already known. Sources that have been neglected as "untrustworthy" for historians trying to find out "*wie es eigentlich gewesen (ist)*", are now fruitful for scholars who want to know "how medieval people felt, thought or talked about certain phenomena". In general, it is very much about the so-called New Cultural History, Cultural Anthropology, Psychohistory, *Alltagsgeschichte*, Gender History, History of Technology and other points of view, which are in the process of establishing their position in the Medieval Studies – no longer as something very radical and new, but not yet in a hegemonic position in the historical field, still thought-provoking and fruitful. The interesting and very complicated relationship between oral, literal and non-verbal communication and the discussion of this field of research is especially taken in account.

In many cases, it is pointed out that the hierarchy between the "medieval" and the "modern" is no longer what it used to be. Just as anthropologists have abandoned the former ideas of non-Western cultures as primitive, so have medievalists got rid of most of the thinking of medieval people as overwhelmingly simple-minded and irrational creatures. The psychohistorical point of view, for example, reminds us that the individual is not the invention of the Early Modern period only. The old feeling of superiority is left aside, and a certain humility can be sensed in the new approaches.

Many historians, including professor Goetz, are considering the linguistic turn not as the end of history but as an end for certain former tendencies in historical research. It may also be of interest to note that some well known postmodern or poststructuralist historians, such as Hayden White and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, have also been studying the Middle Ages. The postmodern point of views are welcomed by professor Goetz as fruitful contributions, while the author himself seems to stay on the modern side of historical research, even though encouraging the readers to think of historical research as construction, not reconstruction, and strongly

recommending a positive attitude towards new "tendencies and trends" of Medieval Studies. If German medievalists (or medievalists of other nationalities) separate themselves too much from the present discussion in media, professor Goetz fears that the discipline is doomed to decline.

Moderne Mediävistik offers, in a whole, a quite tolerant, though not an overwhelmingly radical general view into Medieval Studies. Given its broad perspective, it certainly offers some new insights for anyone. It would certainly be useful to have something like this in Finnish and about Finnish Medieval Studies – or, for example, about Nordic Medieval Studies as a whole. This kind of international historiographical discussion might help us to create more international connections, something Professor Goetz feels is still missing, despite many medieval conferences such as IMC Leeds and other, thematic meetings.

Reading the book together with Dutch postgraduates in the Netherlands, I realised that both my Dutch colleagues and myself felt the representatives of the so-called minor language cultures were missing from the book. Of course, it might be too much to expect that a single book should cover the whole of the European Medieval Studies; and I appreciate that the author is commenting on this problem himself. However, it led me to think how the saying "Publish or perish" has often turned into "Publish in English/German/French or perish". How could the Finnish, Swedish, Dutch and Estonian studies, for example, be brought forward – so that they could also be noticed in publications such as this one?

Quite obviously, this would require a more active approach by the representatives of "minor" scientific languages, perhaps a conscious strategy on how to make more breakthroughs into the linguistically divided fields of historical research.

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