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**Centre for the Study of Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals,
University of Copenhagen**

There is a master narrative, having emerged in the 19th century and being still influential, that describes the Middle Ages as the “dark” age of “intellectual slumber” and the era of Renaissance as a totally new époque opening the way to intellectual enlightenment and modernity (James George Frazer). The “Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals” has done groundbreaking work in challenging this view by discovering and highlighting lines of continuity between medieval and modern European culture. This is a very ambitious and innovative project, providing a lot of case studies for the much debated reflections on “cultural memory” (Jan Assmann). One strength of the Centre is the multidisciplinary approach responding creatively to a problematic feature of previous research in European intellectual history: the variety of academic disciplines has implied a strong tendency to divide the cultural heritage into different and rather unrelated areas: art, music, theology, literature. Each discipline has developed its own methodology and agenda, thereby isolating cultural elements according to a modern understanding of categories like “music”, “religion” and so on. By focusing on the concept of ritual, the Centre has succeeded in bringing together the various disciplines in a joint effort to investigate the interconnectedness of the different cultural areas. This project is of high relevance for the self-perception of contemporary European culture.

The multidisciplinary approach of the Centre is also of relevance for the recent debate on the famous theory of secularization that has viewed the Middle Ages as a thoroughly religious

era in contrast to the secular world of modernity. Here, again, the Centre contributes to international research, criticizing the secularization paradigm by investigating the cultural heritage of medieval rituals, showing hidden lines of continuity from the Middle Ages to Modernity. The Opera is a case in point: according to a still dominating narrative, it emerged with the era of Renaissance in Florence as a totally new phenomenon, unrelated to medieval music (Silke Leopold). This view has been challenged and corrected by the Centre's work, particularly by the work of Nils Holger Petersen, drawing attention to the religious confraternities in Florence which appear as the missing link between medieval liturgy and modern opera. Another case in point is the well established and influential distinction between (medieval) "cult image" and (modern) images as "art" (Hans Belting). Again, the Centre has challenged and corrected such a master narrative, particularly by the work of Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen, for instance, in his contribution to the second volume of the Centre's series "Ritus et Artes". This essay may be taken as an example showing the coherence of the work carried out in the Centre: providing new, widely unknown, materials and relating the highly specialized analysis to the overall theme of the whole project – the cultural heritage of medieval rituals. On an even higher, abstract level, the work of the Center is also of relevance for the debate on the Religious-Secular Distinction which is controversial among historians of religion (Bruce Lincoln; Timothy Fitzgerald). A possible strength of the Center may be seen here, in its potential for stimulating reflections on the concept of religion and for future collaboration with Religious Studies or History of Religions (Religionswissenschaft).

In the following I will comment on some publications of the Center, assessed from the point of view of a historian of religions who is used to lecturing on the European religious history (Europäische Religionsgeschichte) in general and to collaborating with colleagues from music-theatre studies in particular (at the university of Bayreuth we have a B.A. program "Kulturwissenschaft mit Schwerpunkt Religion" and a special M.A. program "Europäische Religionsgeschichte"; joint seminars have been organized with a colleague from our Institut für Musiktheater, Thurnau, and with a colleague from the Institut für Musikwissenschaft of the university of Munich). Publications will be selected according to my own interest in the various fields of research, highlighting and briefly assessing the quality and originality of the contributions to international research in the respective fields.

The collective volume on "The Appearances of Medieval Rituals. The Play of Construction and Modification", appearing 2004 in the Series "Disputatio", offers in the introduction a metaphorical description, nicely defining the multidisciplinary approach as "polyphony", a concept taken up from Bakhtin and in this context meaning to "balance historical narratives", interpreted by a second grade metaphor by applying the concept of "graph", taken up from

mathematics. Thus the introduction already shows the high level of methodological reflection, in this case even going beyond the humanities to include mathematics in the intellectual horizon. This introduction also highlights the dialectics of the historical process that is to be covered by the Center's research plan: the dialectics of secularization and sacralization. The first contribution, written by Nils Holger Petersen, covers in an impressive way a wide field of sources, from Late Antiquity (Augustine) to the Middle Ages (Amalarius of Metz), and an equally wide field of research literature – not only the special research in this historical field (Carolingian music) by historical experts (Flanigan), but also theories of ritual, as, for instance, by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Thus it indicates the central strength of the Center that gives coherence to the complex research plan – the combination of theoretical reflection and detailed investigation of sources in the various historical disciplines. In this case, the combination of theological and musicological reflection contributes to building a bridge between the religious and the secular areas of European culture, normally viewed as different separated fields.

Closely related, but moving beyond music to include the idea of theatre is the contribution by Donnalee Dox. This essay is, from the historian of religion's point of view, very important insofar as it touches upon the medieval theological controversies on the function of music and performance in liturgy (Agobard of Lyon vs. Amalarius of Metz; Gerhoh of Reichersberg and Aelred of Rivaulx vs. Honorius Augustodunensis), a discourse that has parallels in other religious traditions of the world. This essay has also included a response to the theory of Rainer Warning whose book from the seventies had long been neglected in research literature.

Wim Verbaal in his contribution reflects upon the double possibility of developments from liturgy into literature and from literature into liturgy, taking sermons by Bernhard of Clairvaux as the materials. By describing writing and reading as a "sacramental event", he shows the connectedness of literature and ritual, art and religion. Closely related but moving beyond the text of sermons and looking at a different kind of ritual, the palm Sunday procession, is the contribution by Mette Birkedal Bruun. This essay provides another nice example of what Verbaal has been theorizing about. Thus already the first part of this collective volume can show the inner coherence of the various subprojects covering such a large field of materials from different disciplines.

The second volume of the Centre series "Ritus and Artes", takes the concept of "creation" as the point of departure for investigating connections between medieval liturgical practice and modern artistic production. Processes of transformation, leading from the biblical idea of creation to the idea of human creativity as parallel to God's creative power, are analyzed, avoiding a one-dimensional history-of-ideas approach and instead moving towards an actor-oriented approach that takes care of the various factors determining and influencing the re-

interpretation and appropriation of ideas in new historical contexts. This approach is developed already in the first contribution to the first section, written by Eyolf Östrem. The second contribution, by Wim Verbaal, covers an enormously wide time span, from Hesiod to Pasolini – medieval liturgy thus appears as a stage in the middle of an ongoing process of cultural transformation.

Nils Holger Petersen, the leader of the center, in this volume has contributed to the second section on “Human Creation”, taking up the concept of “cultural memory” (Jan and Aleida Assmann) as a framework for constructing meaningful connections between the biblical, foundational myth of creation, medieval liturgy and creative productions in modern Western culture – not only Haydn’s “Schöpfung” but also musical creations of the 20th century (Crumb). Since the analysis is centered on the concept of ritual, this essay goes even beyond theology and music, to include visual representations, referring to the Mosaic decoration of San Marco, Venice. Richard Utz has contributed to this section an equally interesting and innovative essay, dealing with Chaucer and challenging the conventional view that ascribes self-consciousness of artists and writers to the Renaissance era and assumes that the concept of authorship was unknown to the Middle Ages.

The following essays in this section focus on music again, the one (H.W. Schwab) taking up a motif from antiquity (Prometheus) that features prominently in modern classical music and literature, the other (M.Breivik) going beyond music in a strict sense (Schönberg) to philosophy, by referring to Ludwig Wittgenstein. A look at the second section of this volume shows again the inner coherence of the work carried out in the Centre.

The ongoing efforts to achieve an inner coherence of all the work carried out in the various subprojects are clearly to be seen in the fourth volume of the Series “Ritus et Artes”. The concepts of the title - “negotiation” and “heritage” – are well reflected and defined in the introduction, and in addition to this, each section of the volume has its own introduction. The introduction to the first section widens the horizon even to South Africa – a very good example for the significance of genealogical and historical narratives, as I am inclined to confirm on the basis of one of my research projects dealing with South African history. An interesting aspect in one of the essays in this first section, is the comparison of Chretien de Troyes and Jorge Luis Borges, bringing together medieval and contemporary literature (Jörgen Bruhn). Of all the essays in this volume, all of outstanding quality, I want to mention especially the contribution by Mette B. Bruun: the metaphor of “Wilderness” is a good starting point to draw a line of continuity from Citaux to La Trappe, that is from the 12th to the 17th century. The third section deserves special attention: it introduces the complementary concept of “oblivion” to counterbalance the central concept of “memory” – a very inspiring approach.

The fourth section is fascinating in its wide horizon, bringing examples from the visual arts and music to illustrate the “Artistic Negotiations with the Medieval Heritage”.

The monograph written jointly by Nils Holger Petersen and Eyolf Östrem, published in 2008, will have a lasting impact in the field, reconsidering the historiography of Opera and giving a detailed account of the new theory that throws light on its connectedness with medieval religious culture.

Of all the articles, put at my disposal and not included in the collective volumes, I will mention only a few that are of special interest from my point of view: first of all, Petersen’s essay on “Poetry, Truthfulness, and the ‘Pity of War’”: dealing with resignifications of the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac, this essay approaches again the central issue of the whole project, showing how “interactions between biblical and modern elements bring about new meanings”; M.W. Jürgensen’s essay “In the Sphere of Sacrosanctity” takes up the theme of sacred space, a topic that is of high relevance for the History of Religions; Sven Rune Hafsteen’s work on music in the protestant theological tradition deserves also special attention from the point of view of the history of religions: he emphasizes rightly controversy as an important feature of the protestant theological debate in general and its musico-theological discussions in particular – he is touching here on an aspect that is also known from other religious traditions of the world.

As a summary I want to state that the Centre has made a strong contribution to cutting edge international research in the field. Its special strength results from the combination of complex theoretical reflection and detailed historical research carried out by experts in the various disciplines. What could and should be strengthened, from the historian of religion’s point of view, is just a stronger connection and collaboration with this discipline, the History of Religions (Religionswissenschaft in general, and Europäische Religionsgeschichte in particular, as distinct from Church History as a theological discipline). However, judging from my own experience working in this field, I am sure the work of the Centre, especially the series “Ritus et Artes”, will have a lasting impact also in this neighbouring discipline. In any case, the Centre has already established itself among the internationally leading groups in the field. The list of publications is really impressive. With regard to the information on the centre staff’s involvement in teaching and with regard to the list of conferences and workshops, I would say that it is a very attractive place for training younger researchers.

Based on my own experience as a subproject leader in several collaborative research units (Sonderforschungsbereiche) sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG), and as a founding member of an interdisciplinary editorial project (Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad

Ethicam Religionemque Pertinentia (SAPERRE); in 2008 taken over as a long term project by the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen), I would say that the Centre has been managed and led very well, recruiting and maintaining a group of excellent researchers. The research activities have been coherently and consistently developed from the first to the second funding period as has been convincingly shown in the self evaluation report by the leader of the Centre.