

Workshop 12

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**Spatial Narrative and the Mandeville-Author's Vision of World System: Reading Mandeville's Travels as a Universal History**

Reading the late medieval pan-European bestseller Mandeville's Travels as a universal history, this paper investigates the Mandeville-author's vision of and comment on the evolving world system throughout the 13th and 14th centuries, with a focus on the spatial narratives there that convey narratorial understanding, observation, and envisaging of the global power dynamics at the close of the Latin Middle Ages. With reference to the Middle English, Old French, and Middle High German versions comparatively, I argue that although the Mandeville-author performed Cathay, the Mongol Empire, and Arabia as local centres in terms of wealth, flourishing of arts, as well as political and military power, these Oriental centres are ultimately domesticated as auxiliary and subordinate to Jerusalem. Via spatial narrative, the Holy Land is apotheosised as the self-evident, absolute global pivot of faith. This phenomenon not only evinces the Mandeville-author's Eurocentric and potentially pro-Crusade sentiments, but also casts light on the late medieval European intellectual rumination over the position of the Latin Christendom vis-à-vis the oscillating and reshuffling world system. Despite my essentially cultural-historical approach to the multilingual versions of Mandeville's Travels, I ground my research on the compilation contexts of the medieval manuscripts, as well as their early modern incunabula, with a view to substantiating the universal historical concerns alongside the transmission, adaptation, as well as readerly consumption of the manuscripts. Both codicological and literary analyses of the travelogue will be applied, intended to inter-illuminate each other.

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