

Foreword

Interest in medieval studies has grown in Brazil in recent decades. The prestige medieval historiography has garnered, especially through contributions connected with the *Annales* School and so-called New History, has served to expand the space granted to Medieval History within the ambit of our Universities. The consolidation of this interest has assured the translation of various important works on the subject into Portuguese and the emergence of a growing output of national scholarship. This deepening interest has also given rise to study groups devoted to researching and divulging medieval themes. The Laboratory of Medieval Studies – LEME – is one such study group, formed by History lecturers and students from USP, UNICAMP, UNIFESP, UFMG and UFG. Created in 2005, LEME's core goal is to bring lecturers, researchers and students together to develop studies and activities in the area of Medieval History and to establish dialogue with study centers abroad. This dossier is a LEME publication designed to further the pursuit of new forums for discussion and to establish debate with domestic and foreign colleagues. The authors featured in this dossier are the medievalists Néri de Barros Almeida (LEME/UNICAMP); Marcelo Cândido da Silva (LEME/USP); Dulce Amarante O. dos Santos (UFG), Sylvie Joye (Université de Reims) and Patrick Gilli (Université de Montpellier III).

In the light of the crisis of paradigms and interdisciplinarity, the dossier proposes reflection on the relationships between medievalists and their sources. Reflection on these relations is fundamental, as the study of the past is done through the mediation of vestiges of human activity. The crisis that has beset the humanities in recent decades, largely due to declining ideologies, has led historians to question those vestiges of the past. Historiographical debates, influenced by modern and postmodern trends, have trained their focus on the use of historical sources and the craft of the historian. Even the term “source” was called into question, as it could be construed as suggesting that these vestiges were mere echoes of the past and that their simple analysis would be enough to recover it and reconstruct history. Special focus was placed on the need to recognize the dynamic of the production, transmission and interpretation of historical documents. In terms of the historian's *modus operandi*, emphasis was placed on a critical

approach to sources, which involved, among other things, verifying that a given document really dated to a specific time and that it was not a fake, ascertaining the reliability of the person presenting the article, and determining the finality and intention of the document, with particular attention paid to the time and place of its production. As such, criticism of sources was limited to matters of dating, authority, revision, authenticity, transmission and comparison per period or region. The medievalist continues to conduct such critical analysis, but the focus of medieval studies today has shifted to the drawing of new perspectives on already known sources, whether texts or elements of cultural material.

This rereading and reconsideration of sources, in conjunction with a deepening interdisciplinary perspective, has afforded a profound renewal of our knowledge of medieval societies. It was from the observation of this renewal, worked by the rereading of sources and historiographical discussions, that we derived the theme for this dossier: *Medieval history: sources and historiography*, the core concern of the five articles contained herein. Dulce Amarante dos Santos discusses *Old and new relations between medievalists and their sources*, focusing in particular on the difficulties and challenges faced by those interested in interdisciplinary themes related to the social history of medicine in the Middle Ages. In “Public” and “private” in Frankish legal texts, Marcelo Cândido da Silva discusses this public/private dichotomy and shows its inviability in furthering any understanding of the Frankish world in the Late Middle Age. He reveals the connections between the Middle Ages and the modern world, contradicting theses that argue for the medieval origins of the State and of Brazil by presenting how a rereading of the sources can actually underscore the originality of the Late Middle Age. In *The Middle Ages between “public sphere” and “political centralization”: itineraries for a historiographical construction*, Néri de Barros Almeida questions the paradigm of violence, discussing the theoretical validity of analyses of the Middle Ages that take their base in an association between political decentralization and a lack of governance, privatization and the absence of public power. The author examines the sources in order to show how medieval historians saw the violence they recorded and to argue that it is possible to identify agents of recognized public power in medieval societies, acting within the particular criteria of the day. In *Social practice and the traps in the sources: historiographical and normative sources on bride kidnapping in the Late Middle Age*, Sylvie Joye shows how a rereading of the normative and narrative sources can reveal the interpretive errors of the historiography on the subject of bride kidnapping. She shows how a rereading and criticism of the sources can provide grounds for new interpretations of the social practices of the period, the history of which is marked by deep-set paradigms established in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Patrick Gilli, in *The sources of political space: electoral techniques and deliberative practices in*

Italian cities (12th to 14th centuries), presents the world of 12th to 14th-century Italian communes as a privileged laboratory in which to observe through common medieval practices the vestiges of a space of political mediation. He examines the statutory sources in a bid to investigate the modalities of representation and electoral and deliberative techniques and to discuss, among other approaches, the possible singularity of the Italian case.

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