Medieval Urban Planning (ICMS Kalamazoo, 14-17 May 15)

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International Congress on Medieval Studies

Medieval Urban Planning: Beyond the Monastery?

Broadly defined, urban planning is today a process one might describe as half design and half social engineering. One engaged in this process considers not only the aesthetic and visual product, but also the economic, political, and social implications, not to mention the underlying or overarching environmental impact of any given plan.

While it appears that this sort of broad, multifaceted planning did not take place in the middle ages because we do not have left to us the tangible evidence — the maps, the drawings, the reports - recent scholarship employing the methodological lens of Cultural Geography seems to suggest otherwise. Monastic historians, archaeologists, and art historians have long demonstrated, based on the famous plan of St. Gall, that monasteries, particularly those of the Cistercian order, were very much concerned with planning in the rural sense. From the intricacies of the water infrastructure, to the ordered logic of the space, to the esoteric qualities of metaphysical light, to the seasonal inter-dependence of pigs and pollarded oak trees, there is ample evidence to support a claim that the various components of an “urban plan” were understood within the monastic realm during the Middle Ages.

But what of the integration of these various parts? This session seeks to explore and expand our comprehension of how those in roles of authority — both within the monastic confines and the more secular environs - saw the big picture. Was there a plan or a planning process? What can we say by way of an analysis of architectural complexes beyond the monastic enclosure about this planning process? Are there hints in literary sources that indicate sensitivity to the correlation between climate, architectural orientation and positive social interaction, or indications in religious documents to illustrate a planned confluence between visual or aural stimulation, water features and physical well-being? In the broader context of the secular built environment, where historians frequently demonstrate the economic and political interaction between monastic leadership and the local or regional authorities, can we detect a specific replication or modeling of the integrated concern with materials and aesthetics seen in the monastic complex? Similarly, where philosophic and religious scholars highlight the mirrored nature of heaven and earth in medieval texts, can we find evidence of this theoretical “ordering” being planned or integrated into the secular world in the same way we can see it in the monastic enclosure? What can we learn by bringing

together the views of the architect, the archaeologist of infrastructure, and the environmental biologist with those scholars of literature, sculptural ornamentation and liturgy? With these questions in mind, we seek papers from the broadest interdisciplinary point of view, where we can identify glimpses of a plan or, in the modern sense of the term, a planner.

Send 300 word abstracts along with completed Participant Information Form (http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/submissions/)

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