

Proposed thematic session for the International Medieval Congress 2017 in Leeds (3-6 July 2017). Institution: CEMR (Université catholique de Louvain)

Eating Others: Symbolic and Actual Cannibalism towards Other Human Groups in Medieval Storytelling

Deadline: 25th September

The claim that foreign populations were prone to anthropophagic practices is a *topos* of colonial discourse. Nonetheless, cannibal monsters can be found already in several facets of medieval culture, such as travel writing, encyclopaedias, romance and epic songs. In this context, cannibals are usually monstrous populations living in the far corners of the world or marginal ethnic groups. However, cannibalism works both ways in medieval imagination. As Maggie Kilgour highlighted in her seminal publication on the subject, cannibalism being an act of symbolic incorporation, it can also work as an exercise of control over the Other and as a projection of the desire to assimilate the Other. Moreover, as put forward by Kristen Guest, cannibalism does not only draw a separation line between civilisation and savagery, but can also challenge and blur this line.

For this reason, episodes of European or Western characters eating – actually or symbolically – other human beings belonging to different ethnic or social groups played a small but significant role in medieval storytelling. What is the function of these episodes of casual cannibalism on behalf of allegedly civilised European characters in the texts in which they appear? What are the consequences of these acts? And even where there is no actual cannibalism involved, how does the vocabulary and the imagery of eating and devouring intervene in articulating the discourse of otherness in the texts?

Through the proposed session, we would like to address some of these questions through textual examples. In order to offer a varied and multidisciplinary view of the topic, we invite contributions in any field of medieval studies. The papers should focus on textual examples relating practices of anthropophagy or using symbolism and lexicon of anthropophagy, directed towards individuals perceived as others.

Candidates interested in participating in the session will need to submit their **name and affiliation**, a **title** and an **abstract** (about 100 words) of their proposed paper, by the deadline of **September 25**, to the following address: antonella.sciancalepore@uclouvain.be. Please feel free to address any question to the same address.