

Research Project at the IKGf “Fate, Freedom and Prognostication. Strategies for Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe, September 2014 – June 2015”.

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The Future Inbetween This World and The Afterlife: Time and Its Visualization in Medieval Visionary Literature

My research at the IKGf bore on several lines and topics, all focusing on medieval concepts of time, especially those of the future in its many dimensions: the ways of foretelling it and the impact knowledge of the future had on human action. **My starting point has been the interest in early and high medieval visionary literature.** In my analysis of Carolingian dream visions such as the famous *Visio Wettini* and related texts, I have drawn upon modern theories of time (R. Koselleck L. Hölscher) to explain the specifically medieval perceptions of the future and the techniques of visualizing its different dimensions. The specific meaning of “*futura*” (always in the plural form) is shaped by the premodern idea of the finiteness of time. Future in its medieval sense thus comprises three dimensions, visualized by different chronotopes: the *eschatological futures*, that is the state of *eternity (=timelessness)* in heaven or hell (1) and the postmortem status of each individual man in a *purgatorial or paradisiac interim* (2), as well as the *earthly future*, spanning from the present to the Last Judgment (3).

My second topic of research has been the so called prophetic turn of the Twelfth Century, when visions of a new type emerged in a rapidly changing religious and political context affected by the Church Reform, the growing lay piety and the appearance of new heresies. The visionary prognostics of the ‘Carolingian type’ and their setting had changed significantly into a new form of visionary prophecy that went beyond the boundaries of the older models. My focus of interest has been the well-known, but not yet fully explored work of the Rhineland visionary **Elisabeth of Schönau**, a work that has been overshadowed by that of her elder contemporary and compatriot Hildegard of Bingen. It nevertheless merits full attention because of its originality and its much greater popularity throughout the Middle ages. Issues like the reinforced alliance between vision and prophecy, the feminization of prophecy and its relationship to heresy, the new public roles of the Twelfth-Century prophets and the tales of prophetic vocation as part of the touchy process of public authorization have been treated in two subsequent articles.

A third topic of research has been the terminology of historical change: terms like ‘**Renaissance**’ and ‘**Reform**’/ ‘**Reformation**’ are powerful metaphors for political and spiritual renewal frequently used in modern academic as well as in premodern Christian discourse. They convey ideas about how people perceive and structure time, about the relations between old and new, between present, past and future. According to Gerhart Ladner, ‘reform’, ‘rebirth’ and ‘renewal’ were key terms of early Christian and medieval thought and life, linked to the central idea of man’s re-formation towards his original image-likeness of God. In modern discourse they are applied to periods of accelerated socio-political change, often indicating the beginning of a new historical era. The common idea underlying both concepts is that of a movement “back to the future”. I am particularly interested in the impact of the Reform and Renaissance metaphors in founding effective historical master narratives. This research topic has first been presented at the IMC Leeds in 2015 and will be developed in the future.