Forgotten Women from a Forgotten Region: Prostitutes and Female Slaves in Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Middle Ages

Workshop at the Department of Medieval Studies at CEU

May 4, 2017; Central European University
Budapest 1051, Nádor u 15, N15—Room 106

https://medievalstudies.ceu.edu ; contact the main organizer at Mielke_Christopher@phd.ceu.edu
WORKSHOP PROGRAM

** MORNING SESSION – MODERATED BY GERHARD JARITZ AND RUTH MAZO KARRAS **

10:30  **Coffee and Tea Reception**

11:00  **Introductory remarks**
Ruth Mazo Karras (University of Minnesota) - Skype lecture

11:15  **Suspect women: Prostitution, reputation, and gossip in 14th-century Prague**
Eleanor Janega (King's College London)

11:45  **De Ardentissimo Amore: between rape and adultery - a 16th-century trial**
Alexandra-Oana Chira (Babes-Bolyai University)

12:15  **Prostitution in urban brothels in late medieval ‘Austria’**
Michael Hammer (Universität Graz)

13:00  **LUNCH**

** AFTERNOON SESSION – MODERATED BY JUDIT MAJOROSSY **

15:00  **Prostitutes and urban communities of medieval Slavonia**
Marija Karbić (University of Zagreb)

15:30  **Secondary sites of sex trade in medieval Hungarian towns**
Christopher Mielke (Central European University)

16:00  **Prostitution in late medieval Dubrovnik**
Gordan Ravančić (Croatian Institute of History)

16:30  **Closing Remarks**

16:45  **Coffee and Tea Reception**
The Middle Ages is a period most often viewed by modern cinematography as one in which love stories predominated, either with a ‘happily ever after’, or with deep sorrow. But what happens when women, out of love, end up on the wrong side of the common law in respect to relationships with the opposite sex? To what extent does the fault belong to the man? What can be called rape and where does adultery begin?

The subject of the present conference brings into discussion a charter issued in 1545 by the judiciary of the Seat of Cincu, in Transylvania. A trial intended to redeem a certain Zabina, daughter of Lucas Tryster, for sinning with another man before her marriage, and thus threatening the lineage of the family, came to an unexpected turn. As the father tried to prove that a man – Benedictus, son of Georgius Faber – had assaulted his precious Zabina, and forced her to copulate with him, witnesses show a different perspective. This view emphasizes the willingness of both parties to engage in intimacy.

The purpose of the present research is to analyze this particular charter with respect to medieval customs and views regarding women. An attempt will be made to argue Zabina’s situation and draw conclusions to the nature of sins that she has committed. Moreover it will try to open a discussion towards the lack of historical research with regard to so-called “deviant behavior” for the territory of Transylvania.
Michael Hammer

Prostitution in urban brothels in late medieval ‘Austria’

For our workshop, I will present and discuss the main results of my dissertation project on the history and operations of urban brothels in late medieval “Austria”.

The municipal authorities officially established urban brothels in Austria as a necessary evil to control the lust of unmarried men in order to protect women from sexual abuse. During the course of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, brothels began to flourish in cities all over Austria until their abolition during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century.

For our workshop, I would like to focus on the everyday life in the brothels. Some sources give a closer look into the lives of the prostitutes and brothel keepers. Court cases sometimes inform us about their names and daily business. Prostitution was handled as a “safety valve” to provide a sexual outlet for unmarried men; they are therefore an instrument to guarantee the pax ur\textit{bana}. Furthermore, the brothels provided the possibility of controlling extramarital sexuality. For this reason, the municipal authorities also tried to prohibit clandestine types of prostitution – which would also protect their own financial interests.

In addition, I want to explain the approach of my project in terms of sources: which types are relevant? What are the problems and challenges concerning their tradition? What kind of information do they deliver (or fail to)? What are the consequences for the current research?
Eleanor Janega

Suspect women: Prostitution, reputation, and gossip in fourteenth-century Prague

In the late fourteenth century, Prague was one of Europe’s largest and richest cities, having been considerably enlarged under the ruler of the Emperor Charles IV. Though the city was famous as an imperial centre, and a celebrated place of pilgrimage, as a thriving metropolis it also boasted several brothels, and a community of women engaged in both licit and illicit sex work. This paper will examine attitudes towards women in the Prague Archdeaconate Protocol from 1379 – 1382. This rich source records the complaints of Prague’s parishioners to the Archdeacon, and in particular records dozens of complaints about women who were openly or ‘clandestinely’ engaging in sex work. The paper aims to look at how the complaints are registered, where different groups of women (public women, suspect prostitutes, and suspect women) were said to live, and what practices, (other than sex work), marked these women as prostitutes. How did the way in which Prague’s citizens perceive women’s behaviour, and report on it, mark women as potential prostitutes? Why did parishioners want to report on the actions of these women, if, as was true in many cases, the women were engaging in legally permissible sex work? When in a theoretically Christian society, which condemns gossip on theological grounds, does the practice become acceptable? Underpinning this examination will be Dunbar’s theory of social cohesion through gossip, Farley’s work on gossip and power, and Botha’s work on gossip in early Christian communities.

Abstracts
Marija Karbic
Prostitutes and urban communities of medieval Slavonia

The paper will try to give insight into the position of prostitutes in the urban settlements of medieval Slavonia (present-day north-western Croatia), a former part of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. My research primarily focuses on the free royal city of Gradec (part of Zagreb), because the source material for it is more abundant and diversified than for the other settlements in this area. In the first place, I have approached my subject by analyzing the judicial records, but I have also taken into account the other written sources that reflect everyday life (i.e. city protocols, property documents). I will try to answer the following questions: from which social group prostitutes came; what were the reasons for one to become a prostitute; was prostitution for the women in question a main 'profession' or just an additional source of income; were prostitutes involved in other types of criminal activity; in which way was prostitution organized; where were the brothels located; and what do we know about their 'customers'? The attitude of the urban community towards prostitutes, as well as punishments for prostitution will be discussed. In order to get a clearer picture, the judicial practice and the legal regulations will be compared. The sources show that prostitution has been severely punished, but often there were also pardons or a minimization of punishments; in the eyes of the urban community it was worse to be a procuress than to be a prostitute.
While the locations of municipal brothels are known in three Hungarian cities (Bratislava, Sopron and Košice), little has been discussed thus far on other sites where prostitution could occur. Jacques Rossiaud has identified four different levels where sex work could function in the Middle Ages: city-run brothels, bathhouses, smaller private establishments and finally freelance prostitutes. Shifting the focus from the first level, this paper aims to explore the roles of bathhouses and even street names in uncovering what is known of medieval sex work in Hungary.

The first part of this paper will explore known bathhouses in Hungary. As the brothels in Bratislava and Sopron were both in close proximity to bathhouses in those cities, it will be necessary to explore whatever link there is between the two, real or imagined. The other aspect explored will be attempting to trace the origin of several streets in Hungarian cities. In German cities, streets called “Rosengasse” (“Rose street”) are known to be associated with prostitution; this is true for the case of Sopron wherein the fourteenth century brothel is located on “Rózsa utca”. Examining other Hungarian cities with similarly named streets and tracing back the history of the earliest mention of the street name will help understand not only the history of the burgage plots around the street but also the urban topography of prostitution in medieval Hungarian towns. With this groundwork in place, the hope is that eventually experiences of prostitutes in medieval Hungary will be better understood.
GORDAN RAVANČIĆ

Prostitution in late medieval Dubrovnik

Studying the margins of society and marginal groups are a continuous challenge not only for all social historians but also for other scientists such as sociologists. Reasons for this are not difficult to assume because people on the margins had their rules of social life and their own meeting places within society. Some of those places, such as taverns and brothels were meeting points where socially active and marginal groups met each other.

It is well known that the “oldest profession” was wide spread across the Old World and that almost every pre-modern city had one or more brothels or “bathing houses”, even though official public opinion and institutions did not encourage this. Actually, such establishments were offered as part of local amusement, especially in market towns and harbors which were frequently visited by travelers.

Thus in this contribution I will examine one of these establishments – the brothel, its personnel and clientele, focusing on medieval Dubrovnik as a case study. Moreover, as even today the problem of prostitution is the question which divides public opinion, the investigation of such a phenomenon in the Middle Ages should be interesting.

At places with a large number of foreign visitors, the possibility of excesses is enlarged; thus the sources which will be used for this investigation are normative (mostly published) and juridical sources (mostly unpublished). When considering the sources, it is interesting to note that while one would expect that prostitutes were marginalized, they were often asked to testify in front of the rector’s court. Similarly but surprisingly, the information from the town Statute suggests that the government did not interfere in the problem of prostitution but rather left it to be solved (and punished) within the family. Therefore, the comparison between these two types of sources (juridical and normative) might show us what the public opinion about prostitution was and whether this opinion differs from ours today.