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Project Description

Recollecting Conflict. Depictions of War in the Narratives of Early Medieval Southern Italy

The way narrative sources from Lombard and Norman Southern Italy portrayed episodes of warfare and conflict takes centre stage in this project. This region is characterised by recurring conflict between the Lombard principalities of Benevento, Capua, and Salerno, the coastal duchies of Amalfi, Gaeta and Naples and Muslim raiders from Aghlabid Sicily. Moreover, the Frankish/German emperors, their counterparts from Byzantium, and the popes in Rome, also sought to (re-)establish their foothold on the southern end of the peninsula. These dynamics would reshuffle once more after the arrival of the Normans in the eleventh century. These factors all contributed to both a multitude of violent interactions and to the creation of narratives by authors seeking to interpret, understand and shape the events of these turbulent times.

This project strives to analyse this process in narratives by devoting attention to the portrayal of specific acts related to warfare. An analysis of a wide spectrum of acts is possible due to the focus on this specific region. The project will address questions such as: what messages do the sources give us about actions such as the taking of prisoners, laying siege, or pre-battle speeches? In what way does the depiction of the losing side compare with the victors? How does an author express which side in their eyes was just? With these questions, the project mainly connects with the research training group's thematic cluster that focuses on the conceptualization of persons and groups. These depictions also offer an indirect opportunity to comment on the strategies of legitimization, justification, or denouncement of violence and warfare.

However, questions such as these can only be answered after a critical reflection on the historical context of the source and by carefully determining an author's intended aims and audiences. A key premise of this project is the understanding that texts possessed what Gabrielle Spiegel has famously coined as 'social logic.' Texts are products of a certain social reality and they attempt to influence that very same reality. In order to achieve this, a text ought to be understood by its intended readership before a message would have any lasting effect.¹ In other words, social logic provided and limited the room for manoeuvre of medieval authors when they sought to alter it for new contexts.² With this important notion in mind, this project aims to further the understanding of the cultures of war of medieval Southern Italy.

¹ Spiegel, Gabrielle, History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages, in: *Speculum* 65 (1990), 77-78.

² Reimitz, Helmut, The Social Logic of Historiographical Compendia in the Carolingian Period, in: *Configuration du texte en Histoire*, ed. Osamu Kano (*Herméneutique du texte d'histoire* 12), Nagoya 2012, 20.