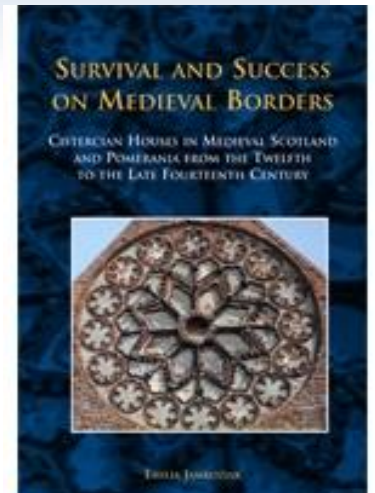


Cistercian monasteries on the frontiers of Scotland and Germany were active agents in the brokering of worldly and other-worldly relations



The cover of Emilia's 2011 book from the project

Historical studies of medieval Europe are usually focused on regions or nations, perhaps in an unconscious echo of contemporary political realities. This makes Emilia Jamrozik's study of Cistercian abbeys on the shifting and disputed borders of what became present-day Scotland and Polish-Germany frontier unusual and intriguing. It reveals that religion can be an agent in the complex process of boundary-formation and dissolution, as well as beneficiary or victim.

Funded by the [Religion and Society Programme](#), Jamrozik's study shows that religious houses played a vital and complex role in medieval society which cannot be neatly classified as religious or political, worldly or otherworldly. Between the 12th and 14th centuries the Cistercian order was invited by landowners to construct monasteries on the 'free land' of borders because of the cultural and political benefits they brought their patrons, not least in terms of access to international networks and associated prestige. In contested spaces where different ethnic and cultural influences met, the monasteries could play a variety of roles. But their connections to the heavenly realm were important as well. Donations were a way of acknowledging the ideal which the laity could not themselves fulfil, and the prayers and rituals of the monks were believed to affect the fate of the dead as well as the living.

The project had a strong comparative dimension. Part of the research focused upon Pomerania on the southern coast of the Baltic sea. This eastern frontier of Germany remained an unstable and disputed territory between German states (primarily Brandenburg), Denmark, 'indigenous' Slavonic duchies, and the Polish Kingdom for most of the Middle Ages. The other part looked at the English-Scottish border. Until the wars, which began in the late 13th century, this was rather open territory, with strong cross-border connections between northern English nobility and southern Scottish barons.

Through archival and secondary literature research in English, German and Polish, the study investigated the role of half a dozen abbeys in these regions (Melrose, Dundrennan and Holm Cultram as well Kołbacz, Marienwalde and Himmelstädt). For some of the sites, especially Melrose (founded in 1136) and Marienwalde (1280) recent archaeological excavations provided further important data. Dr Jamrozik and researcher Dr Katharine Keats-Rohan found that the allegedly uniform practice of the Cistercian order in fact differed greatly across Europe. What didn't differ was the success of these monasteries, which maintained their appeal to benefactors on both sides of their borders. To some extent, this success was a function of their stability, but it also depended upon their flexibility in engagement with their local environments. Neutrality, though, was not always possible. With the

onset of wars in both regions in the 13th century, monasteries became targets for attack not only by armies, but also impoverished neighbours. By the 14th century political boundaries were starting to become more firmly drawn; the role and alignment of the monasteries would have to change again.

Find out more...

- Listen to Emilia discussing the project in a podcast:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/emilia_jamroziak_oct_2009
- Access the book Emilia has written about the project *Survival and Success on Medieval Borders: Cistercian Houses in Medieval Scotland and Pomerania from the Twelfth to the Late Fourteenth Century* published by Brepols in 2011: http://www.brepols.net/Pages/ShowProduct.aspx?prod_id=IS-9782503533070-1
- Look up the database of Melrose Abbey charters created by Dr Katharine Keats-Rohan:
https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=104632
- Keep an eye out for the collected volume resulting from the conference 'Monastic houses on the frontiers of medieval Europe' which took place at the University of Leeds in September 2008 co-edited by Emilia Jamroziak and Karen Stöber.
- Visit Emilia Jamroziak's staff profile at the University of Leeds:
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/people/20041/school_of_history/person/701/emilia_jamroziak

You might also be interested in...

- John Harper's project on the experience of worship in a late medieval cathedral and parish church, funded by the Religion and Society Programme: <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/AHRC/index.php.en>
- The project *Compositional Planning, Musical Grammar & Theology in Old Hispanic Chant* also funded by the Programme and led by Emma Horby at Bristol University. Watch live recordings of a student choir singing at concerts sponsored by it here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/bristolunischolacant>

Project Details

Award Title

Survival and Success on Medieval Borders: Cistercian Houses in Medieval Scotland and Pomerania

Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Emilia Jamroziak (Leeds)

Research Assistant: Dr Katherine Keats-Rohan (Oxford)

University

University of Leeds

Research Partners

informally, Prof Dauvit Brune from the University of Glasgow, who lead the AHRC-funded project 'The Paradox of Medieval Scotland'

Award Type

Phase 1 Small Grant

Key terms

Pomerania, Scotland, Cistercian Order, borders, frontiers, Melrose Abbey, Holm Cultram Abbey, Dundrennan Abbey, Kołbacz Abbey, charters, Marienwalde Abbey, Himmelstädt Abbey, archaeology, , Jamroziak, middle ages