

Methodological Aspects of the History of Everyday Life in the Late Middle Ages

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There are certainly a number of important differences between research into the history of everyday life of the early Middle Ages¹ and the one of the late Middle Ages. At first sight it seems to be much easier to do studies for the later Middle Ages when possessing many more and many more different sources, may they be written, pictorial or archeological. But, we must be aware of the fact that we only possess more reality of the sources, which does not mean more reality of everyday life. When using, for instance, Gothic panel paintings for our research, which seem to offer such a realistic view into the interiors of medieval houses and the objects used in them, we must be aware that it is only the reality of the image, which we are confronted with, but not the reality of life. The same is true for inventories, for testaments, for account books, for court records, for chronicles or for objects out of archeological excavations etc.

We, therefore, are in possession of a large number of reality; we are keen of getting out of it the "reality" of everyday life, knowing that we will not be able to do it, knowing that it does not exist in a way which we can analyse easily.

Doing research into the history of everyday life is also not only looking for the repetitive, or for routine – in any case using quantitative methods to get into the qualitative. It is, at first, getting aware of the issues of gender and status. Particularly the history of everyday life is to deal with problems of the female and the male, with questions of lower classes of society and of the top of it. Especially the history of everyday life has been dealing with the lower classes, with the people and the ordinary², often forgetting that

¹ See the contribution of Hans-Werner Goetz in this volume.

² Cf. Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England*. London and Rio Grande 1994, xi and passim.

the higher classes, the ruling, also had their everyday life.³ And the latter was certainly a mistake. Doing history of everyday life means also dealing with the lower classes, not only dealing with the lower classes.

History of everyday life is to a large extent a history of patterns. We are not working to repeat some information the sources contain, but must be trying to find networks and patterns of objects, situations and deeds.⁴ Quotidianity is represented by found patterns of objects, of women or men, of artisans or rulers.

Everyday life includes the domestic and the non-domestic space. They not only, by that, represent female and male space, but also different space of prestige and competition. Space of prestige and competition are at the same time those which we find to a high degree in normative sources like sumptuary laws to be compared with the contents of court records or account books.

Generally, the history of everyday life is up to many degrees a history of space – also not only seen from a territorial, regional or local point of view, but concerning different space of behaviour and of evaluation.

History of everyday life is a history of various interests. Testaments, account books or inventories mention, for instance, only those objects which are valuable enough to be named. Panel paintings or murals of the late Gothic period may show one's own cultivated nature in the background. If so, it seems valuable enough to present the beholders' own success, connected with some saint or situation out of a saint's legend in the foreground. It is, therefore, very relevant to analyse those interests and to find out networks between them and patterns of them.

This can only be done by comparing. Normative sources, for instance, never can be analysed for themselves, but only in comparison with sources showing a reaction towards them and those explaining their reason. Ever

³ Cf. *Adelige Sachkultur des Spätmittelalters*. Vienna 1982 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde 5 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 400); *Klösterliche Sachkultur des Spätmittelalters*. Vienna 1980 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde 3 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 367).

⁴ Cf. Robert Delort, *Geschichte des mittelalterlichen Alltags: Theorie – Methoden – Bilanz der Forschung*. In: *Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit. Alltag – Leben – Kultur*. Vienna 1990, 53–66 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 13 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 568).

and ever repeated paragraphs in such norms by no means can be seen as clear and open testimonies of numerous and regular offences against them, but may be preventive or copied from other areas. Only comparisons with other types of sources may lead to a legitimate result.

The large amount of late medieval sources and the need for comparison and analysis proves true to a high degree that the computer-supported standardized creation of databases containing different information of the various written, pictorial and archaeological sources is indispensable.⁵ This is not only true for a verbal descriptions of the material as the contents of the databases but also for the digitalisation of the sources.⁶

Let us come back to the question of reality. It became clear that we are not able to find out the reality of the everyday life of the Middle Ages; we also cannot reconstruct everyday life or parts of it. The only work we can do is to find out certain patterns of everyday life, using comparative analysis, which our sources allow us to apply.

The history of everyday life has its tradition. Particularly British and German research go back into the previous century,⁷ very much connected with an interest into the history of culture and with a mood for hunting and collecting. The result of this research are studies written out of this hunters' and collectors' mood. By that, they today can be used and are used as quarries for source information without necessarily going back to the sources. Analytical research was missing. – At the end of the sixties and in the seventies and eighties of our century the history of everyday life, also of the later Middle Ages, became fashionable again, particularly in the German speaking countries – *Alltagsgeschichtsforschung*. And it

⁵ Cf. Manfred Thaller, The Daily Life of the Middle Ages, Editions of Sources and Data Processing. In: *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*-Newsletter 10 (1987) 6–29.

⁶ Cf. Manfred Thaller (ed.), *Images and Manuscripts in Historical Computing*. St. Katharinen 1992 (Halbgraue Reihe zur historischen Fachinformatik A 14); Gerhard Jaritz, *Images. A Primer of Computer-Supported Analysis with κλειω IAS*. St. Katharinen 1993 (Halbgraue Reihe zur historischen Fachinformatik A 22); Jurij Fikfak and Gerhard Jaritz (eds.), *Image Processing in History: towards Open Systems*. St. Katharinen 1993 (Halbgraue Reihe zur historischen Fachinformatik A 16).

⁷ Cf. Alwin Schultz, *Deutsches Leben im XIV. und XV. Jahrhundert*. Vienna, Prague and Leipzig 1892; idem, *Das höfische Leben zur Zeit der Minnesinger*, 2 vols. Osnabrück 1965 (reprint of the edition of 1889); Marjorie and C. H. B. Quennell, *A History of Everyday Things in England I*. London and New York 1969 (first published 1918).

sold well. A theoretical and methodological discussion was mainly initiated and lead by people dealing with the 19th and 20th centuries,⁸ medievalists only starting it, when the other historians had already finished.⁹ Again it was to a high degree the descriptive results of hunting and collecting what was offered first.¹⁰ This time has passed. History of everyday life has become less fashionable now but more serious. The new fashion is historical anthropology,¹¹ not being far away. While the history of the everyday life of the Middle Ages was first in contraposition towards the application of quantitative methods and the connection of the quantitative and the qualitative, this again has changed. Historians of everyday life are not any more story-tellers, though storytelling has generally become more fashionable in historical research. An up-to-date history of everyday life

- connects the quantitative with the qualitative to provide proper analysis of the repetitive and the routine of life. Researchers apply for that to a high degree computer-supported methods.
- History of everyday life of the later Middle Ages has become to a high degree a research of standardized terminology¹², or one, at least, has become aware of the necessity to arrive there.
- One has become aware of the fact that individual examples are on the one side necessary, on the other side only bricks and elements for a more pattern-lead research and their results.
- For the history of everyday life of the later Middle Ages and the early modern period the usage of pictorial sources as well as laws, sermons and other didactic literature is of high importance. In their didactic

⁸ Cf. Klaus Tenfelde, Schwierigkeiten mit dem Alltag. In: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 10 (1984) 376–394.

⁹ Cf. Die Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters. Methode – Ziel – Verwirklichung. Vienna 1984 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde 6 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 433); Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit. Alltag – Leben – Kultur. Vienna 1990 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 13 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 568).

¹⁰ Cf. Otto Borst, Alltagsleben im Mittelalter. Frankfurt/Main 1983.

¹¹ Cf. Historische Anthropologie 1 sqq. Vienna and Cologne 1993 sqq.

¹² Cf. Terminologie und Typologie mittelalterlicher Sachgüter; Das Beispiel der Kleidung. Vienna 1988 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde 10 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 511)

and moralistic efforts they again do not reflect reality but needs and attempts of an order-bound society and, by that, a kind of an ideal of life. The realisation of such an ideal can and has to be investigated by means of comparative methods, using court records, testaments, inventories and so on.

- The methods applied for the research into a history of everyday life of the late Middle Ages are or must be very near to the ones used in studies of cultural history, of the history of popular culture and the one of mentality, also the ones of gender history.
- History of everyday life in the Middle Ages is not only the history of private life¹³ and not only, as it was already emphasised, the history of the popular classes of society.
- History of everyday life of the later Middle Ages is also to a high degree a history of symbols and signs and a history of contrasts.¹⁴ Particularly the above mentioned didactic sources contain much information for those fields, which to a high degree determine life in the later Middle Ages.
- There is no exact difference between studies into the history of everyday life of the early Middle Ages, the later Middle Ages and the early modern period. All of them have to be aware of the already mentioned problems and efforts. The main real difference between them is the availability of source information which is normally getting higher during the times. I would, therefore agree with many of the statements of Mr. Goetz and he would also perhaps agree at least with some of mine.
- The history of everyday life was mainly initiated as something against political history which was the *history of drums and trumpets*. Though we might agree with this necessity for the later Middle Ages, we also have to confess now that no history of everyday life can exist without a modern political history and no modern political history without the history of everyday life.
- Doing history of everyday life of the late Middle Ages in some area or

¹³ Cf. Philippe Ariès and George Duby (eds.), *Histoire de la vie privée II: De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance*. Paris 1985.

¹⁴ Cf. Gerhard Jaritz, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit. Einführung in die Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters*. Vienna and Cologne 1989, 127-192.

region also must be a matter of communication with other researchers of the same or of other periods in other areas or regions. Such a communication between researchers may prove the communication of people in the later Middle Ages as part of their daily life. And communication itself has to be seen as a part of everyday life. It is not only the multiplicity of things which determines quotidianity but also the multiplicity of behaviour and thought.

- Doing research into the history of everyday life of the later Middle Ages, therefore, is not only studying the material, id est the material culture, but also dealing with the non-material, may it be history of spiritual culture¹⁵, of thoughts or of ideas. Only the combination of all those aspects may lead to a proper and legitimate history of everyday life.

¹⁵ Cf. Brian Patrick McGuire, *Spiritual Life and Material Life in the Middle Ages: a Contradiction?* In: *Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit. Leben-Alltag-Kultur*. Vienna 1990. 285-313 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 13 = Sb. Ak. Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse 568).

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Vorwort

Das vorliegende Heft widmet sich zwei Anlässen: dem *International Medieval Congress*. Leeds 1994, an dem *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* zwei Sektionen ausrichtete, und dem Kongreß *Die Vielfalt der Dinge*, den *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* zusammen mit dem *Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften im Oktober 1994 in Krems veranstaltet. Zum einen kommen vier überarbeitete Vorträge der Tagung von Leeds zum Abdruck. Zum anderen werden Resümees der Vorträge der Kremser Veranstaltung präsentiert, die auch den Kongreßbesuchern als Einführung dienen sollen.

Im November 1994 wird als Sonderband unserer Reihe Elke Schlenkrichs "Alltag der Lehrlinge im sächsischen Handwerk, 15. bis 19. Jahrhundert" publiziert werden. Gleichfalls noch im heurigen Jahr wird Heft 31 von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* erscheinen.

Gerhard Jaritz

PAPERS

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