

Utrecht, March 2000

Dear Colleagues,

At last we are able to send you the first *Newsletter* for the *Medieval Chronicle Society*. This newsletter is designed to connect the members of the *MCS*, to give shape to the (activities of the) Society and to update the members on any recent developments. The mailing carries both administrative and academic information. Unfortunately, due to lack of staff, this *Newsletter* is in English only, but reactions and other correspondence may of course be in German or French, as you prefer.

First of all, the letter contains some 'Food for Thought' for those who were not at the 1999 Conference. This document was issued to the participants at the Conference in July of last year and formed the basis of a discussion at the General Meeting.

It is followed by a summary account of that plenary session: 'The Future of the Medieval Chronicle'. All members are invited to give their reactions to these minutes and on the topics that were discussed during the general meeting.

This report is again followed by a checklist of possible entries for a *Chronicle Database*, which is essential for any (structured) future research on the extant corpus of chronicles. This checklist was also discussed elaborately during the plenary session. Since the list is not exhaustive, suggestions for additions are very welcome, as is any information on the state of chronicle research.

The informative section concludes with a summary of the pioneering research activities of Professor Dan Embree on the inventory of chronicle manuscripts.

The second part of the newsletter consists of the addresses of participants of the chronicle conferences in 1996 and 1999. The reason for including these lists is twofold. First, we kindly ask you to check that your personal details are complete, up-to-date and fully correct. We aim to have the full address of each *MCS* member and chronicle researcher. This includes your

Title

Name and Surname

Name of Institute/Department

Name of University

Country

Phone and fax number, with international access codes

E-mail address.

Please send us information about any (temporary) changes or inadequacies through e-mail ([erik.kooper@let.uu.nl](mailto:erik.kooper@let.uu.nl)), by ordinary mail (Dr Erik Kooper, Trans 10, 3512 JK Utrecht, The Netherlands) or by fax (+31 30 253 6000). Note that the details of those of you who participated in both conferences are listed in the 1999 overview.

The other reason for distributing the address database among current *MCS* members is to facilitate communication among these members, and to allow you to check whether none of your colleagues is missing on this list. In other words, we hope that the body of *MCS* membership will soon comprise all researchers with an interest in (interdisciplinary) chronicle research.

### **Miscellanea**

On 3 August 1999 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, the leading German newspaper, published a comprehensive and highly favourable report of our conference. It was written by Jan Rüdiger, one of the participants and a freelance journalist for this paper.

Similarly Uta Goerlitz saw her account of the conference published in the autumn issue of the German *Mediävistenverband* (the Medieval Society). We should be grateful to both for their efforts to make our conference and the *MCS* more widely known.

During a visit I paid to Volker Honemann and Peter Johanek at their university in Münster, on 3 January of this year, a plan was developed to compile an annotated bibliography on the medieval chronicle, with entries organized per region and/or language. More about this in the next newsletter.

At the moment that this *Newsletter* is sent out the editorial committee is working hard to review the 52 papers that were submitted (exactly the same amount as in 1996) for the Conference Proceedings. And as in 1996 we expect that only 20 to 25 will eventually find a place in this second volume. In other words, the committee is faced with an unenviable task.

Finally, I take this opportunity to raise a question that has remained unanswered even after two conferences:

#### ***what makes a text a chronicle?***

In fact, our two conferences have clearly shown that it is nearly impossible to reach a definition of the phenomenon and the genre *chronicle*, because chronicles combine so many genre aspects and historical influences. And yet, all participants of the conferences were certain that their papers were about chronicles, and their audiences agreed with them. This implies that there must be a kind of common denominator underlying the several ideas about what makes a chronicle a chronicle. It is for this reason that we invite you to consider the question: What makes **your** text a chronicle?, and to let us know what you come up with. We will collect your responses and try to deduce a provisional definition, which will be published in the next *Newsletter*. It goes without saying that your reactions are quite valuable for the development of individual and of international and/or interdisciplinary chronicle research, and therefore also of the *MCS*.

It must seem as if we are asking quite a lot of you in this first bulletin ? and we are. We hope that you will enjoy this first newsletter all the same.

Erik Kooper

(with the twinned assistance of Nicole and Elise de Bree)

**CENTRE FOR MEDIEVAL STUDIES**  
*The Medieval Chronicle / La chronique médiévale / Die mittelalterliche Chronik*  
Utrecht / Driebergen, 16 - 21 July 1999

**Food for Thought for the General Meeting, Tuesday 20 July**

The two conferences on the Medieval Chronicle in Driebergen have shown that a growing number of medievalists, and from a variety of disciplines at that, are responding to the challenge of studying seriously this fascinating genre. Because we are dealing with a literary text (a narrative describing a series of events) presenting facts from the past, frequently provided with illustrative material, the genre of the chronicle provides a unique opportunity for scholars of different disciplines to work together.

If we were to formulate a proposal to set up a multi-disciplinary, international project focusing on the chronicle, what should be its aims?

To begin with it is clear that from whatever angle one wants to study the texts, a few basic questions will have to be dealt with first:

- how many texts are there (per country, region, etc.)
- how many manuscripts (or other witnesses) are there
- in what languages and in what form have they been written
- who was the author, and for whom and where did he write
- are (reliable) editions available

Only after such questions have been given serious consideration can further study be fruitfully undertaken.

But where should such a study begin? Is a *status quaestionis* available for all countries/languages?

Your contribution at the **General Meeting** may help to make a serious effort to try and formulate some common aims and to establish a few priorities (which may be completely dissimilar for different countries/languages).

If such a project (which may in fact be a group of sub-projects, larger and smaller ones, but all united under a common umbrella) were to be given concrete shape, the Utrecht Chronicle Conference might function as a meeting place, where not only papers are read but where also participants in the various projects may report on their progress (or setbacks!). Its size, its international character and its multidisciplinary set-up might also make it attractive in the eyes of the money-giving bodies, both Dutch and European. And it is only with such an extra financial boost that the Utrecht organisers can continue with what they started in 1996: the organisation of an triennial international conference on the Medieval Chronicle.

Erik Kooper

## PLENARY SESSION: THE FUTURE OF THE MEDIEVAL CHRONICLE

(Minutes of the meeting, by Nicole de Bree)

At the end of the second international conference on the Medieval Chronicle (16 - 21 July 1999), a plenary session was held. Erik Kooper chaired this session, of which the main point of discussion was the future of chronicle research and of the Medieval Chronicle Society (*MCS*). The following report is a reflection and summary of the suggestions, findings and conclusions of this plenary meeting. The main points of discussion were

- 1) the (extension of) *MCS* membership and the question what membership entails;
- 2) the financial support that is needed to fund the *MCS* and its conferences;
- 3) suggestions for the structure of the work that needs to be done (by volunteers) for the future of the *MCS*;
- 4) setting up a database on Medieval chronicles;
- 5) (methods of) stimulating relevant research to be performed autonomously by members of the *MCS*.

The first issue to be discussed in this meeting was *the future of the Medieval Chronicle Society*. It was founded in 1996, during the first conference on the medieval chronicle. Not much has been done with this society in between the two conferences for two reasons:

- a) the work it involves cannot be performed by one person;
- b) no funding was available for this kind of work and for the society.

These two obstacles of *manpower* and *funding* received considerable attention during the plenary meeting.

All participants seemed to agree that the *MCS*, and its conferences, are functional (if not crucial) in structuring and stimulating research into medieval chronicles. In order to function properly and internationally, the society would need to have access to financial support from international institutions. *Setting up a subsidy-worthy programme for the society* was therefore the second purpose of this plenary session. This programme or statute must deal with *MCS membership* on the one hand, and with its *research/contents* on the other. These aspects were discussed extensively during the plenary session.

The first component to be discussed was that of *membership* and of the networks that the *MCS* could set up. All conference participants would automatically become members. In order to reach new potential members, the idea of faculty membership should also be considered. It was established that in some countries, like for instance France, the number of members and available addresses of potential members is, as yet, very limited. The best way to reach chronicle researchers in France could be the faculty membership, or to ask current members to distribute flyers and information about the *MCS* in their own academic networks. Students and unwaged members were to be eligible for reduced membership fees in the minds of those present at the meeting (the membership fees were not specified any further).

An important element in the existence, promotion and networking of the *MCS* would be (electronic) *newsletters* that would

- 1) report on conferences and projects;
- 2) contain lists of members and their addresses, interests, latest publications and current projects;

3) give relevant websites and bibliographies.

The newsletter would be an essential tool in creating coherence in chronicle research, as would be the conferences. All those present seemed to agree that the newsletter should not only be distributed electronically if it is to reach all interested academics.

The next item of discussion was what kind of combined activity the members, or, rather, the *MCS* as a body, could undertake in terms of research and classification of chronicles. The idea was that some (electronic) kind of “Manual for Chronicle Research”, or a *Database* should be set up to facilitate further research. John Ward's ideas for specific entries in this Manual (see the checklist in the newsletter) gave rise to a lively and fruitful discussion. It became clear that the database items can roughly be divided into two groups. The first group is that of the factual items such as the modern title of the chronicle, the language used, the presence of any illuminations (this item was added on during the meeting), the available editions of the chronicle, other contents of the Manuscripts, etcetera. This kind of information is too factual to cause any major controversies. Other items, however, deserve further thought and detail, such as those about the chronicle's major sources, the author's intended audience, his motive for writing, and the status of the author.

The list of items will therefore circulate with *MCS* members for further approval, corrections and suggestions. Crucial in the highly provisional set-up of the database is that it reflects and supports *the interdisciplinary nature that characterises chronicle research*.

All present agreed that one point of discussion should be avoided at present, that of *the definition of the chronicle as a genre*, as the current state of research does not yet allow for such definitions to be made. There was a consensus that the chronicle manuscript should be the basic principle in the Manual/Database rather than the text in order to avoid confusion and (literary) debates.

Members should be able to access the database through the Internet. This internet site would have to be updated and coordinated by (at least) one person. Even if it turns out that various linked databases are more practical than one large worldwide one, this coordinator would still have a significant task with updating the links and the database. Dan Embree volunteered to do this, and he hoped for financial support from his own university to allow him to perform the coordinating duties.

The database and the *MCS* would receive their information from *research groups*, from other existing databases, or from individuals. Aurélie Kostka and Olivier Ellena presented a plan for such a (n interdisciplinary pilot) research group that focuses on the relationship between text and image in vernacular, relatively unknown chronicles. Research of this kind gives a new perspective on the period that these chronicles cover. Ms Kostka and Mr Ellena believed that regular discussions about the findings of such research groups are essential to a further development of chronicle research. The research groups could possibly communicate via e-mail to exchange their findings with those of the other groups.

Volker Honemann remarked that a quite extensive list of German chronicles is already available. It could perhaps be linked up to the *MCS* database. This remark pointed out that *different countries* will have *different priorities* in contributing to an international database about medieval chronicles. In the case of German chronicles, for example, it would be logical to focus on unpublished and unstudied material first, rather than rehashing known information. It is therefore wise to formulate the questions that each region has about (its) chronicles first, before starting work on the actual database.

The contributions of individuals to the Manual/Database would rely on the work of various kinds of *volunteers*. The construction and maintenance of the database needs to be overseen, and new ideas need to be incorporated into chronicle research. Ernest Tucker suggested that it could be useful to set up list-serve chat boxes. This kind of work would have to be performed by volunteers as well. It is important to stress that the Database/ Manual is not the only thing that the *MCS* would like to stimulate and set up. The society should ideally become an international and interdisciplinary network of chronicle researchers, who all work autonomously on their own projects within the network that the *MCS* provides. In this way, a win-win situation for participants and society would be created.

A formalised and structured representation of these plans, approved by the *MCS* members, would form part of an application to the *European Science Foundation* that will be made in hopes of receiving substantial international subsidies. A petition of this kind for research with such a wide scope and such considerable support will hopefully be a likely candidate for serious funding.

Erik Kooper ended the meeting with an invitation to the (now) *MCS* members to help him select and edit papers for a volume of the Proceedings of the 1999 conference and with an invitation for Any Other Business. Jane Beal and John Ward took the opportunity to thank the organisation for setting up a successful conference with a congenial atmosphere.

## PROPOSAL FOR A *CHECKLIST OF MANUSCRIPTS*

For each chronicle information should be gathered and entered under the following heads (subject to change and discussion):

1. Modern title
2. Contemporary (medieval) title
3. Author (if known)
4. Language(s) used
5. Prose or verse
6. Illuminations
7. Date of composition
8. Location where originally written
9. Earliest MS + other MSS (provenance and date)
10. Years covered
11. Length (lines, folios, pages)
12. Other contents of the MS(S)
13. Available edition(s)
14. Translations, medieval and modern
15. Status of author (cleric, burgher, notary, etc.), incl. educational background
16. Author's stated motive/intentions
17. Author's intended audience
18. Version (in case of multiple versions)
19. Major sources
20. Key secondary literature (+ updates)
21. Known but lost works
22. Extra chronicle-specific information

All persons who wish to contribute are invited to send in information, ordered along the lines set out above, to the coordinator of the project (who will be assisted by supervisors per country/area to ascribe the right codes for the texts). All information will be collected in a database, made progressively available on the Internet through a Website of the *Medieval Chronicle Society*.

Triennial meetings could, among other things, serve to present papers/reports relevant to the project, and discuss progress, difficulties and the like.

The sheer volume of the surviving material is offputting, and beside that scattered all over Europe (and the United States), often unedited or not even known. Only a group of people, working closely together for a prolonged period of time with ongoing funding, could contemplate tackling it.

## DAN EMBREE'S REPORT FROM ITALY

The second half of 1999 Professor Dan Embree spent in the Vatican and other Italian libraries, where he has been working on the construction of a "Repertorium Chronicarum" and has already listed 5200 entries. In autumn this year he will set up a web site with the entries. Some of the most remarkable observations that Dan Embree made while he worked in Italy are listed below. They may be helpful to anyone currently performing similar research.

### 1. Adequate catalogues

It was hard to find adequate catalogues and listings of chronicles. Embree mentions that 'the honourable old sources' (Potthast, the *Monumenta*, etc.) are not very useful, as many MSS have moved around, or have been destroyed, or have been renumbered, or were not where they were said to be even when those books were published. The only sources that were consistently reliable are post-war catalogues (and earlier ones of very stable collections like the Bibliothéque National and the British Library) and post-war editions. Even the Vatican itself has no proper comprehensive list of its chronicles. Embree's list of 1200 MSS, which is incomplete, is the only thing that comes close to a comprehensive list.

### 2. Site-visits

Site-visits (or the checking of the list by someone resident at the library) appeared to be crucial. Embree visited nearly all the libraries of Bologna, Padova and Firenze, and found over and over that information gathered at a distance was often not quite right. Librarians were very helpful in Embree's quest, as they corrected or added to his lists of chronicles, and they gave their names and addresses for further information and contact. Nearly all were enthusiastic about the idea of a list on a website that they could help correct.

### 3. Volunteers

Enthusiastic volunteers are equally important (see also the summary of the plenary session, where it discusses the volunteers that are needed to contribute to the formation of the *MCS*). Embree recruited several graduate students in the Vatican, mostly young (Italian and French) paleographers, who were interested in the project. They may be able to recruit others as well.

### 4. Size of the corpus

Embree assumes that the true amount of available MSS is closer to 25,000 than to his original estimate of a corpus of 25,000 to 50,000 MSS. This means that there is a lot less work - but also a lot less information.