

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### THE STUDY OF TRADITION AND TRADITIONS: A COLLOQUIUM ON METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

organized by the Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies (University of Bergen, Norway) in collaboration with the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore of the University of Tartu, August 28–29, 2008.

During the past two decades, tradition has become a popular concept in the study of culture, literature, history, religion, and folklore, its popularity being most conspicuous in research into and discourse on issues specific to cultural heritage. Within this discourse, 'tradition' and 'heritage' tend to be seen as synonymous concepts, both referring to given interpretations of the past and history as cultural resources in the making of the present.

The aim of the colloquium is to come to grips with the notion of tradition as an analytical tool. Instead of essentializing the category of tradition as a given set of practices, beliefs, customs, etc., continued and transmitted across generations, there has been an increasing emphasis on the processes of interpretation in the constitution of tradition and traditionality. Within medieval studies, it is beyond doubt that a number of both vernacular and Latin texts rely on a long pedigree of storytelling and local 'mythmaking', although the extent of the transformation from oral 'tradition' to written form is, and always will be, contested. In this sense 'tradition' both denotes a specific practice behind and before the text, but is also used as an indefinable blind spot to which anything can be ascribed. A way to proceed may be to find substitutes or better definitions of the core concept. The temporal aspect of 'tradition' – or its substitutes – is of paramount importance here.

In addition, we would like to stress the need to look more closely at the receiving end of the process, to take into account what is perhaps better conveyed by "cultural memory" (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*, Assmann a.o.). This approach invites us to look more closely at the receiving end of the process: what counts in a certain context as 'cultural memory' has been actively selected and canonized. In pre-modern as well as modern contexts this process takes place on an institutional level and often in specific high-profile 'events' like a celebration or an authorial piece of mythmaking. The 'heritage' (cf above), in other words, is not simply handed over and refined in a gradual process, but is more often suddenly selected from a vast amount of cultural goods of which the largest part is simply discarded.

The formulation of a new notion or, perhaps, even a new theory of tradition calls for empirical research not only on traditions with symbolic significance and claims of collective ownership but on cultural phenomena which can be labeled 'traditional' because of their replicability, transmittability and "contagiousness" as ideas, practices and verbal formulations. Indeed, in exploring traditions, a central, perhaps *the* central concern for scholars with various methodological orientations is the process of transmission (< Lat. *tradere* 'to give', 'to deliver', 'to hand over').



We invite both established researchers and doctoral students across scholarly fields and disciplines to submit papers exploring the concept of tradition e.g. in reference to

- temporality of traditions; juxtaposition of temporal lines of demarcation between old and new, as well as then and now
- distinguishing from what is now, what is new, and what is modern; drawing a link between tradition and conservatism
- the making of the present by indicating the persistence of specific cultural forms against modernization
- treating specific cultural forms as models of social reality or as products of that reality (by referring to their position as belonging to 'pre-modern' or 'traditional societies'),
- forms of discourse which encourage reiteration and replication – or at least assertions of reiteration and replication – but resist change
- the transmission of normative and formative knowledge that tends to take place within the confines of social institutions
- the viability of the concept of tradition when describing the formation of a canon
- memory, orality and literacy.

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words to Ilona Pikkanen ([ilona.pikkanen@finlit.fi](mailto:ilona.pikkanen@finlit.fi)) by Monday, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008. Please attach also a short bio (approximately 100 words) including the following: name, title of your representation, name of your department and institution, research interest and contact information.

Abstracts will be reviewed by a committee comprised of the members of the Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies ([www.uib.no/ncms/](http://www.uib.no/ncms/)) The invitations to participate will be sent at latest at the beginning of May, 2008.

