Making Foreigners in Pre-Modern Central Europe

Introductory Remarks

Julia Burkhardt [ID]

Special editor of the block

This issue of *Historical Studies on Central Europe* deals with ideas of 'foreignness' and their usage in pre-modern Europe. In medieval realms, regions, and cities, just as today, 'otherness' and 'foreignness' served as legitimizing tools. They were particularly used in times of socio-political change, when discourses revolved around the definition of a political community, its members' claims to specific rights, or around key categories that constituted forms of belonging. While features like kinship, status, religion, or common customs could shape identities in a constructive way, other forms of defining social groups appeared rather destructive, among them attempts to classify people as 'others': 'making foreigners' could thus serve as an argumentative tool to deny people a significant role in public affairs or to define privileged groups with specific political rights.

Against this backdrop, this issue offers a diachronic and comparative approach to researching argumentative uses of 'otherness' and 'foreignness' in pre-modern times. The articles assembled with case studies from Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland-Lithuania between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries discuss, why 'foreignness' became a political issue in certain phases, how it was semantically framed and what argumentative purpose it was supposed to serve. While our issue does not aim at covering all aspects of the topic, it offers a new approach and seeks to encourage in-depth comparative studies.

The articles in this volume originate from contributions in a session on *Making Foreigners in Pre-Modern Central Europe: Legitimation Strategies in Times of Socio-political Change (14th to 16th Centuries)* organized for the Fourth Biennial MECERN Conference (University of Gdańsk, 7–9 April 2021).[1] I sincerely thank my colleagues for their willingness to contribute to this challenging topic from their research areas. Special thanks go to the editors of this journal, particularly to Balázs Nagy, as well as to our reviewers, who greatly supported us in shaping our approach and realizing it in this issue.

---

1   See Stöckle, Cynthia. "Tagungsbericht: Networks – Cooperation – Rivalry. The Fourth Biennial Conference of the Medieval Central Europe Research Network (MECERN), 07. 04. 2021 – 09. 04. 2021 digital (Gdańsk)." *H-Soz-Kult,* 7 September 2021, www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/ id/tagungsberichte-9051, accessed: 21 November 2022.