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**Medieval Studies in Austria:  
Research Infrastructure and Resources**

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## **Medieval Studies in Austria: Research Infrastructure and Resources**

by Thomas Ertl

### *Introduction and Purpose<sup>1</sup>*

During the formation of government, after the election of the Austrian National Council in the fall of 2013, the “Federal Ministry of Science and Research” was dissolved. Henceforth, the Austrian Minister for Economic Affairs administrates science policy. The rationale for this advance was claimed to be rooted in the firmly established affinity of research and economy. Thus, science, research and academia are formally regarded to be components of the economy. This does not necessarily signify a detriment to research. However, researchers as well as students anxiously anticipate the gradual economization of education and science to result in a decreased promotion of both basic research and the humanities. Time will inevitably show whether this concern is warranted.

### *Research Infrastructure and Resources*

#### *1. Institutions: Universities*

With approximately eight million inhabitants, Austria disposes of more than 22 public universities and numerous equivalent institutions (collectively 55). This ratio is above average compared to, for instance, distinct federal states of Germany. Furthermore, the university attracting most students within the German-speaking countries is the University of Vienna (92.000 students). Austria, therefore, is

<sup>1</sup> For help and advice, I want to thank Katharina Fersterer, Robin Köhler, Christina Lutter, Magda Oberreiter, and last but not least Herwig Weigl.

frequently inclined to present itself as a *Kulturgroßmacht*, i.e. a major cultural player. In part this is true with respect to the study of history and the study of medieval history, in particular.

Until the University Act (*Universitätsgesetz*) in 2002, lifelong careers at one and the same research institute or university department were possible and, indeed, fairly common in Austria. The implementation of the reform, however, resulted in an extension of temporary appointments. As a rule, after a three to six year appointment and after composing a dissertation or habilitation while simultaneously contributing in research-based instruction and university self-administration, young researchers must henceforth depart their university. This transformation constitutes a convergence to German structures, whereas, ironically, Germany currently attempts to create secure career options for young researchers through tenure-track positions (*Junior-Professur*). Life-long careers at Austrian universities, which mostly started before 2002, resulted in an abundance of associate professorships (*Außerordentliche Professuren*). Due to the new legislation, these positions are only partly replaced after retirement of the position holders and given to junior scholars with limited contracts. Moreover, the University Act of 2002 culminated in the implementation of the “Bologna Process” in Austria. The former study programs were, consequently, substituted with the prevailing degree programs of Bachelor (180 ECTS, European Credit Transfer System, within 3 years), Master (120 ECTS within 2 years) and Doctoral (three years).

The Republic of Austria devotes slightly less than three percent of the Gross Domestic Product to education and research. This equals a ranking in the upper third regarding OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) member countries. Nevertheless, financial resources of universities and, even more drastically, of non-university research institutes decreased in recent years which led to vacancies not being refilled. Current examples regarding the history of the Middle Ages are the universities of Graz and Klagenfurt with ongoing long-term vacancies. If and when these vacancies will be filled, remains unpredictable. A further consequence of this development is the increasing significance of third party funding. Even in the humanities, the raising of these external funds of private or public sponsoring bodies evolved to be an important factor in order to promote research. As a matter of fact, within the previous ten years, the number of positions funded through third parties (mainly the State sponsored FWF which is described below) doubled and reached, for instance, approximately 20 percent of all research positions at the University of Salzburg.

Research, in general, and medieval studies, in particular, addresses these challenges in numerous ways. Due to the small size of the country, for instance, scholars and institutions focus considerably on internationalization. Thus, when filling vacancies, the proportion of professors from foreign countries, particularly from Germany, has increased remarkably in recent years. Due to the financial autonomy of Austrian universities, established by the University Act of 2002, the full professors’ salaries are freely negotiated between the university’s head of administration (*Rektor*) and the applicant. As a consequence, full professors’ salaries vary a great deal (I suppose) and vacancies may be attractive also for internationally renowned

scholars. An impact of this effort for internationalization can also be witnessed concerning the cross-border cooperation with single researchers or institutions, advances in new research areas of international relevance and, moreover, the prevalent use of English as the international language of science and, to a certain extent, instruction.

Medieval history is represented with full professorships at the Departments of History of the universities of Innsbruck, Salzburg, and Vienna (positions in Klagenfurt and Graz being vacant at the moment). A special emphasis for the exploration of medieval times is provided by the Institute for Austrian Historical Research (*Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, IÖG: < <http://www.geschichtsforschung.ac.at/> >), a federal research institution closely associated with the University of Vienna. There are four incumbent professors at the IÖG with a medieval focus while a fifth professorship has recently been redesignated to a professorship of modern Austrian history. The Institute publishes a periodical («Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung») and organises a master's degree program, focusing on archives and auxiliary historical sciences. The Institute's focus on medieval primary sources is highlighted, amongst others, by the long-term editing project of the 16-volume register of pope Innocent III.

Furthermore, the Middle Ages are also represented with a professorship at the Department of Economic and Social History at the University of Vienna. At the Department of East European History and the Department of Byzantine Studies, there are professorships and research staff with a medieval focus. Research at the Centre for Environmental History, based in Vienna but affiliated to the University of Klagenfurt, embraces the Middle Ages from time to time (< <http://www.umweltgeschichte.uni-klu.ac.at> >).

In terms of content, the fields of activity are strongly influenced by the full and associate professors' research emphasis and shall be easily disclosed on the website of the respective department. The human resources, affiliated to each full professorship, fluctuate and range from no staff at all to numerous prae-doc and post-doc positions. Vacancies are announced via the universities' websites as well as online platforms such as H-Soz-u-Kult (< <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de> >). Similar to representatives of other subjects, professors of medieval history act as active agents in raising third party funds or co-operate with junior or senior colleagues regarding applications for individual or joint projects. In fact, German language skills are not necessarily a requirement in order to collaborate in a research project. In some projects, the interdisciplinary aspect of research enables cooperation of people with very different background. Examine, for instance, the project *Handling Diversity*, located at the University of Vienna, which compares several aspects of pre-modern Indian and European history (< <http://hd.univie.ac.at> >).

In general, access to the academic field is provided through a doctoral degree program and the composition of a dissertation (ordinarily in German, English and other languages are permitted). In 2014, Vienna Doctoral Academies are initiated in Vienna, enabling PhD students to collaborate in interdisciplinary research groups, while some of them simultaneously may receive certain financial resources. Since 2013, the sponsorship program u:doc is in existence as well, promoting ex-

ceptional PhD projects for the duration of three years. Both programs welcome applicants from foreign countries. Basic requirement is always the holding of a MA degree (and a promising PhD project). The funding of PhD students partially also proceeds on an international level, illustrated, for instance, by the Research Training Group Political Communication from Antiquity to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (*Politische Kommunikation von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*), overseen by the University of Frankfurt am Main, Innsbruck, Trento, Bologna and Pavia (< <http://www.geschichte.uni-frankfurt.de/igk/index.html> >), which was running from 2004 to 2013.

Evidently, it is not exclusively the historian who is investigating medieval topics. To be more precise, philological subjects (for example German, Romance or English philology), legal history, ecclesiastical history/theology, art history or the Vienna Institute for Archeological Science (VIAS) dispose of experts on medieval times or engage in projects concerning the Middle Ages. All these disciplines offer a wide range of research and teaching, from conventional German/Austrian and Western European topics to global ventures. Only one example is the interdisciplinary and international project *The Cultural History of the Western Himalaya from the Eighth Century* (CHWH: < <http://www.univie.ac.at/chwh/> >), based at the Department of Art History.

## 2. Non-university Institutions

Non-university institutes as well as institutes affiliated to a university also obtain departments investigating medieval history. The University of Salzburg, for instance, is closely associated with the Institute for Realia of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age (IMAREAL, *Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und frühen Neuzeit*), based in Krems (< <http://www.imareal.oeaw.ac.at/home/> >), as well as the Commission for Editing the Corpus of the Latin Church Fathers (CSEL, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*) (< <http://www.csel.eu> >). Since 1988, the Institute for Jewish History in Austria in St. Pölten, recently affiliated to the IÖG, has been carrying out research into the history and culture of the Jews in Austria, from the Middle Ages up to the present day. Among the non-university institutes, the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (< <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/imafo/> >) deserves special attention with its distinct divisions regarding early-medieval history, Byzantine history as well as various sub-departments preparing editions (charters of emperors, inscriptions, medieval manuscripts). The Institute securely established its reputation as an international center of early-medieval research, employing diverse associates – predominantly in temporary projects – who particularly focus on research on medieval processes of formation of ethnical identities.

There are numerous additional institutions supervising research projects on medieval history. For a survey of these, it is possible to consult the latest issue of «Vademekum der Geschichtswissenschaften», a periodical embracing all institutions and persons working in historical research in the German-speaking countries. Amongst

many others, it may be worthwhile to mention some explicitly: The Provincial Archive of Lower Austria (*Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv*) compiles a collection of the medieval charters of Lower Austria. At the St. Pölten episcopal archive, the project *monasterium.net*, the largest virtual archive of charters and other primary sources available in an online encyclopedia (< <http://monasterium.net/pages/en/home.php> >), was initiated. Furthermore, various associations and museums are partially involved in medieval research as, for instance, the Upper Austrian Museum Association (*Oberösterreichische Musealverein*) which is in charge of the Upper Austrian book of charters. The Upper Austrian Provincial Museum (*Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum*) conducts a project on medieval castles. The Tyrolean Provincial Museum (*Tiroler Landesmuseum*) focuses on the Tyrolean book of charters. In previous times, archives actively contributed to research on medieval history, whereas nowadays they are primarily occupied with the supervision of users and the handling of source material of the modern period. For many years now, the Tyrolean Provincial Archive (*Tiroler Landesarchiv*) in Innsbruck is taking an initiative for the publication of several primary sources, published in the series “*Tiroler Geschichtsquellen*”, in particular of the Tyrolean account books, the oldest territorial account books north of the Alps. Due to digital archive information systems, an investigation of archive inventories is an easy venture in modern times. However, Austrian monastery archives present a peculiarity, since they regularly keep medieval manuscripts and charters in situ (< <http://kirchenarchive.at/> >). This undoubtedly impedes access as well as analysis, while original charters are, nevertheless, displayed on the website [www.monasterium.net](http://www.monasterium.net). Information on medieval manuscripts in Central European monasteries with a focus on Austria is offered through the web portal (< [http://manuscripta.at/\\_scripts/php/manuscripts.php](http://manuscripta.at/_scripts/php/manuscripts.php) >, supervised by the Abteilung “Schrift- und Buchwesen” of the OEAW Institute of Medieval Research.

The Austrian “*Historikertag*”, a regular gathering of Austrian historians including other experts on medieval history, is conducted at regular intervals (< <http://www.historikertag.at> >). Thus far, the conference was organized by the Union of Austrian Historians and Historical Associations (*Verband Österreichischer Historiker und Geschichtsvereine*). The future of the conference is indeterminate.

### 3. Resources and Funding Programs

Evidently, eligible funding opportunities are of significant interest for Austrian as well as non-Austrian medievalists. Funding solely directed at medieval research, in fact, is non-existent in Austria. Nonetheless, there are numerous possible sponsorships that are either impartial in discipline or also accessible for the humanities. Various Austrian funding programs are not restricted to Austrian citizens. To be more precise, this corresponds to brief sponsorship of several weeks as well as prolonged sponsorship of several years.

In order to work in Austria, European resources can be utilized as well. Two to seven years after completion of a PhD program, researchers of any nationality, age and discipline can apply for a Starting Grant of the European Research

Council (ERC). The objective is to conduct a research project autonomously and establish a research team. Researchers who completed a PhD program seven to twelve years prior have the opportunity to realize their project with a similar objective by means of applying for a Consolidator Grant. Exceptional researchers can request an Advanced Grant of the ERC. These funding schemes (Starting Grants, Consolidator Grants and Advanced Grants) are published annually, have a maximum duration of up to five years and offer a unique possibility for an individual researcher to establish a research team of also non-European researches and to collaborate with foreign research institutions. The website of the European Research Council offers more detailed information (< <http://erc.europa.eu/funding-schemes> >) [date of access: 2014 august 1]. In addition to these periodically announced funding schemes, the European Horizon 2020 program is initiated in 2014 (< <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/> >) [date of access: 2014 august 1].

With regard to Austria, the most important funding institutions are the *Austrian Science Fund* (FWF, Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung: < <http://www.fwf.ac.at/> >) and the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: < <http://www.oeaw.ac.at> >). The FWF sponsors individual prae doc and post doc researchers as well as projects that can be requested by researchers after being awarded a PhD. In the last two decades, about 80 projects with a medieval focus have been supported by the FWF, 20 of them are currently going on. The annually announced START-Program promotes individual researchers for a duration of six years (basic assessment after three years) and includes an optional stay abroad. In order to receive funding, the completion of a PhD program must be two to nine years prior to application. Further requirements are provided on the website (< <http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/start.html> >) [date of access: 2014 august 1]. The Lise-Meitner-Program is particularly promising for non-Austrian scientists, since it enables postdoctoral scholars of all disciplines to conduct research at an Austrian institution for one to two years. Scientific visibility and an official invitation of an Austrian research institution are crucial requirements. Concerning joint projects, the *Special Research Programs* (SFB, Spezialforschungsbereich) deserve attention. This funding program is geared towards research groups, seeking an autonomous research concentration at one or more universities. The duration of the program is eight years; an assessment is, however, conducted after four years. The Visions of Community project (VISCOM: < <http://sfb-viscom.univie.ac.at> >), for instance, is currently financed in part through this funding scheme. Besides its apparent relevance concerning medieval studies, it is an interdisciplinary project combining historical, art historical, philological and social anthropological disciplines.

An opportunity to continue research projects in Austria is offered by the program *Money Follows Researcher*. Projects already in existence or funded by national funds can, consequently, be pursued in Austria. More detailed information is available on the website < <http://www.snf.ch/de/foerderung/ergaenzende-massnahmen/money-follows-researcher/Seiten/default.aspx> >) [date of access: 2014 august 1].

Regarding the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the programs *Austrian Academy of Sciences Central and Eastern European Fellowship* (AAS-CEE) and *Austrian Programme for Advanced Research and Technology* (APART) are of special interest for postdoctoral scholars, the APART program, however, only for scholars with Austrian citizenship: These programs enable habilitation projects at Austrian institutes for a duration of up to 36 months. In case of the AAS-CEE however, the proposed habilitation project must evolve around a topic of Central and Eastern European relevance. Additional information can be obtained on the websites < <http://stipendien.oeaw.ac.at/de/stipendium/aas-cee-austrian-academy-sciences-central-and-eastern-european-fellowship> > [AAS-CEE, date of access: 2014 august 1] and < <http://stipendien.oeaw.ac.at/de/stipendium/apart-austrian-programme-advanced-research-and-technology> > [APART, date of access: 2014 august 1].

In order to promote doctoral students, the ÖAW additionally possesses two funding schemes: the *Doctoral Fellowship Programme* (DOC) is eligible for individual applicants, whereas the *Doctoral Fellowship Programme for Teams* (DOC-team) is aimed at facilitating interdisciplinary research among three or four international doctoral students. For more information, see < <http://stipendien.oeaw.ac.at/en/stipendium/doc-doctoral-fellowship-programme-austrian-academy-sciences> > [DOC, date of access: 2014 august 1] and < <http://stipendien.oeaw.ac.at/en/stipendium/doc-team-doctoral-fellowship-programme-teams-humanities-cultural-studies-and-social> > [DOC-team, date of access: 2014 august 1].

Besides the above-mentioned funding schemes, at a federal level (FWF), the state and municipal level as well as distinct universities, (advancement) awards are periodically announced, grants allocated for a stay abroad and printing costs subsidies offered for active researchers in Austria. Furthermore, a variety of funding programs are addressed exclusively to women in order to support them in their academic careers. Finally, a concise survey is offered by the Austrian Database for Scholarships and Research Grants (*Österreichische Datenbank für Stipendien und Forschungsförderung*), supervised by the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD, *Österreichische Austauschdienst-Gesellschaft*) (<http://www.grants.at/>) [date of access: 2014 august 1].

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