

ORGANIZER



Nájera
Encuentros
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del Medioevo

NÁJERA

23RD INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

THE SOCIAL CHURCH IN THE MEDIEVAL CITY: LAITY, CLERGY AND COMMUNITY

SPONSORING AND SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

CALL FOR PAPERS (CFP)



This conference is funded by the Department of Culture, Tourism, Sport and Youth of the Government of La Rioja

Professor Teófilo F. Ruiz Grants and SEEM Grants for Early-Career Researchers



Corpus Christi Procession. The Morgan Library, New York

26-27 November 2026
(face-to-face and virtual)
<http://www.neim.unican.es>

The International Medieval Studies Meetings of Nájera have been conceived, since their creation in 2003, as an international conference dedicated to the study and dissemination of Medieval History, promoted by the City Council of Nájera and the Government of La Rioja. The 23rd edition of the Meetings is devoted to the theme:

THE SOCIAL CHURCH IN THE MEDIEVAL CITY: LAITY, CLERGY AND COMMUNITY

The Social Church is a recent historiographical concept that redefines the medieval Church as a total social institution, that is, as the network of practices, norms and relationships that structured the daily life of European cities. Advances in historical sociology, microhistory and network analysis have shown that its role went far beyond doctrine, liturgy or pastoral care: it also regulated behaviour, organised communal life, administered resources, managed the local economy, shaped historical memory and produced public truth through rituals, certifications and mechanisms of moral control.

This approach highlights the relational dimension of the Church, understood as a dense network of ties between clerics and laypeople, patrons and communities, families and ecclesiastical agents. In practice, bishops, parish priests and abbots depended structurally on lay participation to sustain the daily functioning of parishes, churches and monasteries. The Church lacked the human and material resources to manage its property and places of worship on its own, and therefore delegated to laypeople the economic administration, supervision of building works, collection of rents and management of assets. This collaboration also extended to judicial and disciplinary matters, where witnesses, trustworthy men and mediators were essential for enforcing moral norms, resolving conflicts and legitimising decisions before the community.

The ritual and festive organisation of urban and rural life likewise rested in lay hands: confraternities, wardenships and neighbourhood groups financed altars, processions, patronal feasts and maintenance works, thereby shaping the rhythms and priorities of local religiosity. The Church thus functioned as a community network in which clerics and laypeople shared responsibilities, negotiated norms and articulated forms of religious sociability that structured collective life.

The concept of the Social Church also makes it possible to analyse how the institution contributed to reproducing inequalities of status, gender or access to power, while simultaneously generating legitimacy through the selection of authorised voices and the construction of local hierarchies. Ecclesiastical authority relied on reputation, faith and moral regulation, creating spaces of inclusion and exclusion within urban communities.

In contrast to approaches focused exclusively on hierarchy, ecclesiastical politics or pastoral activity, the Social Church integrates these spheres from the perspective of daily life and

community interaction. It offers a particularly fertile framework for microhistory, prosopography, network analysis and studies on the circulation of information and the construction of local identities. This CFP invites scholars to explore the medieval Church as a complex, relational and dynamic social system, open to new methodologies and to comparative perspectives that may shed further light on its role in shaping medieval urban societies.

Thematic Axes of the CFP

1. Lay Participation in Ecclesiastical Administration

The involvement of laypeople in the economic and material management of dioceses, parishes and confraternities; the organisation of worship; the administration of alms and charity; and the direction of hospitals and charitable institutions.

2. Inequality and Hierarchies in the Medieval Church

Access to the clergy; status dynamics within the Church; social mobility; and processes of exclusion within ecclesiastical structures and their urban environments.

3. The Church Beyond the Pulpit: Social Functions and Community Networks

The Church as a vehicle of social mobility and an agent of social cohesion; its role in community organisation, conflict mediation, the articulation of networks between clerics and laypeople, and participation in judicial and disciplinary processes.

4. Social Networks, Community Bonds and the Circulation of Information

Interactions among clerics, laypeople, families, confraternities and local elites; networks of religious sociability; mechanisms for transmitting news, rumours, certifications and historical memory.

5. Justice, Discipline and Moral Control

The role of the Church in regulating behaviour, resolving conflicts and producing public truth; lay witnesses, guarantors and mediators; reputation, trust and legitimacy.

6. Ecclesiastical Economy and Social Assistance

Rents, taxation, charity, welfare and forms of redistribution managed by ecclesiastical institutions.

7. The Church as a Source of Employment in the Medieval City

The Church as a generator of urban employment and an economic engine for artisans, scribes, builders and workers linked to religious institutions.

8. Daily Life, Rituality and Christian Sociability

Devotional practices, rituals, community memory and local identities articulated around ecclesiastical institutions and spaces.

9. Education, Literacy and the Production of Knowledge

Parish and monastic schools; the training of clerics and laypeople; the circulation of knowledge; documentary writing; and the construction of institutional memory.

10. Gender, Female Agency and Participation in the Social Church

The role of women as administrators, donors, patrons, managers of hospitals, mediators and witnesses in legal proceedings; and as agents of cohesion within ecclesiastical and community dynamics.

PAPER PROPOSALS

The deadline for submitting free paper proposals is **15 September 2026**. Participants must send their proposal including the following information: full name, email address, thematic axis, an abstract of no more than 250 words (including objectives, sources, methodology and contribution), and a short CV (250 words). Submission address: neim@unican.es

The Direction of the International Medieval Studies Meetings of Nájera adheres to the **Helsinki Initiative (2019) on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication**. The scholarly languages of the Meetings are Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian and English.

The Meetings will be held **in person**. **Important**: the virtual presentation format will be reserved exclusively for participants residing **outside the European Union** who lack the means to attend in person.

Each presenter will have **20 minutes** for their paper, and the **PowerPoint presentation must be written in English**.

The criteria for selecting proposals will be **quality, originality, and in-person participation**. Papers approved by external reviewers will be published in a **monographic volume**.

AWARD

The "International Prize for Medieval Urban History" will be awarded to the best paper.

PROFESSOR TEÓFILO F. RUIZ (UCLA) GRANTS AND SEEM GRANTS

Presenters and in-person attendees may apply for the following:

Professor Teófilo F. Ruiz (UCLA) Grants for presenters. Application deadline: 30 September. Email: neim@unican.es

SEEM Grants for attendees. Application deadline: 30 October. Email: info@medievalistas.es

REGISTRATION AND ATTENDANCE

Registration for attendees (except presenters) must be completed before 24 November, by sending full name, address and email to: neim@unican.es

In-person attendance entitles participants to receive a certificate of attendance, which may be recognised as 1 ECTS credit (25 hours) depending on each university's regulations.

Virtual attendance is reserved for participants from outside the European Union who lack the means to attend in person.

MEETINGS SECRETARIAT

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