



© Die Junge Akademie/Peter Himsel

Racha Kirakosian, Ph.D.

Professor of Medieval Studies (Medieval German)

Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

Born in 1986 in Malkie, Syria
M.A. in Digital Humanities and History of Art from the École nationale des chartes, Paris; M.A. in Medieval and Modern History and German Philology from the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen; and D.Phil. in Medieval and Modern Languages from the University of Oxford

ARBEITSVORHABEN

Scientific Discourse in Medieval Vernacular Texts

The idea that the Middle Ages were an unscientific or at best pre-scientific era is a familiar but contested narrative in discussions of historical progress. Though the narrative of a scientific revolution in the modern era is increasingly questioned, certain sources from the Middle Ages still tend to go unnoticed, for various reasons, in overviews of the history of scientific discourse. However, if we want to understand, not only how knowledge was produced, but also how it was communicated, especially to and among the “unlearned” – i.e. the people who had no formal university education – vernacular texts are invaluable sources.

Through my work on religious texts, I have discovered that medieval German treatises, sermons, and visions often contain what we would now consider to be scientific discourse. Additionally, texts like natural history books and medical treatises provide a more comprehensive view of medieval scientific history. While there has been acknowledgment of scientific discourse in medieval Arabic and Latin texts, vernacular texts, especially those from religious contexts, have largely been overlooked.

In my work, I aim to bridge this gap between the existence of scientific ideas in vernacular medieval texts and the portrayal of a history of science that focuses on knowledge production in the languages of the “learned.” This endeavor is about exploring how texts in the languages of the “unlearned” show their own awareness of scientific knowledge.

Investigating vernacular texts is a crucial step towards a more inclusive and nuanced portrayal of the history of scientific discourse.

Recommended Reading

Kirakosian, Racha. *From the Material to the Mystical in Late Medieval Piety: The Vernacular Transmission of Gertrude of Helfta's Visions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

–. “The Last Empress. Saint Richgard and the End of the Carolingian Dynasty.” *Women's History Review* 30, no. 3 (2021): 375–400.

–. “Katharina von Württemberg – Gräfin und Kanonisse auf der Flucht.” In *Starke Frauen? Adelige Damen im Südwesten des spätmittelalterlichen Reiches*, edited by Klaus Oschema, Peter Rückert, and Anja Thaller, 228–250. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2022.