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Otto Gründler: In Memoriam (1928-2004)

Richard Utz

The first time I met Otto Gründler was at the University of Regensburg in the late 1980s, when he delivered a speech on the history of the academic study of the Middle Ages to Karl Heinz Göller's dozen or so disciples in the "Oberseminar". It was the kind of topic only a wanderer between the institutions of higher learning in the Old and the New World could deliver: he spoke of philology, its *translatio* into the United States and *transmutatio* into medieval studies, and he even mentioned medievalism. Of course, as the founder and director of the world's largest annual gathering of medievalists he would have known of all the latest trends in the field, and he kindly opened the doors of that congress to the sections on medievalism which Leslie Workman began in the early 1970s and which have been taking place at Western Michigan University's Medieval Institute ever since.

When I met Gründler in Regensburg, the encounter was more significant to me than he could ever have known. I had just returned from a one-year visit as Associate Teacher of German and student of English and American literature and Women's studies at Williams College, Massachusetts, and was planning on going back to the USA immediately after earning my doctoral degree. In Gründler I saw, therefore, what a scholar with a European education and an adventurous spirit could achieve "over there". What impressed me even more was that, on the day after his presentation, he took the time to discuss the topic of my dissertation and encouraged me to contact scholars working on related topics, something I would never have dared to do without his assurance that I would not be laughed at.

Over the years, I had several opportunities to speak with him again during chance encounters at the "Kzoo", and he always showed the same personal interest, gave me the same kind of gracious attention, as if I happened to be the most important colleague right there and then among the three thousand congress participants. And that is also how many medievalists will remember him: As a visionary who gave medieval studies (and medievalism) an actual place of pilgrimage where it could thrive, and as a paragon of collegiality who generously shared his time and expertise with all who cared to listen.

The more I think about it: his Regensburg speech may well be the origin of my own desire to investigate and write the history of medieval studies.

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