

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces a Lecture

by

Prof Dr Imke Mendoza
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The Novgorod Birch-Bark Letters – a Medieval Text Genre?

The birch-bark documents found in Novgorod and other cities in Northwest Russia are one of the most remarkable collections of Old Russian manuscripts. The first birch-bark texts were discovered in the early 1950s during archaeological excavations and their number has been and still is growing steadily. Today there are well over 1000 documents covering a time range from the 11th-15th centuries. They contain short messages, such as personal or business letters, official rulings, wills, inventories etc. Their discovery has increased the data base of Old Russian texts from the earliest period, which until then was rather small. At the same time, most of the birch-bark documents are written in the so-called Old Novgorod dialect, which is quite different from the language we know from other Old Russian sources. The most conspicuous trait, however, concerns discourse pragmatics and text composition, since the texts exhibit an unusual combination of orality and features typical for written texts.

Professor Mendoza will first give a short introduction to “berestology”, i.e. the scholarly study of the birch-bark documents. Then she will focus on the peculiar combination of oral and written features of the birch-bark letters, which, according to her assumptions, constitute a particular text genre.

Thursday, 29 January 2015 at 6 pm
Room 0001, CSMC