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  University of Notre Dame
- Lauren Van Nest (2022), Mentorship Program
  University of Virginia
- Mary Alcaro (2023)
  Rutgers University
- Kersti Francis (2023)
  University of California - Los Angeles
- Reed O’Mara (2023)
  Case Western Reserve University

Chair’s Message
Dear friends and colleagues,

This past year has been a testament to our resilience and determination as graduate students. Through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GSC remained committed to its mission of connecting and supporting medievalist graduate students. We held a number of successful social and professional development events via Zoom at IMC Leeds, ICMS Kalamazoo, and the annual meeting of the MAA. We witnessed an exponential increase in graduate student participation in the GSC’s Mentoring Program. We were even able to award four students with the New Horizons Grant. I could not be prouder of the work being done by this committee and look to the future with optimism and a renewed sense of hope.

As we continue to figure out what the new normal in a post-COVID-19 world looks like, the GSC will continue to offer resources and programs for medievalist graduate students worldwide. Stay in touch with us through our newsletters, Facebook and Twitter presence, and conference events. And if there is any event or resource related to teaching, research, and graduate student life that you would like us to offer, do reach out. If you have any event or resource related to these aspects of the graduate experience, reach out and we will help you spread the word. We wish you a restorative summer and a smooth transition into the new academic year!

Sincerely,
Jonathan F. Correa Reyes
Chair, Graduate Student Committee

Series on Innovations in Dissertation Research

The MAA-GSC is pleased to introduce a new series this year that focuses on graduate students and scholars who have developed creative ways to conduct and share their dissertation research. We are excited for this opportunity to highlight the growing number of excellent online resources developed by (and often for) graduate students. In this installment, Sarah Luginbill discusses her experiences crafting the Medieval Portable Altar Database and her interest in sharing her research with scholars and non-specialists alike.

Spread the Love: Sharing Your Dissertation Research with the General Public through Websites
By Sarah Luginbill
The Medieval Portable Altar Database is an open-access inventory of surviving medieval European portable altars and their attributes. I created the Database as a doctoral candidate in History at the University of Colorado Boulder, in conjunction with my dissertation research on portable altar patronage and production in Lower Saxony. When I first began this project in 2018, I expected to find *maybe* a dozen surviving medieval portable altars. But in my research over the last three years, I have located over a hundred altars that still exist in museum and church collections across Europe and North America, reaching from Cleveland, to Iceland, to Malta, and all the way to St. Petersburg in Russia.

In addition to writing my dissertation, it was my goal to share these fascinating objects with the general public in English through the creation of an online, open-access database. I wanted to spread awareness and information about these fascinating objects, encouraging collaboration between scholars of history, religion, and material culture. Since I do not have training in code or building websites, I opted for a simple Wordpress site that has templates to use. With it, I have built an informative, easy-to-use repository for all questions related to portable altars. I even incorporated a Google Maps feature, which displays all known current locations of medieval portable altars.

When completed, each portable altar will have its own information page, with photographs, provenance information, inscriptions, and bibliography. Any scholars researching the altar can utilize the page for a starting point for further information. Most of the photographs I upload to the database are either open-access from the altar’s current institution or pictures taken by me or a friend. I always credit the photograph and information to its source, and include a link to any “official” object page from a museum or repository.
Most medieval portable altars were created in the area of north-central Germany between 1025 and 1200 CE, but examples also come from northern and western Europe, the Italian peninsula, the Iberian peninsula, Byzantium, and the Levant. Some scholars believe portable altars were utilized by priests only to take Mass to homebound individuals. This practice, which may indeed be true, has not been corroborated by textual accounts nor the iconography of devotional objects. There are, however, multiple records of portable altars being used to celebrate Mass outside of churches in fields and on crusade campaigns when no designated sacred space was available. Additionally, inscriptions on several surviving portable altars and contemporary images of their use suggest that some portable altars may have been placed on the main altar of a church in order to supplement the Mass on specific feast days.

To date, there is no monograph-length study of medieval portable altars in English nor an extensive exploration into their iconography, production, and function. Two twentieth-century German art historical studies supply lengthy descriptions and multiple images for each altar, but unfortunately, both works remain untranslanted and in limited circulation. In 2008, Éric Palazzo traced the history of altar rituals and their use to better understand the existence of portable altars in the Middle Ages. Palazzo includes valuable textual evidence for the altars’ ability to transform mundane spaces, but he admits that the work is not so much about portable altars as it is sacred space, with portable altars just a vehicle for the study. Palazzo’s monograph remains untranslated from its original French. Thus, there is a need for extensive study of portable altars in English.

However, I do not want the knowledge of portable altars to be limited to academia. I want museum visitors and cathedral tourists to see a portable altar on display and recognize it, to share its features with their companions. In order to spread basic information about altars, I created a one-page factsheet on Canva and placed the file on the Database website. The general public, teachers, and scholars can download the PDF to use in classrooms or just enjoy. With the help of the international medievalist community, I am creating versions of this info sheet in various languages, with the goal of making medieval portable altars accessible to individuals around the world.
The response to the Database has been incredible. According to the stats presented by Wordpress, individuals around the world have accessed the website and viewed the Database information. And as I have worked to make my research more public, I have been contacted by scholars, amateur historians, and even church carpenters who found the website and want to share photos of medieval portable altars that are stashed in antiquities shops, small auction houses, and private collections. This kind of exchange will continue to expand our understanding of these complex medieval objects and their role in the celebration of the Mass and in the creation of moveable sacred spaces.

I have plans to add more to the Database in the future and to integrate ArcGIS and other tools. But for now, it has been a great platform with which to share my knowledge with
the general public, and to learn more about medieval portable altars that otherwise would remain hidden.

*Dr. Sarah Luginbill received her PhD in History from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2021. Her dissertation, “Portable Altars, Devotion, and Memory in German Lands, 1050-1190 CE,” examines the patronage and use of medieval portable altars in north-central Germany. Sarah is interested in interdisciplinary methods that combine the approaches of art history, history, and religious studies.*

**Series on Career Alternatives to Academia and the Tenure Track**

For the past few issues, the GSC Newsletter has featured a series on career alternatives to tenure-track teaching. The series draws on the varied perspectives of medievalists who are pursuing a variety of careers outside the tenure-track. It offers insights into the nature of work in positions outside academia, what unique skills a background in medieval studies can bring to these careers, and what medievalist graduate students can do to prepare themselves to enter these fields. In this installment, Hannah Hethmon reflects on her career trajectory, her experiences as a medievalist graduate student, and where she finds the best career advice.

**Q&A with Hannah Hethmon**

**Q:** What are a few adjectives you would pick to describe your career trajectory?

**A:** I would say it felt random and eclectic for many years, as I went from English literature studies to Medieval Norse Studies to American public history to producing podcasts for museums. But as I ease into my 30s and a solid career path, I've found everything I learned along the way contributes to being a well-rounded arts and heritage professional. Being able to write, to analyze, to speak "academic" and "historian." Even knowing what TEI XML was came in handy on a podcast for an archive this week. The traditional path of academia requires a lot of focus and specialization, but I think where I've been successful in creating a career--adjacent to academia--is in my embrace of medium over content, so becoming a producer who can take any subject matter and turn it into a compelling podcast. I think many people under-value the own ability to translate from "expert" to "general public" or from expert to expert across fields.

**Q:** Are there any particular skills, habits, or experiences from your medieval studies or academic work that you think prepared you especially well for your career?

**A:** I think simply having experienced the process of a masters in medieval studies gives me a huge advantage in relating to and establishing credibility with the archivists, curators, and
museum executives who hire me on behalf of their institutions. While I’ve quite honestly forgotten much of the facts and content from my degree (I can’t believe I could translate Old Norse seven years ago), the processes and tools of analysis and learning difficult concepts has prepared me well to take on projects in areas I may not be a subject-matter expert in. In a profession where I’m essentially selling a professional service, being able to show that I am not just an audio producer, but work on a foundation of academic study and training, is very useful.

Q: When you’re looking, where do you go for the best career advice?
A: My best career advice has come from my mom, who ran her own granite countertop company for many years. She taught me a lot about entrepreneurship, sales, and business administration. I think looking outside your field for career advice and models for success is critical. I have found that within a discipline or field, people often have trouble giving advice because they are too close to things. They will offer you a well-worn path to a career; but in this day and age of 1000 applicants to a position, standing out is essential. I think I’ve been successful because I’ve applied an entrepreneurial model to a technical medium (podcasting) in an academic space (museums, cultural nonprofits). My skills alone wouldn’t have been enough; I owe as much to understanding marketing and sales and being able to pitch myself as I do to understanding podcasting and history and storytelling. I always advise people to become a two-field specialist. So being the best person to apply coding to humanities or the best person to apply any science the humanities or humanities to the sciences or the best person to apply a technical skill to a content expertise, etc.

Hannah Hethmon is the owner and executive producer of Better Lemon Creative Audio, the author of popular handbook Your Museum Needs a Podcast: A Step-by-Step Guide to Podcasting on a Budget for Museums and Cultural Nonprofits, and the creator and host of award-winning podcast Museums in Strange Places. Hannah received her B.A. in English Language and Literature from the University of Maryland, College Park and her M.A. in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies from the University of Iceland.

Announcements

Tuesday, 06 July 2021 @ 16.30-18.00 GMT / 12:30-2:00pm ET / 9:30-11:00am PT
IMC Leeds 2021 Sponsored Roundtable - “Public Medievalism: Responsibility & Cultural Heritage Management” (Session 821)
If you’re planning on attending the 2021 International Medieval Congress in Leeds, drop by the MAA-GSC’s sponsored virtual roundtable! You’ll hear from Julia Faiers (University of St Andrews), Ruthann Miller (University of Illinois-Urbana Champagne), and Iona Lister (University
of Toronto) as they reflect on the responsibilities we bear to public interpretations, uses, and misuses of the medieval. You can find us at Session 821 through the IMC Pathable portal.

**Wednesday, 07 July 2021 @ 20.00-21.00 GMT / 4:00-5:00pm ET / 1:00-2:00pm PT**

**IMC Leeds 2021 Graduate Student Virtual Social Hour!**

Whether you plan to join us for our sponsored roundtable or not, definitely find time to drop by the MAA-GSC’s Graduate Student Virtual Social Hour! This event will be hosted through Zoom and will be open to IMC attendees through the IMC Pathable portal.

**Tuesday, 31 August 2021**

**Vagantes Conference Call for 2023 Host Institution**

The Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies is now accepting applications to host the 22nd Annual Conference in 2023. Hosted by a different institution each year, Vagantes is an interdisciplinary graduate student conference focused on the Middle Ages. Run and organized entirely by graduate students, Vagantes is a unique opportunity to showcase the Medieval Studies community at your institution. Those involved in planning, organizing, and hosting the event gain valuable professional development experience and connect with other top medievalist graduate students. Seed money will be provided to the host institution!!!

To access the application, review further criteria for hosting, and consult previously submitted applications, visit: [http://vagantesconference.org/hosting-vagantes](http://vagantesconference.org/hosting-vagantes). Please submit completed applications to the Vagantes Board of Directors at vagantesboard@gmail.com.

**Resource Announcement: Call For Papers!**

Looking for a home for your latest seminar paper? Maybe you need an excuse to travel, especially during these summer months? Check out the Call for Papers Archives at Medievalists.net, the Medieval Studies Calls for Papers Facebook Group, and of course the Call for Papers section of the MAA’s very own Medieval Academy Blog. If you have a favorite CFP resource that we haven’t listed here, get in touch and we’ll include it in our next issue!

**Resource Announcement: MAA Grants**

The Medieval Academy of America invites applications for the following grants. Please note that applicants must be members in good standing as of September 15 in order to be eligible for Medieval Academy awards.

**Baldwin Fellowship:** The Baldwin Fellowship provides a one-year grant of $20,000 (with the possibility of a second year of funding) to support a graduate student in a North American university who is researching and writing a significant dissertation for the
Ph.D. in any subject in French medieval history that can be realized only through sustained research in the archives and libraries of France. **Deadline 15 October 2021.**

**Schallek Fellowship:** The Schallek Fellowship provides a one-year grant of $30,000 to support Ph.D. dissertation research in any relevant discipline dealing with late-medieval Britain (ca. 1350-1500). **Deadline 15 October 2021.**

**Travel Grants:** The Medieval Academy provides travel grants to help Academy members who hold doctorates but are not in full-time faculty positions, or are contingent faculty without access to institutional funding, attend conferences to present their work. **Deadline 1 November 2021 for meetings to be held between 16 February and 31 August 2022.**

**MAA/CARA Conference Grant:** The MAA/CARA Conference Grant for Regional Associations and Programs awards $1,000 to help support a regional or consortial conference taking place in 2022. **Deadline 15 October 2021.**

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**An Invitation from the Editors**

In response to the diverse needs and interests of graduate students in Medieval Studies, the GSC plans to continue expanding the variety of content offered in the newsletter. We hope to feature more narratives spotlighting the diverse experiences in which graduate students participate in their higher-ed journeys (conferences, events, workshops, travels, organizations, etc.) and when beginning their forays into the job market, whether on traditional routes, in alternative academic positions, or compatible careers.

If you have an interest in sharing your experiences and ideas as a graduate student, independent researcher, or early career scholar, please send queries and contributions to GSC newsletter editors Logan Quigley ([lquigle1@nd.edu](mailto:lquigle1@nd.edu)) and Reed O’Mara ([rao44@case.edu](mailto:rao44@case.edu)).

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