



The **MEDIEVAL**  
**STUDIES INSTITUTE**  
*of Indiana University*  
**NEWSLETTER**

Vol. 28 No. 1 Fall 2018

This past fall was, again, a busy one at the Medieval Studies Institute, full of lectures, workshops, and outreach events.

In September, MEST held its annual Distinguished Alumni Lecture featuring **Dr. Linda Mitchell** (Distinguished Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Professor of History, University of Missouri). Dr. Mitchell presented a talk on "**Anglo-Irish Women, Property, and Patronage: The Strategies of Emmelina de Ridelsford, Countess of Ulster, and her Daughters**" and led a workshop on working with digital archives.

Our October calendar was packed with events and programming, including a professionalization workshop organized by MEST GSAC, "**Practical Considerations for Conference Planning**," which involved a roundtable discussion with IU faculty **Patricia Clare Ingham** (English), **Diane Reilly** (Art History), and **Morten Oxenboell** (East Asian Languages and Cultures).

MEST ran its "**Making a Medieval Book**" booth for the second year at the **First Thursdays Festival of the Arts and Humanities**. Although rain forced us indoors, dozens of students, faculty, and community members (including many children) had hands-on experiences with the process of medieval bookmaking, from preparing parchment, to writing with quills, to binding a manuscript's booklets. We were grateful for the repeat appearances of local experts **John Cash** and **Jenny Mack** (Lilly Library).

Also in October was a lunch discussion with **Dr. Neil Lewis** (Philosophy, Georgetown University) on "**Robert**

**Grosseteste and the Ordered Universe: The value of interdisciplinary study for solving textual and interpretative problems**," and a Modern Medieval Series roundtable, "**Eow gamen gefylleth: Medievalism in Contemporary Games**," featuring **Edward Castronova** (Media School, IU), **Brent Moberly** (IU English alumni) and **Kevin Moberly** (Communications, Old Dominion), **Stephen Hopkins** (English, IU), and **Kalani Kraig** (History and IDAH, IU).

MEST cosponsored a brownbag lecture by **Dr. Ding Xiang Warner** (Cornell U.), "**Reading between the lines: Another look at the function of Muzhi in Tang China**," in late October, and concluded the busy month with a "**Spooky Song School**" Middle English Paleography and Pronunciation Group event on Halloween featuring **Medieval Ghost Stories**.

In November, MEST hosted a symposium on "**Forms of Catastrophe: Environmental Change in Medieval Literature**," featuring visiting faculty speakers **Rebecca Davis** (UC Irvine), **Peggy McCracken** (Michigan), **William Rhodes** (Pittsburgh); **Kellie Robertson** (Maryland), **Alfred Siewers** (Bucknell), and **Renee Trilling** (Illinois), during which visiting and local faculty explored the formal dynamics and challenges of representing catastrophe in medieval English and French literature.

Our final event of the 2018 year was a Winter Reading Circle and Potluck on December 7, in which MEST faculty and graduate students read passages from premodern texts while enjoying food and comradery with those in the IU medieval community.

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# MEDIA - EVAL



An interview with Sarah Ifft Decker,  
Visiting Lecturer in the Borns Jewish  
Studies Program, on her new podcast.

## **What is your podcast about and how did you get started on it?**

My podcast, Media-eval, looks at medieval and medieval-esque fantasy movies, tv series, and books. We talk about what they get right, what they get wrong, and what they tell us about how modern people see the medieval past. Through my teaching, I've realized how much medieval and fantasy media influence popular perceptions of the medieval world - when I was a TA for a medieval history survey as a PhD student in 2014, over half my students told me they were taking the course because they liked Game of Thrones. Because of that, I started to think that a podcast on the topic could draw an audience of both medievalists and non-medievalists. I had been chatting about inaccuracies in medieval films with my friend Ollie Brady, who is not a medievalist but loves medieval movies, so I asked if he would be willing to co-host the podcast with me. I think having a medievalist and a non-medievalist working together helps keep the tone colloquial and fun.

## **Tell us a little bit about the production of the podcast itself. What goes into the creation of an episode?**

Our podcast relies very heavily on online communication, as my co-host is in Ireland! We usually watch the movie or tv show together virtually, chatting about it over Facebook messenger. I use our chat as the basis for notes about the plot of the movie and any particularly striking issues, and then do some additional research. We go over things that they got right and wrong, and then discuss a particular historical fig-

ure or event related to the film in detail. I usually end up with 5-7 typed pages of notes, so that we can both recap the plot and discuss the history. I would describe the research as comparable to what you would do to prepare for teaching - I read a few things about the particular time period, sometimes dig up little details I find interesting, and often look for and sometimes quote related primary texts. To record the podcast, we video chat over Google Hangouts with headphones (so the computer only records each person's own audio) and record using Audacity. That creates two MP3 files, which can be perfectly synced in terms of timing, and easily edited together. Since I'm in charge of the research side, Ollie does the editing. In addition to editing our audio together, he also finds and edits in audio clips of the films. I've not done the editing myself, but it seems like a lot of careful, painstaking work, involving making sure to have consistent sound levels, checking that two audio tracks (or even three if we have a guest) sync together, and both finding and fitting in the clips.

## **How do your current academic interests influence your work on the podcast and vice versa? Have you discovered anything in the making of your podcast that you might not have from conventional academic research?**

Most mainstream medieval films initially seem a bit distant from my main research area - the majority of medieval historical fiction movies focus on England, often on either the Arthur or Robin Hood legends, and include a lot of battles. I'm a social and economic historian of the medieval Mediterranean, working on a project on Jew-

ish and Christian women's economic activities in late medieval Catalonia - not a well-represented area in medieval and medieval-esque fantasy media! As a gender historian, though, I spend a lot of time on the podcast talking about gender. One of my pet peeves about medieval films is that instead of taking medieval women on their own terms, they tend to make them either deeply submissive, or 20th/21st-century feminists plopped into the 13th century. As I can say from my own research, many medieval women negotiated within the gender system to accomplish their goals, and did very impressive things - but without overtly making claims about gender equality. On the other end of the spectrum, I also discuss how some medieval films reproduce some of the misogynist discourses of the Middle Ages - the Arthurian film *First Knight* suggests that rape culture and ideas about consent in the 1990s were not as distant from the medieval courtly love tradition as we might think - or follow earlier historiography in excluding or marginalizing women. Jewish history (my main teaching area, as well as an important part of my research) is often conspicuous by its absence; in a recent episode on the 2010 *Robin Hood* film I talked a bit about the exclusion of Jews from this and other *Robin Hood* stories - despite the fact that they were a major group financially exploited by *Robin Hood* villain King John. I've become increasingly interested in expanding my research and writing to incorporate medievalism, and I am considering writing an article on Jews and their absence in medieval media. The podcast has also been a fun opportunity to look into things that I might never have looked up otherwise, including oyster consumption

in medieval France, the trousseau brought by Isabella of France in her marriage to Edward II of England, and the slave trade in early medieval Ireland.

### **How can listeners get access to your podcast?**

We are hosted on SoundCloud (<https://soundcloud.com/user-834389367>) but you can also find us on iTunes, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts and most other podcatching apps. If you check out and enjoy the podcast, we always appreciate if listeners subscribe, rate, and review us - it makes it easier for other new listeners to find us! You can also follow us on Twitter @mediaevalpod, or email us at [media.evalpod@gmail.com](mailto:media.evalpod@gmail.com). We also have a Facebook group where we announce episodes and chat about medievalism and pop culture, and would love to have new members!

### **Are there any episodes you would recommend newcomers to the podcast check out first?**

I especially recommend our second episode, on *First Knight* - it was a really great opportunity to talk about a lot of interesting issues in both medieval history and medievalism, including (as mentioned above) the unfortunately timely topic of rape culture, consent, and the courtly love tradition, as well as how medieval movies almost always get the Middle Ages wrong by not taking religion seriously. A few upcoming (already recorded but not released) episodes that I'm especially looking forward to include *Tristan and Isolde* (2006), *Timeline* (2003) and *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (2017). Stay tuned!

## NEW FACULTY PROFILE

Akash Kumar is thrilled to have joined IU as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Italian after having been at UC Santa Cruz for two years, and before that having done a Ph.D. and postdoc at Columbia University. His research focuses on 13th-14th century Italian literature and has two major strands: the importing of Aristotelian science and philosophy in early Italian literature and the global dimensions of popular phenomena like the game of chess and traditions of storytelling as they find voice and representation in medieval Italy.



This semester, Dr. Kumar is teaching an interdisciplinary graduate seminar on Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Mediterranean Studies, as well as an undergraduate course (*Love and Death, Desire and Despair*) that builds on a reading of Petrarch's poetry to move all the way out to Terrance Hayes' 2018 collection *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin*.

Dr. Kumar is currently finishing up work on his book, *Dante's Elements*, which explores how poets in the century before Dante were radically experimenting with the language of Aristotelian science and provide an important way of reading Dante's own poetry as well as the trajectory of Italian culture. In the realm of digital humanities, he works on the website *Digital Dante* as well as a new web project called the Medieval Table, which seeks to build community and provide resources for the teaching and research of the Global Middle Ages.



# Note from the Director



Dear Friends of Medieval Studies,

Once again, Medieval Studies at IU has had a very busy fall. Our faculty and graduate students have taught dozens of classes on medieval topics and published many articles and books. The Institute has hosted academic lectures and conversations, organized events to deepen graduate and undergraduate learning, and sponsored activities that have invited IU undergrads and the Bloomington community to learn more about the Middle Ages, both with hands-on experiences with medieval bookmaking and discussions of the medievalism of contemporary video games. The coming months of 2019 hold some of our most beloved traditions: our Mediaevalia at the Lilly lecture, which this year will feature the president of the Medieval Academy of America, Dr. Lisa Fagin Davis, and our spring symposium, which draws medievalists from around the world to Bloomington for a weekend of stimulating talks and conversations and for our annual Reader's Circle Banquet. We hope that you will join us for these as for our other spring activities, which you will find listed on the next page of this newsletter.

I'm delighted to announce here some exciting news about a future event: We have been invited to host the 2021 meeting of the Medieval Academy of America here (April 15-18, 2021). We are delighted to have the opportunity to showcase our diverse strengths in medieval students to the several hundred participants that the meeting will bring to Bloomington. We have already begun to plan for this event, but watch this space and our website for updates.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shannon Gayk".

Shannon Gayk  
Director, Medieval Studies Institute

## First-Year Fellowship Recipient: Yilin La

Yilin is a first-year graduate student in Comparative Literature. Her research takes a comparative approach to religion and literature, investigating Islam through Persian literature and Biblical literature in English to consider how literature made religion ecumenical in premodern periods.



## MEST GSAC UPDATES

Coming up on February 15, MEST GSAC will host its annual **Transcribe-a-thon**, which will be led by **Elizabeth Hebbard** (FRIT). Professor Hebbard will give a one-hour lecture on the basic principles of transcription, followed by two hours of practice. The workshop is designed to be accessible to people who are new to paleography.

We are also looking forward to our 31st annual MEST Symposium this March 22-23, 2019. The theme of this year's symposium is **"On the Road: Medieval Travel and Travelers"** and promises an excellent lineup of papers and discussion over the course of two days. Also on symposium weekend is the annual **Reader's Circle**,

which highlights the broad range of medieval languages studied at Indiana University by faculty and graduate students. In the



past the Reader's Circle has included readings from as many as fifteen medieval languages, including Middle Chinese, Arabic, Occitan, and more!

We are furthermore excited to host this year's keynote lecturer, **Suzanne Akbari**, Professor of English and Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto and Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies.

*Medieval Studies Institute of Indiana University*

# Spring 2019 Calendar

**January 25-26**

Friday, 2-5:30pm GIS 3067  
Saturday, 9-12:30pm CAHI House

## **Jews, Christians, and Muslims: Religion and Belonging in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages**

A two-day workshop featuring visiting speakers Scott Johnson (University of Oklahoma), Maia Kotrosits (Denison University), and Sara Ronis (St. Mary's University) and local faculty and students: Asma Afsaruddin (NELC), Sarah Ifft Decker (Jewish Studies), Kevin Jacques (Religious Studies), Abby Kulisz (Religious Studies) and Nicolo Sassi (Religious Studies).

**February 7-8**

## **Mediaevalia at the Lilly**

### **Gathering Petals:**

### **Medieval Manuscript Fragments at the Lilly Library**

Featuring **Dr. Lisa Fagin Davis** (Medieval Academy of America)

**February 15**

## **GSAC's Annual "Transcribe-A-Thon"**

Friday, 3:00 - 6:00pm

Led by IU's **Elizabeth Hebbard** (FRIT)

**March 22-23**

## **31st Annual MEST Symposium**

### **On the Road: Medieval Travel and Travelers**

Featuring a keynote lecture by **Suzanne Akbari** (University of Toronto)

**April 18**

Lecture by **Dr. Margot Fassler**  
(Notre Dame)

**April 29**

12:00 - 1:30pm **End-of-the-Year Luncheon**

Coronation Room, IMU

# CONTACT MEST

The members of the administrative staff of MEST are:

**Shannon Gayk**, Director

**Andrew Woodworth**, Assistant to the Director

**Julie Chamberlin**, Special Projects Assistant

If you have communications you would like to have distributed as a general announcement in Medieval Studies, please contact Andrew at [MEST@INDIANA.EDU](mailto:MEST@INDIANA.EDU).

[MEST@INDIANA.EDU](mailto:MEST@INDIANA.EDU): for general correspondence with the Institute, or for administrative matters with Andrew, or newsletter and publicity issues with Julie.

[MESTDIR@INDIANA.EDU](mailto:MESTDIR@INDIANA.EDU): for direct and confidential communications with the Director; this is an administrative account we have established that will transfer from director to director. Please note that [DIRMEST@INDIANA.EDU](mailto:DIRMEST@INDIANA.EDU) is the personal account of another faculty member.

In addition to these two email accounts, we also maintain six distribution lists: one for undergraduate students, one for graduate students, one for alumni, one for faculty, one for core faculty, and one for community members.

If you would like to be added to any of those lists, please contact Andrew at [MEST@INDIANA.EDU](mailto:MEST@INDIANA.EDU).

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## *Help Support the Work of the Medieval Studies Institute*

**Why?** Your tax-deductible financial contribution allows MEST to continue to provide a diverse array of lectures, programs, and fellowships that promote the scholarship and teaching of the Middle Ages.

**What?** Gifts can be directed to any following funds:

- *The Medieval Studies Institute General Fund*: Your donation will provide general support to the Institute, helping us host events, invite speakers, and continue with our outreach.
- *The Medieval Review Support Fund*: Gifts will support the Medieval Review, an open-access journal that publishes reviews of books in medieval studies.
- *The C. Clifford Flanigan Awards*: Your donation will help support medievalist graduate students.
- *The Shirley Jean Cox Undergraduate Fellowships*: Your donation will help fund our two undergraduate prizes (for the best thesis and paper in medieval studies) and several grants to support undergraduate summer study, study abroad, or internships.

**How?**

- *By mail*: Checks made out to “Indiana University Foundation” may be mailed to The Medieval Studies Institute, 650 Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405
- *On our website*: <https://medieval.indiana.edu/about/alumni-giving/index.html>
- *Recurring bank or payroll deductions*: Perhaps the easiest way to offer ongoing support of the work of the Institute, you can make a recurring monthly, quarterly, or annual gift that is deducted from your credit card or bank account. IU Employees can also set up recurring donations through payroll deduction. See <https://www.myiu.org/recurring-gift>.