

## Editor's Remarks

Scholars in the past often defined the Middle Ages as a period confined to European history. They studied it in terms of the origins of western institutions and culture, and then often understood it in terms of the birth of modernity. Scholarship and pedagogy of the Middle Ages now often looks well beyond Europe at all levels of education and research.

Over the last generation, medievalists have come to recognize that European developments cannot be understood in isolation from the wider world, and have moved from analysis of “origins” to the exchange and circulation of goods, people, and ideas. Initially, this meant a shift to study of the Mediterranean basin: the Byzantine Empire and Islamic communities in North Africa, Iberia, and the Levant. A focus on the Mediterranean as a whole system broadened the outlook to include other parts of the world and other regional systems.

These studies have sometimes furthered a “rise of the West” interpretation that emphasizes merchants, missionaries, and crusaders going out into the wider world to trade, convert and conquer. Much rich new research instead stresses connections and demonstrates the limitations of a Eurocentric approach and of grand narratives more generally. Study of inter-connected regions has been fruitful and beneficial. For example, the Mongol empire and the spread of revolutionary technologies, including silk and paper manufacture, fostered a reorientation of Asian, European, and Mediterranean economies in the thirteenth 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In this context of new approaches and methodologies, the journal will foster work in a number of innovative fields. As examples of many such endeavors, we note research on ancient DNA that is changing our understanding of the movement of peoples as well as of epidemic diseases. We appreciate that critical comparative studies are now becoming essential to our understandings of commonalities and distinctive developments, such as uses of writing practices including public inscriptions on stone, comparative scribal cultures, and societies without writing. Another example is the evolving study of people living in weak states. These are drawing on historical linguistics and other methods and can lead to developing comparative analyses of understandings of identity, including gender and sexuality.

Exciting research on the worlds of the Middle Ages is accumulating but, thus far, its impact has been severely limited by its detachment from pedagogy. Scholars are eagerly consuming the new discoveries and enjoying the frisson of having their sense of the past complicated, but this complexity has not yet transformed the worlds of the Middle Ages as offered in classrooms. world history surveys in the last decade have become a staple of high school, college, and university curricula, but textbooks treating the Middle Ages tend to be traditional narratives of the rise and fall of civilizations.

This expanded view of scholarship and pedagogy of the Middle Ages and a desire to challenge traditional narratives and approaches to pedagogy inspired the creation of a University of California Multicampus Research Program entitled “The Middle Ages in the Wider World” in 2016. This program is currently funding graduate and faculty research projects at three University of California campuses, Berkeley, Davis, and Santa Barbara, and supports collaborative and engaging workshops. These research projects have addressed questions on the selling of people in Japanese legal codes, Mayan cities, and the Saharan-Mediterranean slave trade. Additionally, the program sponsors investigations into possible pedagogical innovations and integrations that bear particular impact on the classroom. These important curricular discussions will seek to involve not only students and faculty but also authors and publishers of textbooks in Western Civilization, World History, and Medieval History.

As University of California faculty began developing this Multicampus Research Program focusing on “The Middle Ages and the Wider World,” the notion of launching a new journal with a similar theme began to take shape, leading to the development of a journal proposal for University of California Press and ultimately resulting in the launch of *Journal of Medieval Worlds*.

With a goal of addressing a wider view of medieval studies, geographic regions covered by the journal will encompass Japan, China, Central Asia, South Asia, South East Asia, East and West Africa, Oceans and Seas, the Americas, North Africa, the Middle East and Levant, and Europe, including Northern and Eastern Europe. Possible topics of focus may include bioarcheology, ecology, climate change, state/stateless, religious conversion, gender and sexuality, animal and human plagues and diseases, food, diet and agricultural practices, architecture, comparative medievalisms, nationalisms, and comparative travel accounts. *JMW* will primarily cover the period from 750-1600, but will accommodate papers whose coverage begins earlier and extends into later years as appropriate. Because it facilitates research on the Americas, the journal may also consider work on the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Each quarterly issue of *JMW* seeks to feature a diverse collection of peer reviewed articles, book reviews, and/or review essays, eventually including exhibition reviews, essays highlighting ongoing research projects, and a recurring feature on pedagogy. With its online-only format, the journal endeavors to support multimedia content that enhances and contributes to scholarly discussion and debate.

*JMW* aims to meet a significant multidisciplinary and pedagogical need not necessarily addressed in other journals serving the field, emphasizing original research and its uses in courses in medieval history and the medieval portion of world history surveys. The suggestive pedagogical piece in this issue by Jeffrey Fleisher of Rice University, “Building Medieval Worlds: A Classroom Experience in Digitally Reconstructing Ancient Buildings,” tracks the development and implementation of a course comparing housing practices in East Africa and classical Rome.

The medieval portion of world history surveys is particularly challenging both because the secondary material is often scattered and because there is often no overriding narrative. One long-term goal is to establish the journal as key resource for scholars and educators developing this portion of world history courses.

As many of the central issues in medieval world history are often best addressed by scholarship that draws on methods and evidence from both the sciences and humanities, multidisciplinary focus is an essential component of the journal. We recognize and hope to fill the need to build practices and structures that facilitate connections, collaborations among international scholars across fields and disciplines in the humanities and social sciences that often are not in conversation. The article by Geraldine Heng, “An Ordinary Ship and Its Stories of Early Globalism: World Travel, Mass Production, and Art in the Global Middle Ages,” brings together in an interdisciplinary manner research from archaeology, art history, and commercial trade between East Asia and into to the Indian Ocean.

Through our efforts to bring together an international community of scholars, we hope that the *Journal of Medieval Worlds* will provide a valuable publication venue for bringing together in one journal medieval-oriented papers that previously may have found themselves published in more regional or subject-specific journals. This will make such research and publication more visible to a wider audience. Our project’s specific aim is to bridge this gap by putting the formulation and conduct of research initiatives in close dialogue with critical evaluation and revision of the narratives about the medieval past that frame our courses and textbooks. Two challenging aspects of medieval world history are finding a clear research focus and developing teaching strategies. To set aside grand narratives like the rise of the West requires framing focused alternative questions and narratives. A related challenge that is crucial—and opens fascinating avenues for research—is finding analytic categories that do not privilege Western views of history. Scholars have commented on Western approaches to world history as hegemonic, focused on states and empires, intertwined with imperialism and colonization, marginalizing indigenous histories and subaltern peoples.

We are delighted to launch *Journal of Medieval Worlds* at a time when medieval scholarship is at a remarkable moment of challenge and opportunity. The field is undergoing a transformation as scholars turn away from a narrow focus on Western Europe, recognizing that European developments cannot be understood in isolation from the wider world. Currents of mutual influence and exchange—as well as conflict—ranged far beyond the Mediterranean to include Islamic scholars in Timbuktu or debates over religion at the courts of the Mongol khans. The result is not only a richer understanding of our past but of the complex medieval origins of aspects of the contemporary world, not only sectarian differences but shared developments like institutions of higher learning and diplomacy. This is important: contemporary events have underscored the pressing need for scholars to communicate to students and the broader public deeper understandings of the links and tensions among world cultures, understandings grounded in their long histories of interaction, influence, and conflict. These understandings can no longer be Eurocentric. The journal as a publication seeks to support, inspire, and engage with these new understandings and invites scholars and educators to submit their work to be part of this experience and enterprise.

Sincerely,

*Edward D. English*