



# LEEDS INTERNATIONAL MEDIEVAL CONGRESS

## August 2020 Newsletter



## Leeds IMC welcomes over 3,000 delegates to online Congress

Now, that's a headline we never thought we'd be writing when lockdown finally arrived in the UK in mid-March!

But, somehow, medieval studies has prevailed and vIMC 2020 welcomed a global audience of medievalists to an unprecedented virtual experiment. Hosted online via the brand-new University of Leeds events app, delegates particularly enjoyed the 'enthusiasm of presenters and delegates' and the 'international' atmosphere as well as 'the ability to take part without leaving home!'

Virtual IMC featured over 400 speakers, 3,200 delegates (from over 60 countries!), 30+ publisher stands, and more than 20 craft and marketplace stalls. Over five days, the most popular sessions were viewed 3,800 times in the app, with top publishers receiving 1,000+ views.

### Keynote Lectures

This year's IMC was of course a little different, and both Keynote lectures were pre-recorded. The Congress opened on Monday with introductory remarks for the virtual conference made by Andrew Thorpe, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Cultures, and the Director of the Congress Axel Müller, who warmly invited everyone to the virtual event despite the strange times we are all facing.

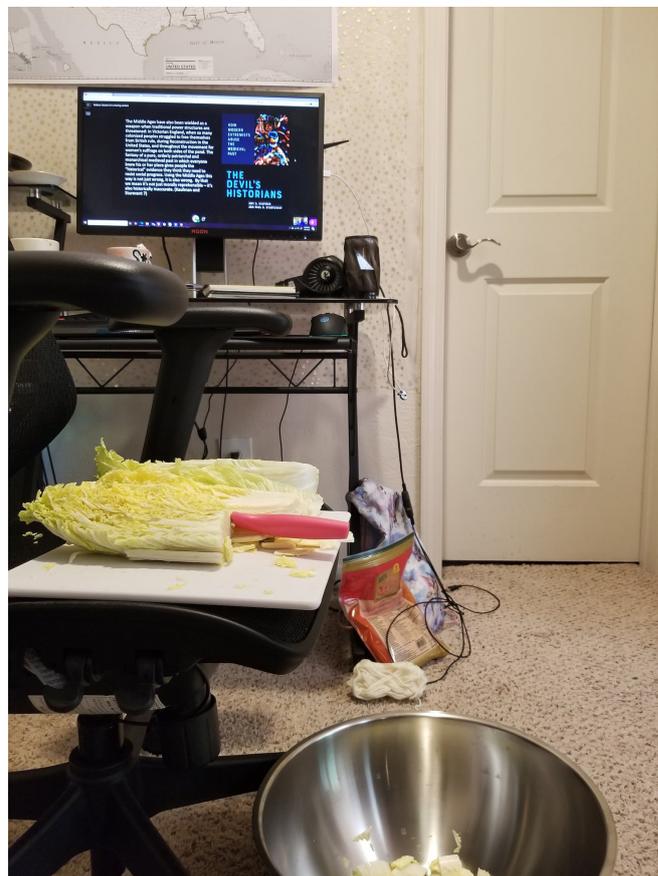
Ana Echevarría Arsuaga (Departamento de Historia Medieval y Ciencias y Técnicas Historiográficas, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid) gave the first keynote on 'Perceived Boundaries: Managing Religious Diversity in Iberian Medieval Towns'. Her paper considered the urban boundaries

*Above: 'Where have all the medievalists gone?' asks the lone customer in Old Bar. Many thanks to the anonymous delegate who submitted this via the vIMCphoto-sharing app.*

between religious and social groups due to long existent Muslim and Jewish populations in Iberia living under Christian rule. Ana's paper was introduced by Eva Frojmovic (School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies / Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Leeds).

Our second keynote of virtual IMC was given by Hyunhee Park (Department of History, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York), on 'Open Space and Flexible Borders - Theorizing Maritime Space through Pre-Modern Sino-Islamic Connections'. She was graciously introduced by Jo van Steenburgen (Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies / Department of Languages & Cultures – Near East & Islamic World, Universiteit Gent), and spoke on the connections between Afro-Eurasian societies over flexible marine borders. Park evaluates how these vast maritime trading routes facilitated wide cultural exchange when compared to land-based commercial activity.

We are pleased that as both Keynote lectures were pre-recorded, [we have been able to make them publicly available for a limited time here](#) for you to watch (or re-watch) these lectures with closed captioning.



Above: Multitasking has never been this easy at the IMC! Thanks to Jillian Kern (@Jillian\_kern) for sharing their set up with us on Twitter.

## Looking to the Future: IMC 2021

We are delighted that this year's virtual experiment has provided an opportunity for delegates around the world – and their cats! – to come together and share their research in spite of restrictions on travel and national lockdowns. Virtual IMC 2020 was a product of the exceptional circumstances as COVID-19 made its presence felt around the world.

As we turn to the future and begin planning for 2021, there are many things which we don't yet know about the pandemic and its impact on large events like the IMC with a global audience. COVID-19 restrictions will be a key factor in planning for next year, not least the ability for colleagues from outside the UK to be able to travel without quarantine restrictions. vIMC saw around 60% of delegates coming from outside the UK and the loss of this international aspect would be a true loss to the vibrancy of the Congress.

Beyond these obvious difficulties, COVID-19 will also impact all aspects of our planning. Current social distancing regulations would have a significant



Above: Delegates also shared purchases from past IMCs, including this beautiful pendant bought by Maja Backvall (@SkribaFel) from Gemmeus (@Gemmeus). Thanks Maja for sharing.

impact on on-campus session room and venue capacities, with many IMC rooms no longer fit for purpose under the UK's current 1 metre+ social distancing rules.

As you may be aware, the core IMC team spend all year preparing for the next IMC. At present, we are uncertain whether the traditional IMC annual schedule will be feasible. We do not yet have any indication from the University when we may be able to return to campus and what controls may be in place when we do. This may well impact key dates for a whole host of IMC activities, not least the production of the programme and opening of registration.

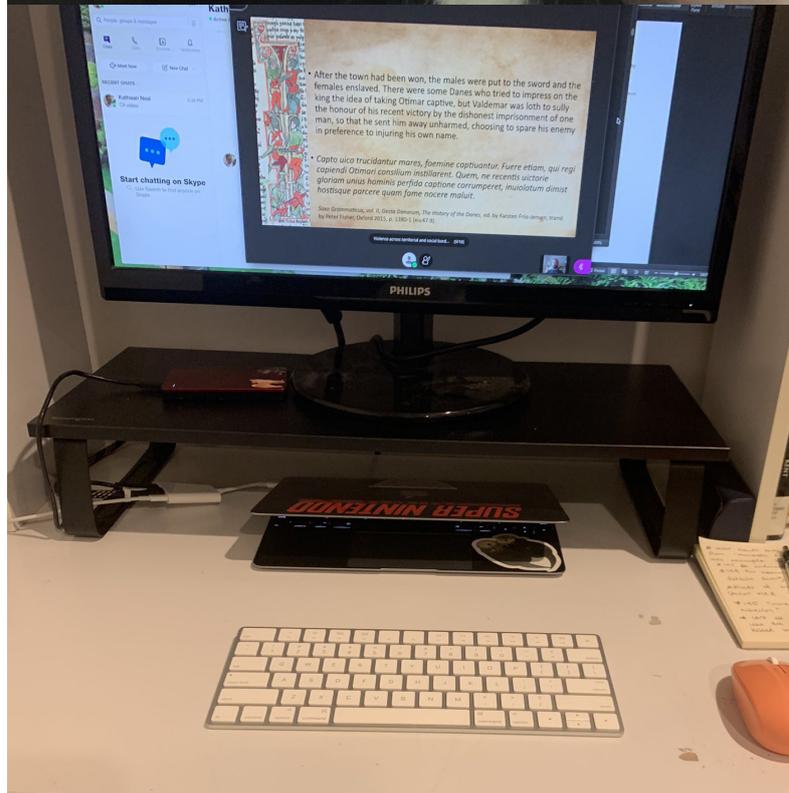
There are also important financial considerations. The success and scale of previous IMCs was a vital factor in securing University financial support for the staffing, technical, and other associated costs for this year's free event. As we look to the future, ensuring the ongoing financial viability of IMC – as an in-person, virtual, or hybrid event – is a critical consideration as we begin logistical planning in the straitened financial circumstances of the post-COVID-19 recession.

We cannot yet know what the 'new normal' will look like in a year's time. As we work this out, we will keep delegates fully informed via [our website](#). As we move forward, we are keen to ensure that the widest possible medievalist community is included in our plans as we work out how the ongoing global crisis impacts on our preparations for IMC 2021.

## IMC 2021: Climates and Sustainability

With next year's special thematic focus on 'Climates' we are keen to ensure that IMC 2021 is not a step backwards in terms of our commitment to sustainability.

Prior to COVID-19, we were working with our colleagues in the Conference and Events team to ensure that the IMC and other events hosted on the University of Leeds campus were as sustainable as possible. This included a commitment to eliminating unnecessary single-use plastic. We were delighted that over 600



Above: It's been a bumper year for virtual IMC cats! Including, above, from top: Tasha, posing for the camera; Blanket, engrossed in a vIMC PowerPoint. Thanks to Rebecca Underwood (@DrUnderwood) and Rosa Martona (@RosaMartorana) for sharing these.

registrants for the in-person event prior to its cancellation chose to buy reusable keep cups. We hope to offer this – and other – products at registration for IMC 2021.

Prior to lockdown, we were also working with colleagues across the University to investigate possible ways to facilitate carbon offsetting for delegates who choose (and are able to) travel to Leeds. We hope to update you all further on this prior to registration opening.

We are also hoping to continue developing our own Sustainability Policy, which will help us better understand and identify areas where we can do better.

Virtual IMC has taught us much about the benefits and limitations of virtual platforms to facilitate a large, international event. Feedback from delegates has shown that in-person encounters remain essential for 69% of our delegates and we will be doing all we can to support this sustainably.

[You can read the Call for Papers for IMC 2021, where the special focus will be 'Climates', at the back of this newsletter.](#)

## Bookfair

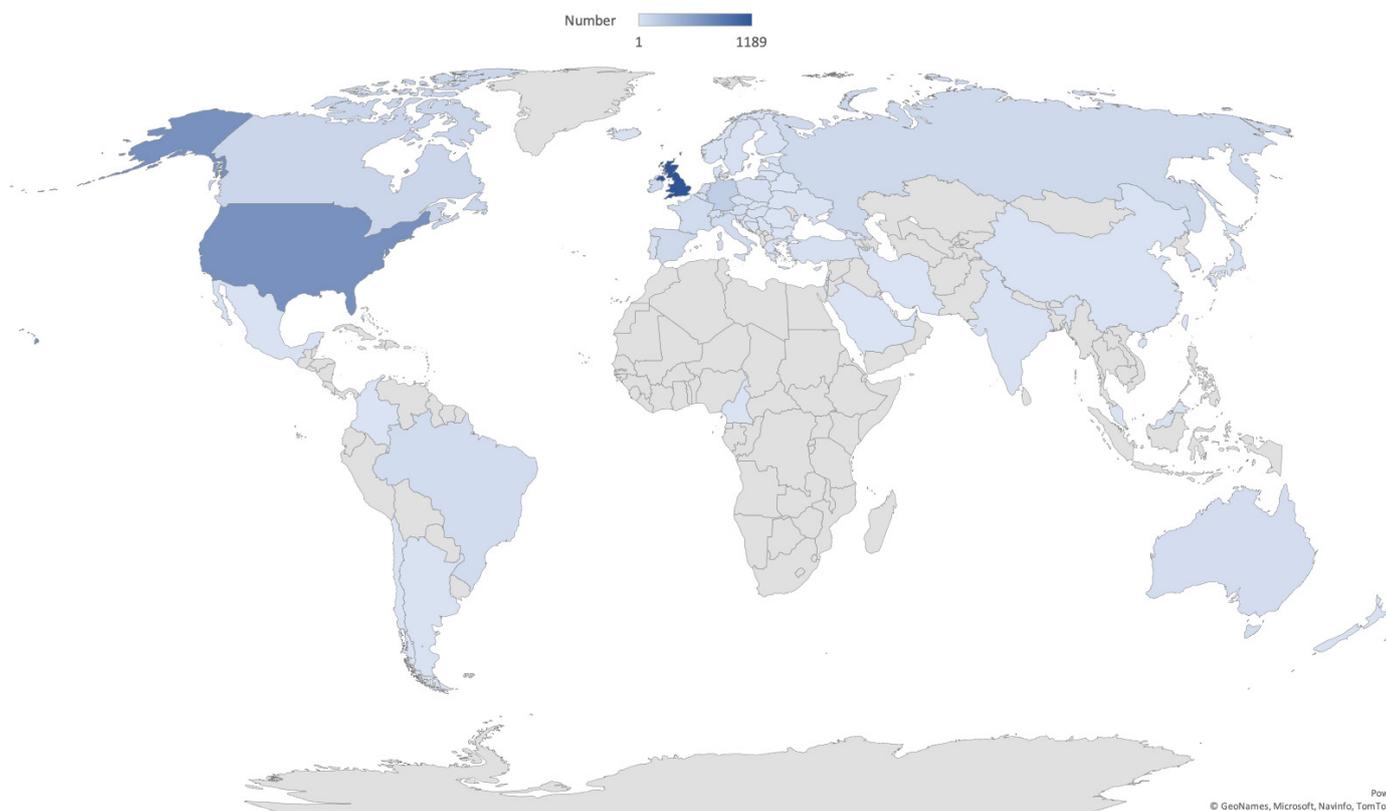
Always an integral part of the Leeds experience, the IMC Bookfair took place virtually this year! Over 30 publishers from all over the world were in attendance, bringing the latest titles, special offers, and fringe events, including book launches and opportunities to meet editors. The Bookfair proved popular as ever, with huge engagement on the app from attendees: 12,000 views of the Bookfair page in the app, driven no doubt by the exclusive IMC offers for our delegates!

We were also delighted to welcome around 20 second-hand and antiquarian booksellers, craft stalls, and local and national historical and archaeological organisations to our virtual marketplace.

## Sessions

Although on a smaller scale than the planned in-person event, virtual IMC saw 19 parallel sessions with over 400 speakers. These included a wide range of traditional academic sessions, as well as

Registrations at vIMC by Country



Above: did you wonder where everyone was dialling in from? This map shows the country given at registration by all 3,200 IMC delegates. In total, delegates connected with vIMC from over 60 countries around the world.



Above: Daisy Black, whose Facebook Live performance 'Broken Shells' proved particularly popular.

four round tables. We were delighted that many sessions or series of sessions were able to transfer to the virtual format intact.

Where this was not possible, the IMC team created new sessions, creating new connections between sometimes disparate papers. The limitations imposed by COVID-19 – a fixed number of speakers keen to give virtual presenting a go – provided an opportunity for the medievalist community to come together and learn from each other across disciplinary lines.

## Events, Workshops, and Exhibitions

Workshops and events are often a highlight of the IMC experience. In spite of being virtual, IMC 2020 was no exception, offering a range of performances and interactive events. The ever-popular Medieval Society Pub Quiz returned, with our quiz masters asking a range of questions to a delighted crowd, all of them competing with one another for eternal glory via the Blackboard Chat function.

On Monday night, Anastasija Ropa (Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Riga) and Edgar Rops (Independent Scholar, Riga) offered an interactive demonstration of

Cyrillic Calligraphy from their living room in Latvia. On Thursday, James Baillie (Universität Wien) hosted the first ever IMC Storytelling Circle, featuring riddles, songs, and stories from a wide range of volunteer tellers.

Also as part of the IMC events programme, Daisy Black (University of Wolverhampton) performed 'Broken Shells', a lively and feminist-inflected retelling of Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale', live on Facebook. Combining songs of the sea with the adventures of Custance as she is driven in her boat from one place to another by events beyond her control, Daisy's performance was given in aid of [Hope Projects](#), a charity that provides housing and help for homeless people refused by the UK asylum system.

And no IMC would be complete without its iconic disco! Hosted by our very own Alaric Hall (Director of the Institute for Medieval Studies, University of Leeds) and with music provided by [South Leeds Community Radio](#), participants were regaled not only with their favourite tunes but also with animations, film clips, and interactive quizzes.

Using the vIMC app, delegates could also watch pre-recorded performances of music and storytelling, visit virtual exhibitions at the Royal Armouries and the National Archives, and even sign up for virtual medieval embroidery workshops run by IMC stalwart Tanya Bentham (Opus Anglicanum).



Above: There aren't many discos you can bring your hamster to! Thanks to Daisy Privett for sharing this shot of her plus one for the disco.



Above, from left: The University of Leeds campus looking sparse without the traditional medieval goings-on, thanks to Kyly Walker (@Kyly\_Walker); a crowd of delegates enjoy a non-socially-distanced combat display by re-enactors 3 Swords.

## Fringe Sessions

For the first time, we invited participants to organise their own online fringe events, using whatever platform they felt best suited their activity. We were amazed by the number of fringe events proposed (over 30) and by the range of activities on offer. From book launches and networking meetings to nalbinding, collage workshops to virtual battlefield tours, every aspect of medieval studies was represented. We would like to thank the organisers of these events for doing so much to ensure that virtual IMC 2020 was such a great success!

On Wednesday of the IMC, Leeds's own Institute for Medieval Studies hosted a meeting about MA and doctoral study at the University of Leeds. We welcomed guests from Europe, the Americas, and Asia, including both prospective students and staff from other universities who just wanted to know more about what we do when we're not at the IMC. Discussions

included the IMS's commitment to teaching medieval languages, the internships we offer in connection with both the IMC and the International Medieval Bibliography.

## Bursaries

We are extremely grateful to the donors who have contributed to the IMC Bursary Fund for next year's Congress. We have already received over £2,500 in donations. If you would like to donate to the fund and help ensure marginalised scholars can attend future IMCs, [visit the Bursaries and Awards pages of our website](#).

We are also keen to hear from individuals and organisations who would like to support scholars. If you are interested in contributing in this way, please get in touch by emailing [imc@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:imc@leeds.ac.uk).

[Applications for bursaries to attend IMC 2021 are now open and the application form can be found here.](#)



International Medieval  
Congress - University of  
Leeds



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Above, from left: The University of Leeds campus looking sparse without the traditional medieval goings-on, thanks to Kyly Walker (@Kyly\_Walker); a similar scene from 2019's Congress as delegates bustle about University Square during a break.

## Congress App Update

Whilst we hope to offer an in-person congress in 2021, due to continuing uncertainty as to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions and regulations, we are also investigating options for other formats should this be necessary including in-person, virtual, and hybrid options.

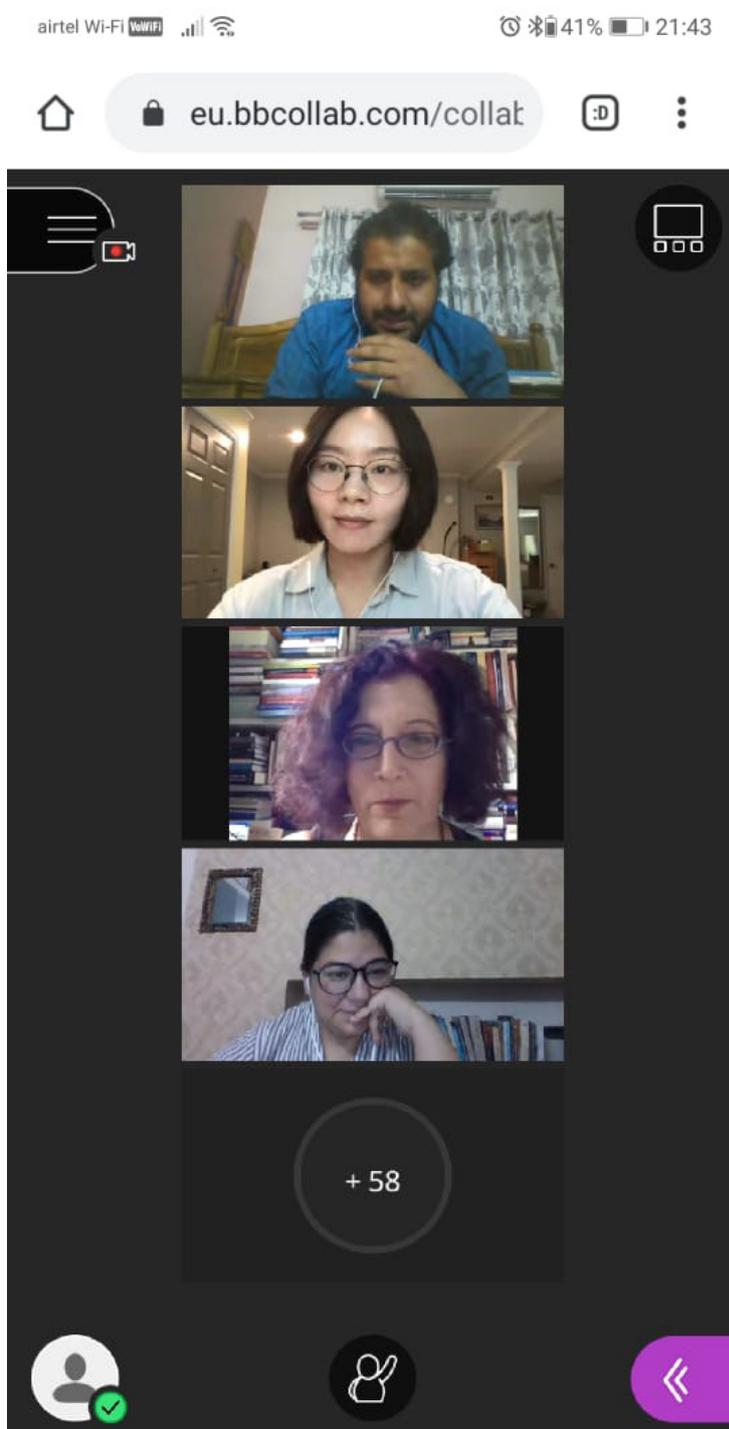
The app used for this year's Congress was principally designed for smaller events hosted on-campus by our colleagues in the Conferencing and Events team. Technical limitations mean that it is unlikely to ever be fully suitable for the traditional in-person IMC, with over 2,500 speakers.

As the scope, nature and format of IMC 2021 becomes clearer in the coming months, we hope that we will be able to tell you more about any options for virtual presentation and participation, and the relationship between these options and the in-person event.

## Thank You

Virtual IMC couldn't have happened without the help, support and dedication of our team: Angharad, Axel, Corin, Elsa, Emma, Fiona, Hector, Iain, Jacob, John, and Marta.

Right: The speakers at the 'Global Middle Ages' session. Thanks to Aniket Chetty (@aniketc44) for sharing this image with us.





# Delegate Feedback Survey 2020

As ever, we are grateful to the over 700 of you who completed the IMC evaluation questionnaire. Here's a summary of what you told us!

- 43% of delegates attended the IMC for the first time. This is around 8% higher than recent years.
  - Over 90 delegates had attended 10 or more previous IMCs, with some having attended all 27!
  - 92% of delegates rated the academic quality of the programme good or excellent.
  - 90% of delegates feel that the IMC is a high quality forum for sharing the latest research in medieval studies.
  - 86% of delegates felt the IMC has a strong sense of community.
  - 84% of respondents found the systems easy to use.
- Feedback for virtual IMC 2020 has been very positive, with many delegates commenting on the sense of community that they experienced given the scale of the IMC and the sudden transition to an online-only event.
- In particular, attendees commented on friendly and vibrant atmosphere delegates created amongst themselves by being open to one another, sharing and comparing notes and work, and interacting with and welcoming new people in the virtual sessions.
- As ever, many delegates told us about particular sessions they enjoyed - a testament to the vitality of medieval studies in spite of the pandemic. The reduced programme also meant that delegates reported substantially fewer clashes between sessions they would like to attend, likely a result of the slimmed

## IMC 2021 - Key Dates

Paper Proposal Deadline: Saturday 31 August 2020

Session Proposal Deadline: Monday 30 September 2020

Submit your Proposal: [www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/imc2020/](http://www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/imc2020/)

Read our Proposal Guidelines: [www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/proposals/proposal-guidelines/](http://www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/proposals/proposal-guidelines/)

The IMC welcomes session and paper proposals relating to all areas of medieval studies. Proposals can be submitted in all major languages.

Here's a taste of what our delegates loved about virtual IMC 2020...

"The fact that it happened at all! So much else has vanished altogether this year - it was great that you at Leeds managed to put the vIMC together."

"I enjoyed the collegiate atmosphere... Having not been to an academic conference before, I had not realised that the atmosphere is so supportive and just fun!"

"The engagement with fellow participants after months of lockdown."

"The ability to attend sessions from my living room. The papers were good and the Q&As were truly excellent."

"The accessibility. It was amazing to know that over 100 people saw my talk, which would never have been possible at an in-person conference!"

"I was pleasantly surprised to experience how strongly the sense of community that I find so typical for the IMC was present even in an online event."

"Seeing people from around the world was amazing, and getting the chance to present my research for feedback was invaluable."

"As the only medievalist at my institution, I count on the interaction with colleagues provided each summer at the IMC. I was *very* grateful that the organizers facilitated an option for participants this year, but I sorely missed the in-person interactions."

down programme necessitated by virtual delivery.

Many hope that in-person IMC will be able to return for 2021, and look forward to meeting their new-found friends in Leeds. For most people, this was their first experience of attending a digital conference, though those who had attended digital conferences before felt that the IMC was more than a match for other virtual events.

Delegates found that the IMC team were very supportive, with 91% of respondents rating the technical support provided as good or excellent.

In these unprecedented times, we were heartened to read that delegates felt invigorated and energised about their own research after attending virtual IMC.

Finally, don't forget that we will be publishing regular updates as we know more about how IMC 2021 will operate. [You can find out the latest by visiting our website.](#)



Above: Always keep your swords and axes handy when attending virtual presentations! Thanks to Joshua T Phillips (@JTitusP) for sharing this.

# About the Institute for Medieval Studies

## Medieval Research and Teaching at Leeds: A Unique Environment

Leeds combines exceptional interdisciplinary teaching and research with access to the historic riches of medieval Yorkshire.

The Institute for Medieval Studies (IMS) is the home of the International Medieval Congress as well as the International Medieval Bibliography, the world's foremost interdisciplinary bibliography of the Middle Ages. Together, they provide opportunities for students to combine paid work experience with academic practice. Formed in 1967, the IMS today is one of the largest communities of medievalists in the UK, with over 50 members of staff and associated specialists.

The University's world-class library has the best medieval resources in the north of England including the archive of the Yorkshire Archaeological & Historical Society, important collections of medieval manuscripts and rare books. [Many of the medieval manuscripts of the Library can now be viewed online.](#)

The libraries of the Royal Armouries and the British Library at Boston Spa are close at hand. Cooperation with the Royal Armouries and Leeds City Museum enriches teaching, research, and career development opportunities.

## MA in Medieval Studies

Full-time (12 months) and part-time (24 months)

The MA in Medieval Studies programme is made up of a core of language and skills modules, which give students an excellent grounding for postgraduate study, plus a range of interdisciplinary, team-taught, and single-discipline optional modules, and an extended piece of supervised independent research.

Our teaching and supervision expertise spans 1300 years and enables the student to study either a closely interrelated set of subjects or to spread their interests across an outstanding range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields.

There are also specialised modules offering language teaching for beginners in Old and Middle English, Old French, Old Norse, and Middle High German.

The MA Medieval Studies programme provides an excellent basis for further work at doctoral level, either full-time or part-time, including key skills for research on medieval topics.

## PhD Research in Medieval Studies

The IMS supervises doctoral research on interdisciplinary medieval topics, across a wide range of subjects. Research degrees in the IMS are structured so that, as well as embarking on their doctoral project, in the first year of study students take the following taught modules in foundational skills for research:

Research Methods and Bibliography  
Medieval Latin

A modern foreign language for reading scholarship on the research topic

Usually, IMS research students have two co-supervisors from different relevant disciplines. They work with the students to shape the project and give bibliographical and methodological guidance and will continue to read and advise throughout their research. Each student presents an annual paper on their work in progress at a research seminar in the IMS. Research students are also encouraged to give papers at national and international conferences.

## International Medieval Bibliography: Call for Contributors

The editorial team is looking for individuals or organisations to become contributors to join its existing range of partners throughout the world. Contributors take responsibility for identifying and cataloguing publications relating to specific subjects or geographical areas, and are rewarded with free subscriptions to IMB (online or print), other free publications, and additional benefits.

Contributors are sought for national, regional, and local history in France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Portugal, Serbia, Israel, Lithuania, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Korea, and the Arab world. Thematic contributors (who may be based anywhere) are particularly sought for art history, humanism, Italian literature, French literature, German literature, Jewish Studies, linguistics, numismatics, and music. For more information contact the Editorial Director, Alan Murray: [a.v.murray@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.v.murray@leeds.ac.uk).

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