NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

MESSAGES

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF SMFS
Welcome SMFS members old and new! This is my first message to you as incoming President of SMFS. For those of you who don’t know me yet, I’m a historian of medieval women’s healthcare and have worked extensively in philology and cultural history. For more than ten years, I was a member of the North Carolina Research Group on Medieval and Early Modern Women, and am now affiliated with the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. I have always considered the interdisciplinary dialogue that SMFS facilitates one of its chief attractions.

With this issue, we celebrate not simply a New Year, but the 20th anniversary of SMFS’s founding! Yes, it was in 1986 that our four founding mothers—Jane Burns, Beth Robertson, Roberta Krueger, and Bonnie Wheeler—conceived of some regular way people working on feminist approaches to the Middle Ages could gather and communicate among themselves. I joined by 1987 or 1988, I think, and I still have all my back issues of those early newsletters. (Remember how those were our “lifeline” before there was the Internet or e-mail?)

SMFS-sponsored sessions this coming spring at Kalamazoo will commemorate 20 years of SMFS with five panels reflecting on how feminist medievalist scholarship has developed in this period, as well as a very special roundtable. The roundtable, called “Founding Mothers,” will feature a discussion by the four pioneering women who founded SMFS. Our panels will concentrate on medieval feminist scholarship. One will be devoted to theory, another to teaching, and a third to the archives—the subject of MFF Issues 39 & 40. We are also co-sponsoring a session with the International Anchoritic Society on Christine Carpenter. A “spin-off” of SMFS, the Medieval Foremothers Society, will also be sponsoring two sessions to honor one of our living legends, Mary Martin McLaughlin, an early pioneer in feminist studies of Heloise.
SMFS also celebrates the first year in its new institutional home, Minot State University in North Dakota, where we are now under the able editorship of Michelle Sauer. During the coming year, Michelle will be revamping the SMFS website. In addition, SMFS has now added a new position to its Advisory Board—Information Technology (IT) Manager. This new member of the board will advise us on managing the medfem-l listserv (which will be coming under SMFS management) and other ways SMFS can increase its presence on the World Wide Web and better serve scholars around the world who share our interests.

Please join us at our Business Meeting at Kalamazoo (scheduled for 5:00 PM; Friday, May 5), which will include a cash bar. As has been our tradition for several years, we will also be sponsoring a film: this year, *The Anchoress*, on Friday night. Look for details about our annual SMFS Banquet later. And do feel free to contact me or any other member of the SMFS Advisory Board with your ideas about how the organization can better serve your needs.

Finally, please join me in thanking our officers who are stepping down now after two years (or more!) of devoted service: our retiring President, Ann Matter (who is not even "fading away," since she will edit two special issues of MFF this year); Advisory Board members Montserrat Cabré and Bruce Holsinger; and our inaugural graduate student representative, Myra Struckmeyer.

*Monica Green*

**MESSAGES FROM THE SPECIAL EDITION EDITORS**

*Back to the Archives: A Co-Editor’s Introduction to MFF Vol. 40*

In this issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum*, we follow up on the theme of Issue 39, medieval feminist scholars working with archival and manuscript sources. We offer our readers six essays here. The first two, by Michelle M. Sauer and E. R. Truitt, give some valuable basic information about the craft of working with the primary materials of medieval studies, whether in American book and document repositories, or in the often more challenging situations posed by European archives and manuscript libraries. The advice offered by these essays is useful even for those of us who have spent years in such collections: nothing is more important for scholars who want to see primary materials than just remembering that preparation, courtesy and patience pay off (as my students say) "majorly."
The second set of essays is more closely focused, as each deals with a specific type of collection or with collections in specific regions of Europe. Katherine French takes us on a search for archival material in England, in local record societies, and national and regional archives such as the Public Record Office in London. Claire Waters provides a “Rough Guide” for navigating the bureaucratic intricacies of the Bibliothèque Nationale (BN) in Paris, with very specific information about the steps one takes to get and return a document. This advice should be taken immediately by those who have projects based partly in the BN, since the word on the medieval street is that the Salle des Manuscrits is about to close for a period of months or even years. Elizabeth Haluska-Rausch offers us her expertise on research in far less well-known collections than those in London and Paris, the small libraries and archival repositories of Languedoc. This essay reminds us that there are many scholarly benefits in traveling to the region where one’s documents were made, even in a field where many things are already in print and available in an edited version much closer to home.

In the last section, we have two essays about working with primary sources in specific fields. Monica Green explains the way one goes about identifying a topic in medieval medical history, and then how to find and understand the primary documents from this field. The medical tradition tells us how pre-modern people understood embodiment, a topic that is increasingly part of the history of medieval women. Finally, an essay by Jennifer Borland gives a perspective from the field of Art History for working on a different type of “document”: the monuments of grotesque sculptures of women known as Sheela-na-gigs, a type of image found scattered around England and Ireland that has drawn the attention of feminists because of the apparent bold sexuality they display. Borland shows how reading such images involves the same sort of attention to original context that scholars find in the archives, although, to be sure, with a different and more countrified set of obstacles to overcome!

Several of these essays end with a meditation about what is “feminist” about this type of work. Isn’t it more appropriate, one could ask, for feminist medievalists to be dedicating themselves to the theoretical implications of the documents that have already been published and repeatedly interpreted from a patriarchal point of view? No one of our authors disputes the importance of this work of feminist analysis. Yet, the point that is made in these essays is that feminist medievalists must also be in control of our
documents at the most elementary level: what that text by or about a woman looks like in the manuscript, how the documents about women's lives are found collected in archives of towns or provinces, even what that sculpture looks like on a twelfth-century building rather than in a museum.

Sometimes this patient diligence in the libraries and archives leads to exciting discoveries about medieval women and gender in the Middle Ages. Often, it seems that it is only those the Italians call i topi di biblioteca, the "library mice," who turn the page or call up one more document, and find what is unknown or has been lost. But it is only the experienced researcher who can say for sure what has been found. I was thrilled when, in the city library of Pavia, among the kids doing their history projects, I found a small book of seven revelations in the hand of Lucia Brocadelli, the court prophet of Ercole d'Este of Ferrara, a text that had been considered lost (if it ever existed); but how would I have known what I had found if I had not seen many far less exciting documents over years in Pavia and other collections?

It is our hope that these essays will provide practical advice, available mentors, and by no means least of all, the enticement to get feminist medievalists into collections of primary sources for the Middle Ages. When we can work effectively with medieval documents at their most basic level, we can truly take control of our field, and answer the questions the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship has been dedicated to asking.

E. Ann Matter

THE ARCHIVES, PART II: GREETINGS FROM A CO-EDITOR

The articles in this issue of MFF struck a chord with me for I too have learned, and am learning, how to use manuscripts through trial and error rather than a formal credit course. I am heartened by the practical advice and experiences offered here, as well as from Issue #39, and sincerely hope that graduate students and junior faculty will reconsider the role of archive work in their research agendas and be inspired to develop these skills, either through a formal course of study or through "trial and error."

Like many graduate students, I had the will to learn but not the resources available within driving distance. The manuscript resources of my own institution consist of a peculiar collection of about a dozen single-leaf fragments that a state judge once used to cover his law books (the remaining scotch tape tears and staple holes serve as witness to these fragments once being tightly secured around what could have been the judge's workaday law dictionaries).
Luckily, I had the opportunity to meet a faculty member in the UK with the hope of becoming better acquainted with the art of archival research. My intention was to learn how to do manuscripts. Once I made it past the gatekeeper and found the manuscript room, I sat and observed. OK, so I need two foam triangle thingies. Oh, and I need a snake weight thingy. Hmm, I better find a magnifying glass thingy. Soon, I was sipping tea in the tearoom like an expert, trying to play the part of a grownup medievalist rather than the novice I really was. I was ready to surround myself with early Ovidian manuscripts and be brilliant. Of course, it was easy to feel confident when I was still in the process of “self-teaching” rather than actually doing the substantive work. And the doing can be difficult for the beginning archive researcher.

Returning a year later to do the “real” work, I encountered an incredibly steep learning curve, an incline that was almost insurmountable during a generous eight-week period of institutional support (seems like so much time, doesn’t it?). I was not expecting the incredible range of procedures at each library, from applying for access to requesting the work to how and where one may use the restroom. I was not prepared for tables too narrow to support the manuscript adequately, poor lighting, microfiche and reel machines that do not work, alarmed book shelves in front of the seating area that constantly activate, lack of central heating, unsecured coatrooms, trains rumbling underneath one London library, and a surly security guard who insisted on opening my notebook and flipping through every page while giving me “the look.” I was not prepared for driving on the wrong side of the road during rush hour on the M40 with snow falling at seemingly blizzard speed (at least that is what it seemed to a Seattleite like me). I was not prepared for the librarian who greeted me at the porter’s lodge, hung up my coat, offered me tea, and had my manuscript laid out in a private room overlooking a beautiful courtyard. I was not prepared for the good company of various librarians and fellow scholars—in the reading rooms, the cafeterias, the locker rooms, and the Starbucks where we all checked our e-mail on our laptops. Finally, I was not prepared for the beautiful, the sparse, the gilded, the doodled, the disintegrating, the faded, the embellished, and, most importantly, the illegible that I encountered in the manuscripts themselves. Perhaps the most important bit I learned is that despite the work I had put in to learning paleography on my own, the books I had studied and the faculty I had conferred with, I was still woefully unprepared to read the tiny 12th and 13th century hands that I needed to know. Just like the authors in this issue, I forge on.

Jen Gonyer-Donohue
MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR
Welcome to our second special issue on “the archive,” an extremely valuable topic for all medieval scholars. I found it interesting that all of the articles in this issue seemingly focus on the practicalities (as I call them in my piece) of archival work. In particular, Borland’s article surprised me—I spend weeks each summer tracking down extant anchorholds in England, but had never equated that experience with archival research. Now I will!

It would have been interesting to have a European member write about going to the archives—in Europe or in the US. Interestingly, none of the contributors (including me) really talked about using US manuscript resources (Truitt touches on it briefly). I also wonder, would all the “peculiarities” we Americans mention in our discussion of European systems have struck a European as worth mentioning? For example, one morning I arrived at the British Library only to discover that my requested manuscript was not waiting for me. An inquiry resulted in the answer—I had completely forgotten that dates are written in reverse order (according to US standards), and had inadvertently requested the manuscript for July 6 (7-6-05) instead of June 7 (6-7-05). Perhaps a European scholar working in the US would have encountered similar snags?

Not only inspired by these last two issues, but also inspired by my own research, in June 2006, I will be teaching a hands-on paleography course, with the cooperation of the Lambeth Palace Library, for undergraduates. This will be exclusively in Middle English texts, as that is the language the students have the most experience with in common. I am excited about this endeavor, and hope that it proves fruitful.

We continue to tinker with the new look for MFF. I think that the new paper works better with the cover and ink colors. Small artwork pieces fill some white space. The staple binding vexed me too much, and we have now switched to perfect binding. There are definite advantages to this change. We no longer need to worry about length, so every issue will now be able to have numerous quality articles, and we will also be able to publish our book reviews in a timely manner. The volume and issue numbers are printed on the spine, and the issues will be sturdier.

Finally, some notes about affiliations. We have been affiliated with MLA for some time now, but as of April 2005, we have also been indexed in the
MLA Directory of Periodicals and Bibliography, and they are updating to include all of our back issues. We have also signed an agreement with Blackwell as part of their Literature Compass series. The Advisory Board is looking into affiliating with AHA and AAR as well as other organizations, so these are exciting times for SMFS and MFF! As always, please feel free to send in comments and/or suggestions, as well as submissions, and thank you for your continued support.

Michelle M. Sauer

MESSAGE FROM MSU'S EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
It has been a great experience to be Dr. Sauer's Editorial Assistant for the Medieval Feminist Forum. I have gained a greater admiration for the many scholars who are members of the SMFS, developed a further interest in studying medieval women and gender, and have improved my cultural and historical understanding of the Middle Ages. Initially, after reading Issue 38, the wide range of topics seemed overwhelming; nevertheless, I was intrigued by everything, and it has been exciting to be a part of Issues 39 & 40. I would also like to thank Dr. Sauer for pushing me to further my education in medieval studies, and to offer my thanks to everyone who has contributed their work to the journal. This fall was busy with agendas that had to meet deadlines—and went beyond the deadlines—but all of you were very patient in waiting for the previous issue of the journal. Lastly, I am honored to have been able to communicate with several great scholars. I experienced the excitement along with all of you.

Missie Harris