

Travel award report: Helen Cam Award

As a PhD student within Medieval studies, being awarded financial support by the Helen Cam Award to appear and present at the 2019 International Medieval Congress in Leeds provided an immensely valuable opportunity that I am very thankful for. Awards like this are vital for supporting the academic development of doctoral students in a situation where scarce funding is available, and I would thoroughly recommend all interested postgraduates taking the time to apply for them; they can really provide the necessary backing for research opportunities which would otherwise be left unexplored. The award enabled me to embark on an incredibly exciting research project centred around the connection between the presentation of women in Medieval historiography and literature, and their equivalents in modern video games, specifically fantasy role-playing games. This topic, whilst heavily connected to my doctoral studies, is not directly part of them, and pursuing such side projects can seem quite daunting, but can also be highly rewarding, as was the case for me personally.

Anyone familiar with the Leeds IMC will recognise that it is not easy to deal with the costs of attendance without outside support, particularly not for students. The award that I was given helped pay for the costs of both attendance fees, accommodation and transport in their entirety, and gave me the space and time to focus entirely on innovative academic exploits at the grand Medievalist scene.

As a brief description of what I used the award for, my primary goal at the congress consisted of attending the sessions relating to 'Playing the Middle Ages' (organised by *The Public Medievalist*), presenting my own research there, and interacting with the academic community surrounding games in Medieval studies. To begin with the first, when attending the sessions, I got the opportunity to listen to and discuss a variety of fascinating papers on games, sparking several interesting ideas and thoughts that I would like to bring forward in my own research. In such a recently developed field, cutting-edge research is taking place all across the board, and finding the opportunity to build on the findings and experiences of like-minded academics is vital in taking these studies further.

My own paper, 'The Representation of Medieval Gender Identities in Fantasy Role-Playing Games', in particular investigating the application of gender systems derived from Medieval Old Norse literature, was well received by the audience, and through discussing with colleagues in the lecture theatre I was posed challenging questions which really made me think even further about the direction of this project. It is a path I would like to pursue further, and would not have been able to even consider if not for getting the chance to attend here.

Finally, interaction with the "gaming" community brought about further interesting developments. I was invited by the organisers to adapt my paper to a web article on *The Public Medievalist* website, and further to contribute a longer chapter on the representation of Medieval women in the fantasy genre to an edited volume forthcoming in 2020. This all made me believe more strongly in the research and the project, much more so than I could have hoped for beforehand, and solidified my view of it as a vital avenue of research.

None of this would have been possible without the support of the Helen Cam Award. I was reluctant to try to go in the first place because of the lack of financial support, and receiving a travel award

from Royal Holloway was in the end what made the trip a possibility. In truth, I did not expect such a positive result, so it was most definitely a welcome surprise. Receiving this particular award was a considerable bonus; as it is awarded to assist postgraduate research in any facet of Medieval studies, being selected with such an unconventional research project as video games, and the representation of the Medieval in them, was a delightful recognition.

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