



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES

MEDIEVAL SOLUTIONS
FOR A MODERN CRISIS

by

CHRISTOPHER D. FLETCHER

ARC HUMANITIES PRESS



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For Stephanie, Theo, and Grace

PREFACE

GREETINGS! WELCOME TO *Public Engagement in the European Middle Ages: Medieval Solutions for a Modern Crisis*. Thanks for taking the time to read this book; I hope you find it useful.

Before we get started, I have a couple of orders of business. While I love footnotes as much as the next medievalist, I decided to keep them to a minimum in this book by using in-line citations for the most frequently-used sources. Each one of these is a little different, so you'll find specific details about how the various citations work early on in each chapter. Also, all the translations in this book are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Now that that's out of the way, I can get to the more important part: thanking the many people who have helped make this book a reality over the years. First, to Danna Messer, Tania Colwell, and the rest of the staff at Arc Humanities Press, thank you for taking a chance on this book and providing all the sound guidance and encouragement a first-time author (like me) needed.

Second, to Dr. Elizabeth Harding, Dr. Volker Bauer, and the librarians, staff, and fellows at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel: thank you for awarding me a short-term fellowship at the HAB in the summer of 2023, for giving me access to your collections, and for welcoming me into your vibrant intellectual community that made it possible for me to finish the first draft of this book.

Speaking of funding, I owe special gratitude to the Newberry Library's Fellowships department and anonymous reviewers for awarding this book the Weiss-Brown Publication Subvention Award, which supports the publication of outstanding works of scholarship that cover European civilization before 1700 in the areas of music, theatre, French or Italian literature, or cultural studies. It is made to commemorate the career of Howard Mayer Brown.

Next up are the good people in the Honors College at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I've had the pleasure of teaching an undergraduate core course on public engagement in medieval Europe since 2021. To the Honors College administration and staff—especially Michele McCrillis and Yolanda Rodriguez-Venegas—thank you for the opportunity to teach this course and for taking care of all the logistical details to make it happen. And,

of course, to all my students, thank you for being engaged, patient, and willing participants in what turned out to be a multi-year process of workshoping the case studies in the following pages.

And now for the many academic colleagues—graduate students, faculty, and independent scholars—with whom I’ve worked out my thoughts about public engagement and medieval Europe in classes, programs, and conversations. To all of you, thank you for pushing me to make my arguments stronger and assuring me that what I thought I was seeing in medieval culture was really there. In particular, to Bryan Brazeau, Kristen Haas Curtis, Elisa Jones, Isabella Magni, and Anne Koenig, thank you all for helping me work through my struggles with academia and for showing me a different way to think about the accessibility of medieval culture. Lastly, to Becky Fall, Liz Hebbard, and Jonathan Lyon, thank you for taking the time to do all the above and read and respond to earlier drafts of this book.

That brings me to all my wonderful colleagues, past and present, at the Newberry Library in Chicago, several of whom you’ll meet a bit later on. To all the staff in Collections and Library Services, thank you for making it so easy both to work with the Newberry’s medieval collections and to share them with all kinds of audiences over the years. To my compatriots in Research and Education (especially the crew in 4-East), thank you for humouring me as I shoehorned medieval content into every possible conversation and, more importantly, for showing every day how it’s possible to use academic expertise to make a difference in the world through your inspiring work. It has been a blessing to work with you all, but I have to single out two in particular for their role in making this book happen. To Kara Johnson, thank you for showing what compassionate pedagogy looks like and for being the first person to read and respond to this book. And, above all, to the Director of the Center for Renaissance Studies, Lia Markey: thank you for your vision, your wisdom, your leadership, and your encouragement to always “just go for it.” I can only hope that this book embodies just a tiny piece of the transformative culture you’ve created.

Finally, we come to the most important thanks of all. To my parents and sisters, thank you for the constant and unshakeable support (and relatively small number of eye rolls) you’ve given me as I’ve tried to understand and explain why medieval people did what they did. But most of all, to Stephanie, Theo, and Grace: thank you for being the unending source of the patience, steadfastness, and love I needed to finish this journey. This book is for you guys.

Soli Deo gloria.

Chicago, October 2024