Medieval Material Matters

Held at the Wolfson Research Exchange in the University of Warwick library, this postgraduate research day in medieval materiality took place on 18 July 2016, and was headed by a plenary lecture from Professor Catherine Brown of the University of Michigan on ‘Manuscript is the New Digital’. Following this, two paper panels generated discussions on the broad themes of manuscripts and their material worlds, and the materiality of space and place as this applies to the study of medieval sources, including literature, art, architecture and archaeology. The final session of the day consisted of a materiality workshop led by Catherine Brown, in which participants discussed recent work by writers Tim Ingold and Andrew Cole in seminar format. Discussion for all panels during the day was enhanced by pre-circulated papers. In particular, debate focused on how materiality might be understood – and critiqued – in medieval contexts and how the digital environment in which medieval research increasingly takes place might affect our thinking about the materiality of cultural artefacts, objects, and spaces from and in the European Middle Ages. This comes at a moment when scholars across disciplines are beginning to think through the effects of New Materialism and its associated discourses.

The event, generously funded by the Warwick Humanities Research Centre and Department of French Studies, sought to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines, with scholars from the UK, USA and Portugal attending. Likewise, the event would not have been the success that it was without funding for postgraduate travel provided by the Society for French Studies, which encouraged PhD students from the UK and further afield to travel to the University of Warwick.

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