# Medievalists without Borders

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As always, medieval studies is pregnant with movements and conflicts, and will soon birth something new. Any thoughtful medievalist understands that the field is not, has never been, and can never be static; as the cliché goes, change is the only constant. Assuming the inevitability of change, scholars cannot simply resign themselves to adapting themselves to whatever world the future brings. The responsibilities of the scholar exceed those of the mere teacher, as scholars must be involved in the creation of new knowledge and ideas. As such, scholars should actively create the future we desire.

Of course, we can never be in complete control of events. Alfred Wyatt's 1922 *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* opens poignantly: "The War has left is mark on this book," and recounts how his first collaborator on the book was killed in the First World War (Wyatt v). Surely if Wyatt had been in control of events,

the War would never have happened, and his friend would have survived to shape the future of medieval studies. Nevertheless, Wyatt did not allow the death of his friend to prevent him from eventually publishing *An Anglo-Saxon Reader*. In his popular historiography, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, Norman F. Cantor traces the lives of about twenty prominent medievalists. In each case, although the lives of the scholars were affected by current events, each one in some way redirected the zeitgeist to form a renewed vision of the Middle Ages.

If medieval scholars are to plan for the future of our field, we need a model for that future, and what better place to find that model than in the Middle Ages? King Alfred the Great provides just such a model—one that resonates across the centuries, and that speaks to our situation today. By applying the model of Alfred's educational reforms into our twenty-first century milieu, we can add more vigor to the field of medieval studies.

King Alfred the Great reigned as King of Wessex from 871-899 A.D. During his life, England faced a profound threat from Viking invaders. Though most of England fell under Viking domination, under Alfred's leadership Wessex managed to remain standing. Later in his reign, when the threat of the Vikings grew less immediate, Alfred presided over a great cultural revival, primarily in the areas of religion and education. Most notably, he called for all free-born men in England to learn to read, and embarked on an ambitious translation program of important Latin texts into English. He famously complained that "knowledge of Latin had previously decayed throughout England, and yet many could still read things written in English"(Keynes 126). His program to translate into English was a radical departure from typical path of education. Obviously, the accessibility of Latin sources was the problem, but rather than seeing the solution as transforming English readers into Latin readers, Alfred sought to transform Latin texts into English texts.

In many ways, Medieval Studies faces the same problem today. Consider this passage from King Alfred's translation of Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*:

> When I reflected on all this, I recollected how－before everything was ransacked and burned－the churches throughout England stood filled with treasures and books. Similarly, there was a great multitude of those serving God. And they derived very little benefit from those books, because they could understand nothing of them, since they were not written in their own language. It is as if they had said: 'Our ancestors, who formerly maintained these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and passed it on to us. Here one can see their track, but we cannot follow it.' Therefore we have now lost the wealth as well as the wisdom, because we did not wish to set our minds to the track. (Keynes 125)

Substitute the words "churches throughout England" with "universities throughout the world," and Alfred could very well be describing our own time. Complaints of the smug ignorance of students are older than universities themselves, so we recognize ourselves in this past. Alfred, however, does not stop there simply to shake his head and complain. He then offers a rebuke to the wise men of his own day, a rebuke that should convict us as well: "When I reflected on all this, I wondered exceedingly why the good, wise men who were formerly found throughout England and had thoroughly studied all those books, did not wish to translate any part of them into their own language" (125).

Alfred's solution to the problem, then, was translation, and the problem confronting medievalists in the immediate future is the translation of Medieval Studies into a language that others can understand. Unlike Alfred's time, the problem is not one of translation from Latin to English, but rather from print culture to electronic culture. In *Desire for Origins*, speaking about the particular

case of Anglo-Saxon studies, Allen Frantzen puts it this way: "It is the connectedness of Anglo-Saxon studies that matters, not their age" (226). Both Alfred and Frantzen identify the same problem, disconnectedness. In order to reconnect, then, the "good, wise men"　Alfred to whom Alfred refers had to translate texts to reconnect them to the people. The gathering of MEMESAK[Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea] is of "good, wise" men and women, the scholars for whom the challenge is to "translate" medieval studies into a reconnected form.

How, then, are we to "translate" our fields? There is no single answer to this question, as medieval studies always finds itself in need of some form of translation or contextualization, whether it be from a dead language to a living one, or from a culturally neglected context to one of greater cultural interest. Certainly some theoretical or methodological movements such as postcolonialism and feminism try to make medieval studies more politically and culturally relevant—or, perhaps, some might argue that they reveal previously-existing relevance. It would be impossible to scan the entire breadth of movements in medieval studies, so I will be focusing here on only one: the use of emerging technologies to create Medievalists without Borders. To focus even tighter, I would like to survey some ways in which emerging communications technologies are being used by medievalists to transcend borders.

The oldest of these technologies has become so much a part of our daily lives that it is perhaps wrong to call it emerging; nevertheless, e-mail was the first text-based mode to break free of print culture, and draw all of us into electronic literacy. The term "e-mail" gave rise to a new description of traditional manuscript and print culture mailing, "snail mail."　As the term "snail mail" suggests, the immediate advantage of e-mail that springs to mind is speed. Academic life is rarely marked by the need for speed—as one of my colleagues

hyperbolically puts it, "There's no such thing as an academic emergency." Though the speed of e-mail no doubt encourages more academic communication, a more important quality of e-mail for medievalists is its ability to send mass mailings essentially for free. Medievalists have put this function to very good use in the proliferation of various subscriber-based e-mail lists: *MedTextL*, *AnSaxNet*, and *ArthurNet* all spring readily to mind. Postings on these lists have come to be indispensable parts of every medieval scholars life; indeed, I would go so far as to argue that only the most senior established scholars can get away with not being subscribed to at least one such list, and the day is rapidly coming when no one can be part of the scholarly community without at least being aware of what goes on in these lists. They are media for asking questions of fellow scholars, making announcements, and hashing out disagreements－all without respect for international borders. In David Lodge's academic satire *Small World*, Stanley Zapp and others maintain their status as international scholars by flying to conferences all over the world. Today, even those scholars on limited budgets can become Medievalists without Borders through use of these e-mail lists.

Websites, too, have become a daily part of our lives, though these have been embraced by medieval scholars a bit more slowly. Scholars have used websites to create portals into medieval studies, some of which appear intended for students, some of which may be intended for other scholars, and some of which are neither one nor the other. The Orb, for example, has this disclaimer at the bottom of its entry page: "The ORB is an academic site, written and maintained by medieval scholars for the benefit of their fellow instructors and serious students. All articles have been judged by at least two peer reviewers. Authors are held to high standards of accuracy, currency, and relevance to the field of medieval studies." The Orb is primarily a collection of entries similar

to those found in encyclopedias. Unlike an encyclopedia, the coverage tends to be eclectic, with some subjects having multiple entries, and others just a few, but the articles tend to be deeper. *The Labyrinth*, on the other hand, is a site composed primarily of links to other sites, and this style of page, basically a miscellany of links, is perhaps the most common. Online materials for scholars range from articles, to online versions of traditional paper publications, to images of manuscripts.

In addition to providing materials online for other scholars, many medievalists have chosen to create websites for their students' benefit. For the most part, these pages are of little interest to people not taking the class, with the focus being on the particulars of assignments and syllabi. Some websites, however, offer materials that will be of interest to Medievalists without Borders. Probably the most extensive such site is the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, which offers for its visitors medieval texts in translation. MEMESAK's own Brother Anthony of Taize offers editions of medieval and early modern texts in translation on his website, which can be accessed by students all over the world. As testimony to this effect, I myself have received a research paper from a student that cited, as one of its sources, Brother Anthony's website. When an undergraduate in rural Alabama cites the work of a scholar in urban Korea, we have truly entered the era of borderless medievalism.

Of course, by the end of 2006, e-mails and websites are hardly emerging technologies, and have been embraced, to a greater or lesser degree, by all scholars as valuable tools for communicating with students and other scholars. Some other technologies, as well as certain variations on the idea of the traditional website, have increased our opportunities for reaching across borders.

Weblogs, more commonly known as "blogs," have only in the last few years become a medium for outreach to popular and scholarly audiences—in

fact last year we held the first session at the International Medieval Congress about blogging, and the very first question that had to be answered was "What is a blog?" Essentially, these are electronic journal entries, very simply published online, and arranged in reverse sequence, so that a visitor to a blog sees the most recent entry first. Unlike e-mail lists, blogs are readily available to non-subscribers, but unlike sources like on traditional websites, blog entries tend to be written quickly, with little scholarly apparatus, and with popular audiences in mind. Blogs not only reach over the border between scholarly and professional audiences, but they also reach across international borders. My own blog, *Unlocked Wordhoard*, for example, takes the vast majority of its traffic from North America, but has regular visitors from every continent except for Antarctica. Viewers have translated its pages into Spanish, Portuguese, and Chinese. MEMESAK's own Horace Jeffery Hodge's blog, *Gypsy Scholar*, receives comments from around the world. Blogs, then, are the place of closest communication between scholars and their audiences, and more and more medievalists are taking advantage of that connection. As of today, Owlfish, which keeps a list of medievalist weblogs, has links to over 170 blogs with medieval content. Non-scholarly sites regularly use the information listed on these blogs, with such pages as Answers.com regularly offering links to medieval blogs when viewers search for answers to questions about medieval literature or history.

*Wikipedia* is a controversial source among scholars. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, for example, recently ran a series of stories on *Wikipedia* and the suspicion of the professorate of the site (Read). Many professors, and I am among them, ban students from using *Wikipedia* as a resource. Because *Wikipedia* allows any of its readers to change the entry on any subject, the medieval scholar who has spent a lifetime studying a subject is granted no more

authority than any other reader. *Wikipedia* depends on its readers to act as writers and editors, the principle being that if someone makes an error in an entry, someone else will catch it and correct it. Not only are many scholars loathe to contribute to a source that does not value their expertise, but the lack of true peer review means that publication  on *Wikipedia* would generally not count toward tenure or promotion. I have heard many academics praised for their books and articles; I have yet to hear one praised for their *Wikipedia* entries.

Because *Wikipedia* keeps a history of previous versions of a page, it is sometimes possible to see who has contributed to an entry, and what his qualifications are. In many cases, though, the contributor is identified only by username, so it is impossible to know what qualifications, if any, the contributors have. My own search through the history of the entry for "Beowulf,"  for example, yielded no one who claims to be a medieval scholar, and the chief contributor, who goes by the username of "Yst," writes:

> Somewhat unintuitively, the chief area of expertise and knowledge which presently I bring to *Wikipedia* is that of Old English language, linguistics, history and poetry. That's unintuitive, as it has absolutely nothing to do with my present work, academic or otherwise. However, it is my chief academic hobby, persistent now for quite a few years, and it is one which I do not conceive of myself abandoning in any foreseeable future. ("User: Yst")

Medieval scholars are left in a quandry. We can ignore sites like *Wikipedia*, but the populace at large relies heavily upon them, and in doing so, we allow conventional wisdom to usurp expertise. We can contribute to them, but that path risks legitimizing potentially illegitimate sources, and de-valuing our own peer-reviewed work. *Wikipedia* and other wiki-style sources do not appear to be

a passing fad, and a challenge to all of us is to find ways either to counter *Wikipedia* or to redirect it. My own preference would be to find a way to redirect the *Wikipedia* entries so that we can reach across international and scholarly borders to reach those interested in our field.

One last emerging technology that medieval scholars should be utilizing is the "podcast," or "webcast." For those of you unfamiliar with webcasting, a webcast is simply an audio or video recording that is formatted to be viewed online. In come cases, webcasts are designed to be downloaded, such as to an iPod portable media device, while in other cases they are viewed as streaming video or streaming audio. Some scholars have begun to find ways to use these new technologies to reach out beyond national and educational borders. For example, "Medieval Podcast" ran from June 2005 to January 2006. In other cases, schools have been archiving podcast versions of their professors' lectures for students to view when they miss class, or for distance learning applications.

Scholars have been understandably suspicious of and slow to use podcast technology. Podcasts, especially by those of us who are not technically savvy, can tend to look rough and unprofessional. Some professors have resisted having their lectures podcast, fearing the loss of their intellectual property, or that students would consider viewing a podcast of a lecture as a substitution for actually attending a lecture. These fears are not unfounded. It might be very tempting for a school to use a professor's podcast lecture for distance learning, then have a low-paid adjunct or instructor administer the course and grade the assignments. Indeed, it is possible that a professor might continue to teach at a university long after he is retired, or even dead! Beyond classroom lectures, video podcasts aimed at a popular audience run the risk of being too flashy, and too interested in popularity and spectacle. Nevertheless, scholars must begin to experiment with these technologies in order to continue our project of

crossing borders.

Many other emerging technologies are not being exploited at all, to my knowledge. Community sites, such as *MySpace* and *Facebook*, are underutilized, even as politicians use these as outreach. Cell phones are not being used at all. At the moment, it is hard to imagine of what possible use cell phones could be-after all, we cannot personally call every single person interested in medieval studies and have a conversation with them－but the trend seems to be to merge cell phones with mp3 players, suggesting that, in the very near future, personal devices used for all forms of audio, textual, and video communication will be the norm, rather than the exception. Scholars need to be aware that our work will often have to be "translated" into these new media.

While we embark on our Alfredian translation project, then, what are our main concerns? Though we have many, I see three primary areas. First is accessibility. Just as Alfred's contemporaries found the Latin texts inaccessible, so may new technologies lead to accessibility issues. For example, in order to reach across national boundaries, most of these sources will have to be in English. Korea has perhaps the richest internet culture in the world, yet I have included no Korean-language websites in this survey because my own Korean is too amateurish to read them. Sources written in English may be too dense for non-English speakers to understand, while audio and video sources in English might have accessibility problems if the English is too heavily accented or idiomatic. In some areas, scholars might not have the bandwidth necessary to view detailed manuscript images conveniently, or might not have the hardware or software to view certain types of files at all.

Permanence is a concern that is tied into accessibility. I have in my desk drawers floppy disks with (presumably) readable files on them－but the ancient Macintosh machines on which they were written have long since disappeared.

From a practical point of view, then, the disks are unreadable, less than a decade after using them. On the other hand, on my shelves I have books that have been out of print for more than a century, and are still as readable as they were the day they were published. As platforms, operating systems, and applications change, scholarly work that was once accessible will become inaccessible. Scholars need to consider the issue of permanence when using new technologies. Certain kinds of scholarship may call for more permanent media than other kinds of scholarship.

The final major concern is scholarliness. All of these technologies, because they are not traditional print technologies, allow users to evade the normal peer review process. While peer review is fallible, it does at least provide a modicum of quality control. Simply because something is written by a scholar does not make it *ipso facto* scholarly, and these technologies may blur that distinction. Many things that I dash off on my blog are not scholarly, and are not intended to be. Though many of the e-mails found on *MedTextL* and other e-mail subscription lists are deeply scholarly, some are simply whimsical. To be honest, I am not as concerned about this issue as others, since I think that good scholarship will tend to rise to the top regardless of medium. Nevertheless, some will see scholarship in these new media as somehow compromised; no doubt some in Alfred's time saw the translation out of the language of high thought and scholarship, Latin, into a vulgar and common tongue, Old English, was a terrible compromise. Alfred himself said that the cause was that men became "so careless and that learning would decay like this" (Keynes 125). Let us remember, though, that Alfred's translation program led to Old English developing one of the richest vernacular literatures in Europe. In the long term, perhaps these new technologies will reinvigorate medieval studies over the long term.

This paper has been more a manifesto than a scholarly study; nevertheless, groups committed to the international exchange of ideas like MEMESAK are composed of those scholars most likely to see the importance of crossing borders technologically. This conference itself is made possible by the technological innovation of easy air travel, and would have been impossible in the medieval or early modern eras. We use the technologies available to us to come together and exchange ideas, enriching one another, and creating a truly global medieval studies. Yet even these efforts are limited by the cost of travel in terms of time and money. Let us be certain that we do not allow this exchange to fade between conferences. Instead, let international conferences become the punctuation marks in the endless conversation taking place across various media, new and old, of these new creatures－Medievalists without Borders.

주제어: 국경 없는 중세학자회, 알프레드 대왕, 기술 변혁, 전자 미디어, 기술
        적으로 경제 허물기

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# Medievalists without Borders

Abstract                                                          Richard Scott Nokes

As technological and social changes alter the ways in which the general public connects with scholarship, as well as the ways scholars connect with one another, medieval scholarship needs to change as well. One model for change is that offered by King Alfred the Great's educational reforms, which sought to translate Latin text into Old English in order to make them readable to the Anglo-Saxons. Medieval scholars in the very near future will need to "translate" their work into electronic media, both established media such as e-mail and webpages, and emerging media such as blogs and new cell phone functions. Through this act of translation scholars can cross both academic and international borders, becoming "Medievalists without Borders."