

MERC Newsletter

Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC)

Issue #1/2025

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Our Mission

The Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC) promotes medieval archaeology (AD 400–1600) across greater Europe by uniting researchers and societies into a global hub. Its ethos: medieval archaeology without borders.



Photo. N. Sawicka. Third MERC Conference for Post-Graduate and Early Career Researchers in Medieval Archaeology, Wrocław, 2024

MERC is the successor body to the Medieval Europe Congresses held in York, Bruges, Basel, and Paris between 1992 and 2007. It is currently the largest Community within the European Association of Archaeologists, with members also beyond the Association, undertaking various activities in cooperation with different organisations and researchers.

We aim to support inclusive, diverse, and collaborative research through shared initiatives, events, and communications. With this newsletter, our vision is to enlarge and engage our community on a larger level to foster more cooperation within the researchers of Medieval Europe. If you would like to have your research highlighted, have a conference announcement or a job post to share, do not hesitate to contact us!

Europe's Medieval Pasts: A Manifesto

Medieval archaeology is a matter of European importance. The MERC Manifesto calls for practitioners and decision-makers and members of the public to work to make socially engaged archaeology more widespread. The manifesto is intended to build consciousness and inspire action.

Link to the website is [here!](#)



Photo: GodefroyParis, after: Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

URGENT MATTERS: Serbian Universities under the Iron Heel of Authoritarianism

This situation directly affects our friends and colleagues at universities in Serbia. Sadly, its seriousness has not been adequately reflected in the media, which tend to shift their focus quickly to new stories, leaving urgent but ongoing issues behind.

While the impact on the majority of us may seem minor – such as not being able to gather all together at the annual EAA conference – for our Serbian colleagues, the consequences are far more serious and deeply rooted.

MERC stands in solidarity with our colleagues in Serbia – especially now, when sustained support is most needed.

The text below is provided by our committee member, Monika Milosavljević.

While populist authoritarianism continues to gain footholds globally amidst democracy in decline, Serbia, a tiny Balkan landlocked country on the fringes of Europe, has come into view within the last year as an outlier where the nascent public protests of everyday citizens have garnered international public attention.



Photo: Stefan Miljuš, after: Wikimedia Commons, Public domain.

Although nominally a Republic, Serbia has declined substantially in freedom over the last decade. The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), a party forged from the larger Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj and other smaller parties of the 2000s, has been in firm power since 2012. Aleksandar Vučić, the current President of the Republic of Serbia since 2017, is no stranger to politics: serving as Prime Minister from 2014 to 2017, following a term as the First

Deputy Prime Minister from 2012 to 2014, his roots stretch all the way back to the Milosević regime where he was the Minister for Information (de facto censorship and propaganda) from 1998 to 2000. Despite his many official titles, all SNS prime ministers have been acting figureheads, operating under Vučić's centralized authority. As a party, the SNS hold 46% of all seats in Parliament, entering into coalitions to establish majority rule. Vučić often allies himself with far-right populist leaders; his hybrid regime comparable to the likes of Viktor Orbán.

In response to a worsening exclusion from political and social life, a general sense of malaise and dissatisfaction has been sweeping through Serbia over the last decade. Protests against the regime have often failed to deliver change, leaving Serbian citizens disillusioned. The smaller waves of protests only began to coalesce into a substantial movement within the last few years, with voices incorporating a range of social issues (the environment, school violence, public corruption, and increasing institutionalized violence against opposition leaders, to name just a few). In short, since the end of last year, there has been a palpable change in Serbian society, grounded in solidarity and new modes of collective tactics introduced by Serbia's university students. The spark to this new protest movement was a preventable man-made catastrophe:

An hour away from the capital of Belgrade, Novi Sad is the second largest city in Serbia. On Friday, November 1st, 2024, at 11:52 a.m. (CET), the newly and ceremoniously renovated concrete awning at the Novi Sad Railway Station, gave way, killing 16 people - 14 instantly, with 2 later succumbing to their fatal injuries. The sheer randomness of the dead, many elderly and children among them, brought home the tragedy. A grandfather who died with his two granddaughters, a young man accompanying his pregnant girlfriend, these were all loved individuals who needlessly perished. To quote one shocked protestor: "We are all under the awning."

Almost immediately, public outrage erupted, blaming corruption and graft. As an expression of solidarity, students began to organize silent vigils, initially standing in silence for 14 minutes in front of university buildings every Friday at 11:52, increasing to 15 then 16 minutes to match the number of victims as they died in hospital.

But even these silent vigils to remember the dead were met with violence. On November 22nd, 2024, students and professors of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU) peacefully honoring the victims were physically attacked in front of their Department building. The attack triggered student blockades of Universities across Serbia, with protestors independently organizing themselves into leaderless, fluid committees. The foremost of students' demands is that all paperwork related to the reconstruction of the Novi Sad Railway Station be made public. Institutions of higher learning gradually formalized their support for the students by suspending classes. The Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, of which I am a professor, officially supported the blockade on December 5th, 2024.

Institutions of higher education in Serbia have become epicenters of the struggle against injustice. In response, the SNS now seeks to exhaust universities and impoverish

public discourse, suffocating reality itself. Pressures have been systemically ramped up, primarily through administrative and financial measures widely perceived as acts of repression. These include radical, months-long salary reductions for professors (to 12.5%), as well as an unconstitutional decree that dramatically reduces the scientific workload from 20 hours per week to only 5, effectively quenching any research. University departments are financially drained, and most will, by the start of the new school year, be unable to pay for electricity and water, making both financial autonomy and basic institutional functioning impossible. The destruction of public universities also happens to coincide with announced plans to ease the entry of foreign, non-accredited universities in Serbia. As a result, vertical mobility will no longer be achieved through education, but solely through clientelism.

In such conditions, professors are taking early retirement, searching for new or alternative employment after months of draining struggle in the streets. Most professors and students, however, continue the fight to the extent of their capacities, and often even beyond them.



Photo: Sergio Oren, after: Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0. The banner in the foreground reads "Само Студент Србина Спашава" (Only a Student[s] Saves the Serbs), a play on the national slogan "Only Unity Saves the Serbs".

It is now early June, 2025. No progress has been made toward meeting the demands of students. The situation grows worse. Since November, we have witnessed cars ramming into peaceful protestors, a knife attack on the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, the groundless arrest of the rector of the University of Belgrade on Easter, smear campaigns against students and professors in SNS controlled tabloids, arrests of students in dormitories

and the use of sound cannons against peaceful protestors. A female student in Novi Sad even suffered a broken jaw while putting up protest posters at the hands of attackers affiliated with the SNS.



Creator: Karadan1804, after WikimediaCommons, CC0 1.0 Universal. Student blockade of Belgrade faculties, January 2025. Left to right: Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Philosophy and Faculty of Fine Arts.

Universities are important pillars in society as they form independent groups that think, act and have agency. But authoritarian governments have little value for them. Anti-intellectualism and devaluing education serve them better for the here and now. The Serbian government is currently dismantling its education system to cut critical voices and install universities whose criteria are not education but loyalty to the regime, in the interests of unchallenged corruption.

Monika Milosavljević
Associate Professor
Department of Archaeology
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Belgrade

Meet the Committee

Aiming for a higher level of transparency, we would like you to get to know the people behind MERC!



Carlo Citter is **MERC Chair** and associate professor of Christian and Medieval archaeology at the Department of History and Cultural Heritage of the University of Siena. He is chair of the Medieval Europe Research Community and joined the group that discussed and wrote the MERC manifesto. His recent research activities are focused on the long lasting transition from the middle ages to the modern period in central and southern Italy (see www.med2mod.it) in collaboration with several Italian and European institutions.



Jakub Sawicki is **MERC Vice-Chair**, Researcher and Deputy Head of the Department of Historical Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. His specialisation lies in the archaeology of the Later Middle Ages and the early modern period, with a particular focus on material culture examined through social, economic, and symbolic frameworks. He organises MERC conferences for postgraduate and early-career researchers (Prague 2022, Wrocław 2024) and is a co-founder of the European Medieval Finds Network Forum. ORCID: 0000-0003-1198-0713



Pam Crabtree is **MERC Secretary** and a Professor of Anthropology at New York University where she has taught since 1990. She is also a zooarchaeologist who studies archaeologically-recovered animal bone remains to reconstruct past animal husbandry patterns, hunting practices, and diets. As an archaeologist, she is interested in the origins of urbanism in early medieval Europe (8th-10th centuries CE), as well as the transition to farming in the ancient Near East and the subsequent development of animal husbandry practices in later prehistory and early historic times.



Sam Turner is a Professor of Archaeology and Co-Director of the Centre for Landscape at Newcastle University (UK). He studies landscape archaeology and medieval archaeology through research in Europe and beyond. He has been involved with MERC since 2014, and also chairs the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Special Interest Group on 'Landscape'. [Professor Sam Turner - Newcastle upon Tyne](#)



Marte Spangen is Associate Professor of Archaeology at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. She is specialized in Saami archaeology and the historical archaeology of northern Fennoscandia. In her current position she also works with projects related to metal detecting and participatory approaches in archaeology and museums. She has organised several of the MERC roundtable and panel EAA sessions during her time on the committee, particularly focusing on topics of diversity and inclusion in archaeology. ORCID: 0000-0003-1559-1678



Michael Lewis is Head of Portable Antiquities & Treasure at the British Museum and Visiting Professor at the University of Helsinki (Finland) and Reading (UK). He is particularly interested in medieval material culture, especially small metal finds associated with religion and everyday life. His PhD was on the material culture of the Bayeux Tapestry. He co-founded the European Public Finds Recording Network (EPFRN) and the European Medieval Finds (EMF) network, which promote pan-European collaboration. ORCID: 0000-0001-5933-8557



Eugene Costello is Lecturer / Assistant Professor in the School of History at University College Cork in Ireland. He specialises in the history and archaeology of rural areas of Europe in the late medieval and early modern periods, with a particular focus on livestock farming societies and their adaptability over time. He is co-founder of the Radical Humanities Laboratory in University College Cork and contributes to sustainable farming initiatives in Ireland as well as to academic committees in the Irish Humanities Alliance, European Society for Environmental History and Medieval Europe Research Community.

<https://research.ucc.ie/profiles/ECostello@ucc.ie>



Pavla Tomanová is an archaeologist at the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague; but now temporarily on a mobility research project at ETH Zurich (2025-2027). Her research interests focus on Early Middle Ages, fortified central places, church archaeology, research of historical building materials and possibilities of radiocarbon dating of historical mortars. She has been a member of the MERC committee since 2024 and is the editor of the MERC Newsletter. Academia.edu: <https://cas-cz.academia.edu/PavlaTomanov%C3%A1>



Aleks Pluskowski teaches medieval archaeology and zooarchaeology at the University of Reading, UK. His research focuses on human impact on past environments, especially in the frontier societies of medieval Europe. He was PI of the Ecology of Crusading (ERC), the Landscapes of (Re)Conquest (AHRC) and most recently the Medieval Green Revolution (ERC) projects. He organised the first MERC conference for postgraduate and early career researchers (Pula 2019) and runs MERC sessions at the EAA and SAA.



Elisabeth Lorans is emeritus professor of Medieval Archaeology at the University of Tours (France). She works mainly on urban archaeology in Northern France and England in a comparative perspective and on monastic settlements in the *longue durée*, specifically Marmoutier, founded by saint Martin just outside Tours, which she excavated for many years. Her work is based on a confrontation between archaeological data, written sources and iconography.

<https://www.univ-tours.fr/elisabeth-lorans>



Ben Jervis is Professor of Medieval Archaeology at the University of Leicester, UK. His research focuses on the archaeology of urbanism in later medieval England and on material culture (particularly pottery), with a particular emphasis on engagement with archaeological theory. He is PI of the UKRI project [ENDURE](#) – Urban Life in a Time of Crisis. Enduring Urbanism in Later Medieval England and, in addition to MERC, is a committee member of the Society for Medieval Archaeology and The Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group. He represented MERC on the Scientific Committee for EAA Belfast (2023). ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5295-0647>



Mária Vargha is an assistant professor at the Department of History at the University of Vienna, where she started the ERC-StG project 'RELIC' in 2024. Since 2022, she has served as a committee member of the Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC) and is a founding member of the European Medieval Finds Network. Her main interests are social and religious history, social, landscape and burial archaeology, the material culture of the High Middle Ages, and (Spatial) Digital Humanities.

Website: <https://ucrisportal.univie.ac.at/en/persons/maria-vargha>



Andreia Rodrigues is an archaeologist currently pursuing a PhD in Archaeology at the University of Évora. Her research project, titled “[Transitional Ceramics from the 13th to the 15th Centuries in Southern Portugal](#)”, is funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia) under grant reference 2021.04944.BD. Since 2023, she has been a member of the CIGA Group, which focuses on the study of Islamic Ceramics from the Gharb al-Andalus, and as of 2024, she also serves on the committee of the Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC). Her main research interests lie in the Islamic Medieval period and the Late Middle Ages, with a particular emphasis on ceramics within this chronological framework (<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1521-3036>).



Carena Lewis is a British archaeologist specialising in medieval and later rural settlement and the social impact of heritage participation. Her career has included roles as senior investigator for the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (1986-99), research fellow at University of Birmingham (1992-4), presenter on the TV series Time Team (1994-2005), founding director of Access Cambridge Archaeology at the University of Cambridge (1999-2015) and Professor of Public Understanding of Research 2015 at the University of Lincoln (2015-present). She has involved thousands of members of the public in hands-on medieval archaeology, contributed to the development of Europe’s Medieval Pasts: a Manifesto for MERC, chairs the EAA committee on the Public Benefits of Archaeology and regularly gives papers at EAA general meetings.



Saša Čaval is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Anthropological and Spatial Studies in the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) and an assistant professor at the Department of Heritage and Archaeology at the University of Primorska, Slovenia. She has been a MERC Committee member since 2021. Her research focuses on plural societies in the medieval Western Balkans and the colonial Indian Ocean world, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to cultural heritage, identity, and memory. She is the Principal Investigator of the ERC project STONE, which explores the W Balkan funerary phenomenon of stećci. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9337-3951>
<https://iaps.zrc-sazu.si/en/sodelavci/sasa-caval-en>



Monika Milosavljević is an associate professor at the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, as well as the head of the Center for Theoretical Archaeology at the same Department. She has been a MERC committee member since 2019. Her research interests lie in the political usage of archaeology, the history of archaeology, the archaeology of identity and medieval mortuary archaeology. <https://bg.academia.edu/MonikaMilosavljevic>



Liisa Seppänen is a Docent (Assistant Professor) in Archaeology at the University of Helsinki and in Urban Archaeology at the University of Turku, Finland. She has been a member of the MERC committee since 2019. Her research focuses in Medieval and Early Modern periods (in the North), particularly on urban development, buildings, burials and graveyards. Furthermore, she has experience in heritage management and in exploring the role of archaeology in contemporary society. ORCID: 0000-0002-1337-9764



Sophie Hueglin is an archaeologist with a wide periodical and geographical scope. She has been engaged with MERC and EAA for almost two decades. Her current foci are islands, monasteries and water on a global scale, and she is continuing to develop a module on the archaeology of the Maritime Silk Road. She is representing EAA at the Conference of International NGOs at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Furthermore, she is part of the EAA's Heritage Advisory Board. Together with EAA and MERC, she would like to develop archaeology on a European scale and reach out to South Asia.



Sarah Kerr is a lecturer in Archaeology and Radical Humanities at University College Cork, Ireland. She is a council member for the Society for Medieval Archaeology and Reviews Editors for the Medieval Archaeology journal. Sarah researches the built environment of medieval Europe and has written about English lodging ranges, castles and great houses, and Irish tower houses and round towers. She is equally interested in the role of historic buildings in contemporary society and has written about the impacts of climate change on built heritage in Ireland, Scotland and Denmark and the role of heritage in climate action. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4199-3913>



Camilla Felicioni is an archaeologist currently pursuing a PhD in Heritage Science at the University of Rome, La Sapienza. Her research project is concerned with the study of the formation and transformation of medieval castles in Calabria, in Italy; the project is part of a larger container project called Med2Mod, which she herself is part of as a research team. Since 2023, she has been a member of the committee of the Medieval Europe Research Community(MERC). Her main research interests relate to the study of medieval settlements and landscape, and their transition into the modern age.

(ORCID: – orcid.org/0009-0004-1163-3361).



Jesús Brufal is an associate professor at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. I am currently the coordinator of the Archaeology degree programme. My research interests in the archaeology and history of al-Andalus between the 8th and 12th centuries focus on the study of landscape, architecture and death.

Call for Committee Nominations

Work with us and help shape the future of MERC!

MERC is more than just the Manifesto for Medieval Archaeology. It is an active and growing community, visible through numerous sessions at the annual EAA meetings. These include the MERC Forum and Roundtables, organised by committee members to address the evolving needs of our field, as well as the now well-established MERC Party featured in the programme.

We also organise a biennial conference for early-career researchers, with past editions held in Pula (2019), Prague (2022), and Wrocław (2024). The next is planned for Barcelona in 2026. In addition, MERC sponsors and supports sessions at the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) annual meetings.

We are currently **seeking nominations for new committee members!** If you are interested please send your CV, motivation letter and a photo to medievalerc@gmail.com up to **14.07.2025** and answer the call!

This year we have **five (5)** open positions for the role of committee members!

Stay Connected

- Website: <https://medievaleuroresearch.wordpress.com>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/174193399395058>