

# MERC Newsletter

Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC)  
Issue #2/2025

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## What is MERC?

The Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC) is an international research network which aims to promote research in medieval archaeology (AD 400-1600) across all countries in greater Europe by providing a hub for existing societies and researchers, thereby aiding practitioners in Europe and the rest of the world. Its ethos is medieval archaeology without borders. We aim to support inclusive, diverse, and collaborative research through shared initiatives, events, and communications. With this newsletter, our vision is to expand and engage our community on a larger level to foster greater cooperation among 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!

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## **Statement on the Actions of the EAA Executive Board at the EAA 2026 Meeting**

At the beginning of the EAA 2026, we witnessed some chaotic and undemocratic messaging from the EAA Executive Board regarding the participation of Israeli institutions, and aiming to control debates on these matters during sessions. Members of the MERC committee were deeply disturbed by these actions of the EAA executive board, and decided to express their disapproval by sending the Executive Board the following statement:

### *MERC statement*

*In line with the values of the Medieval Europe Research Community (MERC), which holds all archaeological practices politically relevant (see [MERC manifesto](#)), we wish to formally protest the chaotic messaging from the EAA Executive Board at the start of the 2025 EAA Annual Meeting regarding Israeli participation. Messaging included an official public statement that was almost immediately reversed, as well as instructions sent to session organisers and volunteers on September 2nd 2025, aiming to control any attempted debate on this matter during conference sessions. This is unacceptable. Overall, the Executive Board of EAA's handling of the situation was neither democratic nor transparent. No EAA body either informed or consulted the MERC community on any decisions made. In addition, during the Annual Business Meeting, the Executive Board gave insufficient justification for its poor decisions and communication concerning the attempt to hinder members from voicing their opinions. We wish to underscore that such inadequate management must never be repeated and that a clear explanation is necessary to properly and fully account for the way that this state of affairs came about and restore confidence in the EAA Executive Board.*

*This is even more significant in the context of the support that European archaeologists have extended to colleagues in Serbia, who have for months been standing together with the citizens of Serbia to defend their own democracy, freedom of speech and transparency, all the while enduring intimidation, physical assault, financial depletion and violations of academic autonomy. We believe in the open exchange of ideas, even in the most challenging circumstances, where a variety of positions and perspectives are always present.*

Carlo Citter, Ben Jervis, Jesús Brufal Sucarrat, Michael Lewis, Maxime Poulain, Andreia Filipa Moreira Rodrigues, Monika Milosavljevic, Aleks Pluskowski, Mária Vargha, Camilla Felicioni, Saša Čaval, Sarah Kerr, Pavla Tomanová, Pam Crabtree, Marte Spangen, Jakub Sawicki, Petar Parvanov.

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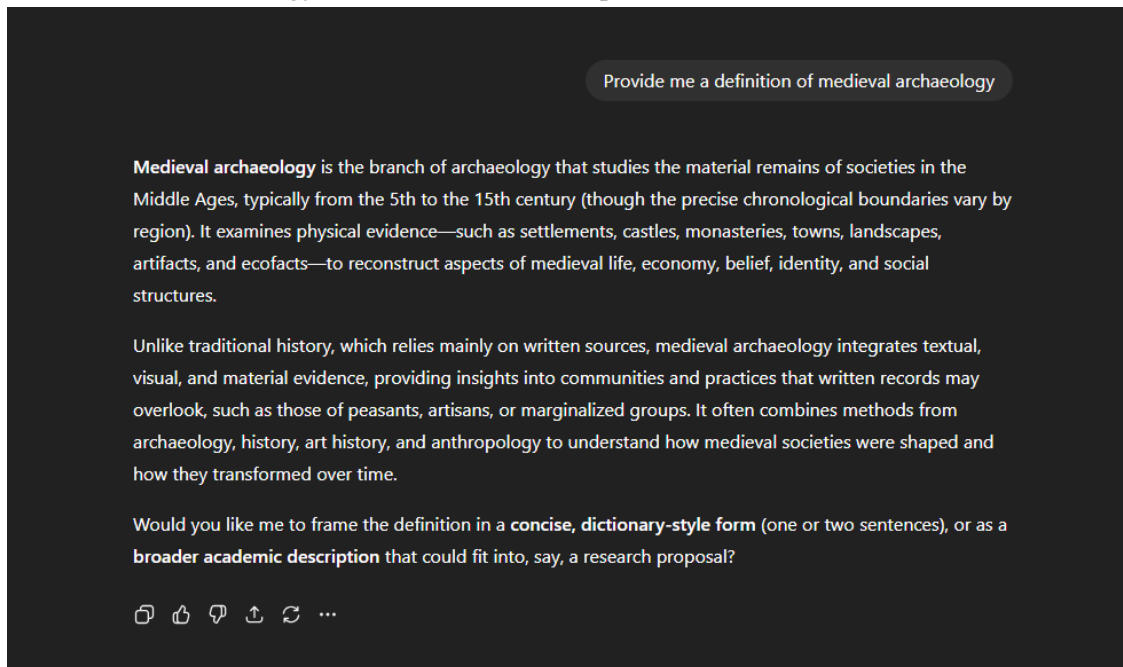
## MERC FORUM at EAA in Belgrade - Summary

As every year, at the EAA annual conference in Belgrade, the Medieval Europe Research Community hosted a forum titled Beyond Boundaries: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Future of Medieval Archaeology. The invited guests – Pam Crabtree (New York University), Robin Fleming (Boston College), and Carenza Lewis (University of Lincoln) – participated in an open debate on the current state and future of medieval archaeology within wider scholarship.

MERC Forum is a platform where a community of medieval archaeologists can meet and talk about “medieval” problems within the discipline or archaeology in general. We aim to keep it as a place where we can discuss important, current matters on our own and also meet fantastic guests and specialists in the field.

### Crossing disciplinary perspectives

This year, based on the previous forum held in Rome, we wanted to think about medieval archaeology from the outside – and as a starting point we asked ChatGPT for the definition of medieval archaeology, which (we think) is quite accurate.



Conversation with ChatGPT, 23.09.2025.

This became a springboard for discussion on how the discipline is perceived by scholars in other fields. Participants noted that while archaeology, history, art history, and geography often overlap, disciplinary boundaries and methodological differences can obstruct genuine collaboration.

## **Narratives and training**

A recurring theme was the role of training and communication. Archaeologists are taught to excavate, document, and classify material evidence, but they receive less preparation in transforming data into narratives that resonate with wider audiences. By contrast, historians are trained from the outset to tell stories about people in the past. This imbalance highlights the need for archaeologists to sharpen their narrative skills and to write with greater clarity for those outside the discipline.

## **Interdisciplinarity in practice**

The session made clear that interdisciplinarity is not simply a slogan but a matter of practice. Productive collaboration requires more than citing each other's work; it depends on genuine exchange, early sharing of results, and the willingness to refine ideas across disciplinary boundaries. Such efforts are not always easy to achieve, particularly for younger researchers navigating the pressures of disciplinary expectations, but they remain crucial if medieval archaeology is to thrive in a broader academic landscape.

## **Public engagement**

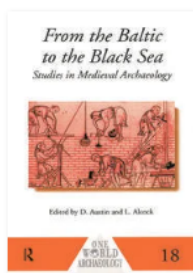
The discussion also underscored the role of archaeology in engaging wider audiences. Material remains offer a tangible connection to the past that texts alone cannot provide. Whether through community projects or student training, the direct encounter with artefacts and landscapes often proves transformative, creating a sense of immediacy and human presence that deepens understanding of the medieval world.



Photo summary of The Currently Occupied Rural Settlement (CORS) project, directed by Professor Carenza Lewis, copyright Carenza Lewis.

## Beyond the “tyranny of historical record”

The forum returned to the issue of textual dominance: is archaeology still seen as a subsidiary to history? Medieval archaeology inevitably draws on historical narrations, yet there is a danger of allowing such an approach to dominate the field. Material culture has the capacity to challenge textual narratives, to illuminate aspects of everyday life that never entered the written record, and to reshape chronologies through new scientific techniques. Advances in dating methods and bioarchaeology already demonstrate how archaeology can generate knowledge that history alone cannot supply. Carenza Lewis pointed to evidence such as medieval graffiti, which escapes textual categorisation yet opens new perspectives on lived experience. Pam Crabtree emphasised the impact of scientific methods, which allow archaeology to supply increasingly precise insights. Robin Fleming noted the growing potential of radiocarbon dating to transform historical narratives altogether.



Chapter

## Medieval archaeology and the tyranny of the historical record

By [Timothy C. Champion](#)

Book [From the Baltic to the Black Sea](#)

Edition	1st Edition
First Published	1991
Imprint	Routledge
Pages	17



Share

Chapter with a provocative (for our discussion!) title!

## Moving forward

The forum showed that medieval archaeology sits at the crossroads of disciplines: it both relies on written sources and challenges them, provides innovative data and methods, yet still faces the task of making itself intelligible beyond its own community. Participants agreed that archaeologists must step outside disciplinary comfort zones, embrace collaboration in writing and teaching, and communicate more widely. In doing so, medieval archaeology can assert its independence while helping to shape genuinely interdisciplinary approaches to the past.

Summary prepared by Andreia Rodrigues and Jakub Sawicki; the whole transcription can be accessed [here](#).

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## **MERC Election Outcomes**

We are pleased to announce the results of the MERC committee elections!

**Saša Čaval**

**Petar Parvanov**

**Maxime Poulain**

**Marte Spangen**

**Lukas Werther**

Congratulations to the successful candidates! The committee looks forward to future collaborations with all of them.

The exact results are available [here!](#)

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## **Meet the New Committee Members**



**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. [ORCID](#), [Institutional Profile](#)



**Petar Parvanov** is an archaeologist at the National Archaeological Institute with Museum in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His research interests focus on cross-cultural perspectives in funerary archaeology and conflict heritage, as well as the public perceptions and political uses of the past. Recently he has been involved in various rescue archaeology projects in his home country and the research of the early Bulgar power centre in Pliska. Petar has been a MERC member since 2019 and a regular contributor to the MERC-sponsored sessions at the EAA Annual Meeting and beyond. [Academia.edu](#), [ORCID](#)



**Maxime Poulain** is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the University of Tübingen (Germany). His research explores (post-)medieval Flanders in a broad comparative framework, drawing on methods ranging from pottery studies to biomolecular science. Most recently, he has focused on the archaeology of medieval sex work, using ancient DNA and isotopes to challenge long-standing stereotypes.

[Institutional Profile](#)



**Marte Spangen** is Associate Professor of Archaeology at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. She specialises 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 since 2019, particularly focusing on topics of diversity and inclusion in archaeology. [ORCID](#)



**Lukas Werther** is Deputy Director of the Romano-Germanic Commission (RGK) Frankfurt at the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), and he teaches at Tübingen University. He conducts research at the interface of archaeology, geosciences and history, particularly in Germany, France, Great Britain and the Balkans. Until 2025, he was executive secretary of the German Society for Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology (DGAMN).

[Institutional Profile](#), [ORCID](#)

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**📞 Call for the 4th MERC Postgraduate and Early Career Conference in Medieval Archaeology Barcelona 13-16.04.2026**



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We are happy to invite you to the 4th MERC Postgraduate and Early Career (in short ECR – for Early Career Researchers) Conference in Medieval Archaeology, which will be held this time at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain, between 13-16th April 2026.

As every year, the conference has no particular theme and all post-graduate and young career scholars working on broadly understood European Middle Ages are welcome!

Please send your presentation title, abstract up to 200 words and 5 keywords to the following address: [4thmercconference@gmail.com](mailto:4thmercconference@gmail.com)

Deadline: **11.01.2026**

The proceedings will be published in English in open access, with no publication fees for participants.



## **MERC Postgraduate and Early Career Conferences - Past Events**

MERC has organised three MERC Postgraduate and Early Career Conferences (ECR – for Early Career Researchers) in Medieval Archaeology: in Pula (2018), Prague (2022), and Wrocław (2024).

The aim of the conference is to create and stimulate an international forum for postgraduate and early-career researchers in Medieval Archaeology. We offer opportunities for networking to foster further inter-regional collaboration, and aim to promote top-quality research in an accessible and informal atmosphere.



ECR MERC 2022, Prague; photo N. Sawicka (courtesy of the author)

We are also proud to say the conference is growing with every edition: whereas there were 27 papers presented in Pula, the program of the Wrocław meeting contained 36 oral presentations and 19 posters.





ECR MERC 2024, Wrocław; photo N. Sawicka (courtesy of the author)

The presented papers and posters are offered for publication in a peer-reviewed open-access conference [Proceedings](#). Besides being available in e-versions, those proceedings are also issued and available in physical copies at [Yellow Point Publications](#).

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## Stay Connected

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

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