

**Jessica Funtanilla**

Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

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During the summer, I studied palaeography and manuscript studies during three weeks of summer courses at the University of London's Institute of English Studies. Two summer courses were available to students and scholars to broaden their understanding of the fields. The courses were taught by well-known professors, established curators, and cataloguers; class sizes of no more than twelve allowed for group conversation and individual discussion. Additionally, I was able to begin research to continue a project I had begun in Madison, which allowed me to immediately utilize the information from the courses without delay.

The London International Palaeography Summer School offered five days of intensive training on a variety of topics. I selected three day-courses and one two-day course. The individual courses offered thorough introductions to each palaeographic topic, and the materials, which included photocopied manuscripts, were copious and detailed; sight-reading was encouraged and there were many opportunities to acquaint oneself with specific types of handwriting. The course on German palaeography was particularly useful, proving to be the most intensive sight-reading course. My two-day course focused on cataloguing, which I had not previously done. The course covered the intricacies of properly cataloguing manuscripts, recognizing styles from different countries, and making decisions on how to handle missing or unusual information. The instructors were very thorough in their explanations and handled each manuscript on a case-by-case basis to ensure that we understood the various methods of cataloguing and accounting for anomalies or rarities.

During the last two weeks, I took part in the London Rare Books School, which offered five-day courses on a single subject. For my first week I chose the History of the Book, which was incredibly detailed and provided insight into the book as an object; in addition to allowing us library time to observe and handle manuscripts at the University, we were able to visit Lambeth Palace Library, where we analyzed medieval religious texts. In the final week my course was European Bookbinding, where much time was spent becoming familiar with various continental and non-continental bookbinding practices. A large part of the course included hands-on sessions, where we discussed hundreds of late medieval and early modern printed books. Again, we visited other libraries and museums to become better acquainted to the rich collections available in London—and working with curators and librarians provided additional experience.

Towards the second half of my trip, I had the opportunity to carry out research pertinent to my studies, continuing a project I started two years ago, focusing on a manuscript which happened to be held at the University. I was able to use transcribe the text using the original manuscript, and could better analyze its palaeographical features, as many were not visible in the copy available in Madison. I discussed the manuscript with library staff, who offered guidance on the binding and how to best catalogue it for my research. I was also allowed to photograph each page so that I could continue this research when I left London. I intend to finish this transcription and use the data to add to my previous project.

The above highlights the many opportunities I was able to enjoy in London, from working esteemed professionals to handling original manuscripts. I also came away with a number of contacts from course participants, many of whom work in various archives and libraries around the world; these contacts, in addition to the professors and academic staff at the University with whom I worked, have allowed me to greatly broaden my professional network. I am especially grateful to the IRIS for providing the Mellon Fellowship which made my research and training possible. I have returned from London with a richer and deeper understanding of palaeography and manuscript studies, with materials and points of contact which will certainly enrich the direction of my future Ph.D. studies at UW-Madison.