Greetings: 55 Years Ago…

Dear Affiliates and Friends:

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- Rose McCandless, CMRS Major / Izzy DeSantis, CMRS Minor
  
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From the Pandemic to the Page: The “La Sfera Challenge”

Challenge I

The COVID-19 has cancelled conferences, moved classes online, closed archives and libraries, and made research opportunities disappear before our eyes. But luckily for me, Benjamin Albritton (Rare Books Curator, Stanford University Libraries) and Laura Morreale (Independent Scholar) started the “La Sfera Challenge”, an international competition to transcribe manuscripts of Goro Dati’s La Sfera, an early fifteenth-century work focusing on astrology, geography, and cosmology.

The first round of the challenge was made up of three teams from three countries: Italy, France, and the U.S. “Squadra Italia” transcribed Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 752; “Équipe France” transcribed Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arsenal MS 8536; and “Team USA” transcribed New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS 328. Each copy was fully digitized on the crowdsourcing transcription software FromThePage, and we competed to see which team could accurately transcribe their copy the fastest. The collated copies would be useful for anyone who wanted to analyze the discrepancies between the texts or hands. And, of course, international bragging rights awaited the winners.

I joined Team USA after participating in a virtual session on Stanford University’s fragmentary manuscript collection led by Dr. Albritton, who invited anyone interested to join in the pandemic-era digital manuscript fun. The first round took place in May/June 2020, and it was such a hit among manuscript scholars (and Twitter users!) that the judges decided to hold a second round. I texted my classmate and friend, Izzy, to join La Sfera with me…

Rose McCandless
Senior MedRen and History major

Challenge II

For this round of the challenge, five teams of scholars were assembled around five copies of La Sfera. This time, instead of being divided by country, scholars worked in international teams named for the library of
their manuscript. Rose and I were members of “Team Wellcome”, which
centered on the manuscript in the Wellcome Collection in London;
competing teams worked on manuscripts from the Beinecke, Vatican,
Spencer, and Newberry Libraries. We were the youngest members on the
team, and the only team members without PhDs in some area of Medieval
and Renaissance Studies. While this fact intimidated me at first—as did
the fact that our manuscript was in Italian, a language I don’t speak—our
teammates were so “wellcoming”!

The day of the challenge came in July, and I completed my portion while
staying with my aunt in Chesapeake Bay. She made crab cakes while I
mumbled in Italian and tried to remember the different abbreviations for
“per” and “pro”. This exercise improved my confidence in my transcription
skills—previously, I had only transcribed Latin, English, and French, all
languages which I know, so it was really exciting to see that I could also
work with Italian, especially when I had teammates in Italy who could
check my work.

After completing my pages of transcription, my task was to revise the
transcriptions of a teammate—basically, to check the abbreviations they
chose to expand, and test my eye on confusing letter forms. As the art
historian of the team, I also reviewed our descriptions of the maps and
charts at the beginning of our manuscript. Thanks to the manuscript
illumination course I took with Professor Whittington this past spring, I was
able to identify the T-O and climate zone maps as typical for the period.

Team Wellcome was quick and accurate with our transcription—we won
the challenge within 48 hours. Besides the thrill of eternal glory, I am
grateful for the challenge to test my transcription skills in a new language,
and to meet more scholars in the disciplines I love.

The La Sfera Challenge may be over (for now), but the collaborative
transcribing was so popular that Laura Moreale started the “Image du
Monde Challenge”, again using FromThePage to transcribe five copies of
Gautier de Metz’s thirteenth-century French treatise. Rose is participating
on Team 2, transcribing Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fonds
Français 2173 alongside manuscript scholars from the USA, UK, Russia,
and beyond. These challenges have been a welcome respite from the
stress and uncertainty of COVID-19, giving manuscript scholars a way to
connect through transcription and digital humanities.

To find out more about the La Sfera and Image du Monde Challenges,
you can visit https://lasferachallenge.wordpress.com and
https://imagedumonde.wordpress.com, and search #LaSferaChallenge,
#LaSferaChallenge2, and #ImageduMonde on Twitter. To learn more
about (and sign up for) FromThePage, visit fromthepage.com.

Izzy DeSantis
Senior MedRen minor, History of Art and Creative Writing major

Upcoming CMRS Events
CMRS Affiliate Accomplishments

Naomi Fukumori (Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures), has been appointed director of the Institute for Japanese Studies (IJS). Fukumori will be responsible for enhancing Japanese studies programming to advance and disseminate knowledge about Japan, including its people, language, art, culture, history and its society.

SAVE THE DATE:

2020-2021 Symposium on Digital Archaeology
Friday, October 23, 10:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Zoom

Presenters - Janelle Jenstad (University of Victoria), Anthony Masinton (Independent Scholar), Jim Knowles (North Carolina State)

**Free and Open to the Public**

If you require an accommodation such as live captioning or interpretation to participate in this event, please contact cmrs@osu.edu. Requests made by about 10 days before the event will generally allow us to provide seamless access, but the university will make every effort to meet requests made after this date.

Additional Information
Faculty affiliates Alan Farmer, Elizabeth Kolkovich, and Sarah Neville (Department of English) each have an essay in a collection that was published this summer:


Hannibal Hamlin has had two articles published recently:

- "How Far is Love from Charity?: The Literary Influence of Reformation Bible Translation." *Reformation*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2020, pp. 69-91 (a special issue commemorating founding editor David Daniell).

**News & Notes**

MEDREN course listings for Spring 2021 are now posted on the CMRS website; the list of affiliated courses is in process and should be posted by October 16 before the first Spring term enrollment windows open.
Research fellowships are offered twice a year by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at Saint John’s University. The deadline for the upcoming application cycle is October 15, 2020:

- Heckman Stipends;
- Nicky B. Carpenter Fellowship in Manuscript Studies;
- Swenson Family Fellowships in Eastern Christian Manuscript Studies for Junior Scholars.

Next Issue: October 19  Submission Deadline: October 16