

Sunday, September 29, 2013

## Top Eleven (free) Resources for Medieval Research

By Catherine Ambrose

Not all of us have access to online databases that universities now offer their students. As a matter of fact, most of us have no idea what is offered now, since it's such a change from when we were all in school once upon a time. How do we get access to the research we need, and without paying upwards of a thousand dollars a year for a resource that we rarely use?

Some of these resources require local library cards – but for the most part, obtaining a library card is free if you live in the area.

### 1. Interlibrary Loan

Let's face it: not all libraries have everything, especially if you live in a smaller town or city. With the advent of the internet, however, we've gotten a step closer to freedom of information by allowing books to be lent world-wide through a process known as "Interlibrary Loan". If your library doesn't have a resource that you need, talk to your librarian about it, and usually within a few weeks that resource will be in your hands – and usually at no cost.

### 2. WorldCat – (<http://www.worldcat.org/>)

The mother of all library catalogs, WorldCat is a catalog that taps into nearly every library around the world, including many local libraries. Not sure where to find something you've been wanting to get your hands on? Switch over to WorldCat and you can see at a glance where the book is carried and how far it is. You can even request a loan straight from the site, as long as you belong to a local library. It's a combination of one-stop shopping and research.

### 3. JSTOR

If WorldCat is the mother of all library catalogs, JSTOR is the father of all historical research databases. Combining a massive number of regularly-updated scholarly journals and magazines, JSTOR offers the best of the best in historical research, and all of their sources are peer-reviewed and checked thoroughly. While many local libraries do not have access to JSTOR, state libraries usually will and a card is just as easy to obtain there.

### 4. Google Scholar – ([scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com))

There has always been a battle fought between freedom of information and who that information really belongs to. This is where Google Scholar steps in, offering a middle ground of articles from older journals (ideal for historical research), article abstracts (summaries), and citations. Want to find out who the best are referring to in their research? Google Scholar has citation information too.

### 5. Online Subject Bibliographies

Chances are, if you're facing a research problem for the SCA, it's already been addressed. By searching for your specific problem and the term "bibliography" in your preferred search engine, lists of resources that are related may just pop up, compiled by fellow SCA members and researchers alike. If anything, this will give you a great place to begin.

### 6. Historical Atlases

Can't find any information on your culture during the time period you want? Check a

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From The Seneschal's Pen

Baronial Missives - September

September - Master Efenwealt

## Persona of The Month

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## Links!

Nottingham Hill Coill

Email lists/Forums

## Luminaries Illuminated

Lord Jonathon Hawke

Rohesia Anven

Lady Sithmaith NicAoidh

Lady Millicent Shiveley

Lady Katherine d'Orleans

Syr Richard de Montbrai

Baroness Morwenna and Baron Bardulf

Lord Ivar Ulfsson

Jack Black of Flint

## Songs and Poetry

The Marshall's Cross by Sir Bryce

## Fiction

historical atlas. Place names change (a lot!). For instance, what we know now to be Germany has once been part of the Prussian Empire, and before had been divided up into dozens of smaller kingdoms and parcels of land. Historical atlases will give you the names you need, and the information to go along with them. Like much else, these atlases exist both in libraries and online.

### 7. Cambridge History of...

If you're looking for something on a specific culture, encyclopedias won't have the depth you'll most likely need. The Cambridge History series features entire volumes on specific cultures. The series has a great reputation among scholars, and is popular enough to where many libraries hold the books.

### 8. Heralds and Librarians

In the case of finding information on your persona, what better resource is there than your local herald? With all the tools on naming, culture, and heraldic devices at hand, the herald is the first person you should check with if you're starting persona research. Plus, most heralds have the experience to go along with the research; chances are that they've gone through the process plenty of times.

While most haven't specialized in medieval history, librarians are trained in the art and science of search. Bring your questions in to the research or reference desk, and your local librarian will be more than happy to help get you started. They'll also be able to help you with all the other resources listed here.

### 9. Bartelby (<http://www.bartelby.com>)

Need some general information? Bartelby is a website that features full text of thousands of encyclopedias, reference books, fiction, non-fiction, and many, many other sources. Of particular note is The Oxford Shakespeare with full text of all of Shakespeare's work, and entire sections on mythology and religion – excellent for medieval research.

### 10. British Library Online ( <http://www.bl.uk/> ), British Museum Online (<http://www.britishmuseum.org/>)

With manuscripts being scanned in for the local public on a daily basis, all the information you need for research like this is right at your fingertips. Not only does the British Library and British Museum websites feature complete interactive manuscripts and entire exhibits right there online, they also offer the information with which to back it all up.

### 11. Other SCA Members

In many cases, one of the best resources to have at your disposal is people. Have a question on something specific? Ask someone in the SCA who focuses on the area. Peers (especially Laurels) are wonderful for this, because they've already done the research on their subject.

There's absolutely no limit on geography. Ask around; find out who might know, and shoot out an email. Chances are that the recipient will be thrilled and more than a little humbled to have been approached. After all, that's what the SCA is about: sharing what we know with other people.

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