

MitMA Irving Interview

Mon, Sep 25, 2023 4:58PM 41:08

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

manuscripts, work, monte, medieval, books, library, microfilm, parchment, middle ages, vatican library, interested, liturgy, university, big, kalamazoo, letters, southern italian, study, fragment, gospel

SPEAKERS

Will Beattie, Ben Pykare, Dr. Irving



Ben Pykare 00:05

I'm Will Beattie.



Will Beattie 00:06

I'm Ben Pykare. And we're two graduate students at the University of Notre Dame's Medieval Institute.



Ben Pykare 00:12

We're here to chat with students and scholars of the medieval world about what they do and how they came to do it.



Will Beattie 00:18

So who have we got today, Ben?



Ben Pykare 00:20


Well, today we're sitting down with Dr. Andrew Irving, Assistant Professor of Religion and Heritage at the University of Groningen. We're talking to him today about his academic journey and his fantastic recent lecture at the Medieval Institute on the Uta Codex.





Will Beattie 00:35

Sounds great. Well, let's go and meet him in the Middle Ages.


 **B** Ben Pykare 00:40
Welcome, Dr. Irving. It's a pleasure to sit down with you today.


 **D** Dr. Irving 00:46
Likewise.


 **B** Ben Pykare 00:49
One question we like to start with: you're at the grocery store. It's a long line. You start chatting, perhaps with the person in front of you [or] behind you. They ask you, "so what do you do for a living"? How do you typically answer that question?

 **D** Dr. Irving 01:06
Umm... [laughs]. No, I think recently I think I've... I'm slowly beginning-it's taking me a while-to articulate that I am a cultural historian. And that allows me to swing in a variety of directions.


 **B** Ben Pykare 01:22
Yes


 **D** Dr. Irving 01:22
Depending on how people pick up on that. If I say that I work on religious history, or I work on... or I say, work on manuscripts. It's often people have like, ooh, manuscripts, you know, Dan Brown, you know...

 **Will Beattie** 01:35
Right.


 **D** Dr. Irving 01:36
And then there's some sort of like, a sort of fantasy world of manuscripts. But I don't usually say I'm a medievalist. What I've noticed... So my biggest challenge is not in the supermarket. It's more in the academic world. So I'm teaching as Theology and Religious Studies faculty. So an I, I've always introduced myself in circles, as in... people, you're around the table, and, you know, "what do you do"? And I always say, "I'm a medievalist."


 Ben Pykare 02:03
Yes.


 Dr. Irving 02:04
And that usually, people's [reaction] "oh... medievalist." There's nothing goes off in their imagination about that. And so now, I tend to say, "I'm a cultural historian. I work on material culture, mostly in the Middle Ages," to my to my religious studies colleagues, because it's not going to get me any brownie points for being a medievalist there. Whereas in the supermarket, people might say, "oh, Middle Ages, castles"?

 Will Beattie 02:31
Yeah.

 Dr. Irving 02:32
And so they have something to fill in? Yeah.

 Will Beattie 02:34
Does it tend to be the same kind of when you're in the supermarket talking to people and you know, that kind of thing comes up? Does it seem to be tend to be the same touchpoints of castles? Knights? Dragons?

 Dr. Irving 02:44
Yeah, yeah. And, and a little bit, if you say to them "manuscripts" then they immediately think of Dan Brown and like that, that will that happens a lot. That happens. And, and it's fun, because then I can well, yes, I worked at work in the Vatican Library. And then and then you've got some and you say "yeah, it really is amazing." And people have... you can you can work and build on people's imagination of the past in that way. I mean, I don't do a lot of work with castles. So I don't work much on military history. And so yeah, so I can't really do that. But I can do monks, you know, and that's also a little bit of a world that is open to medieval imagination. You know, the general public's imagination of the Middle Ages. Yeah.

 Ben Pykare 03:34
Yes.

 Dr. Irving 03:35

 Dr. Irving 03:33

And I've done a little bit on medicine, so they can also connect with that. Yeah.

 B Ben Pykare 03:41

Fantastic. Fantastic. Yes, that's a very, it's very intriguing that it's harder to clarify what you do to your complete stranger. But that is the nature, that is the nature of being in a broader field, well, such as history or literature field. You know, I feel like medieval concerns are sometimes ancillary maybe to what they think of their own field.

 D Dr. Irving 04:08

Yeah, yeah. Well, yes, I think it's true that I think, perhaps because of the splintering of disciplines, or perhaps because of a drive to be oriented towards present concerns, not only in religious studies and theology, but in other faculties, too. There's a kind of like, oh, you know, you need to be with what's happening now. And then as soon as you say, "Middle Ages," how is that relevant now? Whereas if you say to the person on the street, "Middle Ages," it, it kind of opens up a world of imagination.

 B Ben Pykare 04:40

That's exciting.

 D Dr. Irving 04:41

A lot of the imagination might be questionably historically accurate, but you've got something to build on. Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

 B Ben Pykare 04:49

So for you, when did that interest in Middle Ages, in the medieval period, begin? Was at age two was it in grade school or later?

 Will Beattie 05:02

When did that world of imagination open up to you?

 05:06

Well, yeah, I grew up on a dairy farm and rural northern New Zealand. And so I didn't... so there wasn't any medieval European Middle Ages on my doorstep. What it was associated for me was with a past, a distant past that was far away. And I wanted, I wanted to get closer to that. I didn't really do anything on that, you know, as I didn't have any opportunity to do anything on

that when I was a child or a teenager. But when I went to university, I did French and German - I majored in French and German. And we had to do medieval French and medieval German majors in those days, I don't know whether they still do, but we did then. And I loved it. I absolutely loved it. It was all you know, medieval, vernacular, tradition, we did "Chanson de Roland" as well.



Will Beattie 06:10

What would that be? Sorry? I'm not too good with Old French.



Dr. Irving 06:14

Oh, yeah. Okay, so it's the "Song of Roland." So this sort of story of really fighting against impulses on the invading, invading Frankish territory. And then the kind of Frankish pushback against it, and the hero was Roland. So... and then that story is told in old French. And then we also read other very vulgar literature with lots of, you know, farting, and sex and all kinds of things from late medieval French sources. I loved it. And I had very good professors, I would say [at the] University of Auckland, both in the French and in the German [departments]. And I was planning actually to do my Masters in the Percival epic, which is another sort of late medieval epic that was told both in German and in French. It originated in French and then "The Song of Roses," and then all was put into, into Wolfram von Eschenbach's thing on Parzival. And I got interested in that because I, my peculiar teenage rebellion was to discover Wagner. So, and of course, Wagner isn't really, you know, you know, Wagner's Wagner. He's not the Middle Ages, but, but I loved Wagner's Parsifal, and then I wanted to read the source material. And... but then I abandoned ship and decided no, I wanted to do theology. So then I did a degree in theology instead of doing that Masters. So it didn't... but that that stayed with me. And then I came back to it through different through a different lens later. Yeah.



Will Beattie 08:03

Was coming to Notre Dame always on your radar?



Dr. Irving 08:07

No, that came out on my radar... well, it so I, after I finished my undergraduate degrees in New Zealand, I worked in a bookstore for a while. I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do. So I managed to bookstore. And then I thought, what I really want to do is study liturgy. And Notre Dame had a very, has a very strong literacy program. It also had a summer school program. So you could do three consecutive summers, if you studied and six weeks for three summers, like really intensive courses, then you had to do a reading program in between. And then in the fourth year, you came back for your comps, and you could have your Masters degree in those days. And, and so I thought it was the easiest way for me to test to see if I could make it in a big American university. So and you couldn't study liturgy in New Zealand or in Australia, so I had to go further afield. So I came for that. And then I got the bug, and thought I have to come

full time. So I came back full time. So it's really liturgy that I came [for], and then when I was here, I did a course medieval liturgy and then thought "oh, there's the Middle Ages! I can do literally and the Middle Ages." and then I came to the Medieval Institute. Yeah.

B

Ben Pykare 09:23

What was that first draw toward more theological study as well as liturgy in particular?

D

Dr. Irving 09:30

I think, you know, for me, I mean, I think everyone wants to say this about their discipline...

B

Ben Pykare 09:38

Yeah.

D

Dr. Irving 09:38

But I think it brings together a lot of... a lot of things that I'm interested in. So liturgy has a little bit of theology, it has ways of thinking about God and what it means to be human, which gives an interesting discourse. It has history; you can study history in it and the historical sources. It's about practice. And it's about things. And you can, you can deal with material culture, and art, and architecture, and music. So it's a sort of multifaceted... it's like a Wagnerian opera! But it's, it's liturgical instead, with all of these multiple facets, you know. And that gave me... that both interests me, and then gives you a kind of range of skills that you can then use later in your, you know, when you need to teach and do research.



Will Beattie 10:34

And coming from New Zealand to a big American institution, which is something I can sort of relate to coming from the UK and, and also wondering, can I make an a big scary American University? How was that?

D

Dr. Irving 10:49

Yeah. Well, I mean, it was scary when I first arrived here. And also, you know, culture shock, was coming from Auckland, and, you know, arriving here: wah! I'm in the Midwest of the United States, I had never been to America before. So it was completely new. But, you know, what I found is, you know, the, the grad... the graduate school population is very, you're with your cohort. And they're also mostly from elsewhere. And so you instantly, therefore, bond together. And, and that provides an orientation. I think I regularly needed to, my principal always accused me of escaping regularly to off campus to go to, you know, Chicago, or whatever. And, of course, when I was doing my research, I was often away doing [research] in Italy and France. But I, I had an attachment here for a long time. And it's still feels a little bit like a home away

from home it because I was... because a lot of very important people for me in my early adult development were here. Both professors and fellow students. And because Kalamazoo is nearby, then every time I come from Kalamazoo, I get to see a lot of that cohort.



Will Beattie 12:14

Because Kalamazoo is sort of the big North American medieval conference, right, where hundreds of medievalists from across the world will come together to, to share their research.



Dr. Irving 12:24

Yeah, yeah. So... and what I like about Kalamazoo, so it's this huge, huge conference, thousands of people, some crazy, some not. But it's very relaxed for a conference. So some conferences that really, you know, [are] very focused, or they're more like expert meetings, you know, they're super serious. And some big but also have job interviews attached. So there's lots of nervous graduate students running around looking like they want to throw up. And Kalamazoo is, you know, at the sweet moment of the year, at, you know, middle of May when most people have either finished their academic year in, in North America, or they're just about to finish in the US and Canada. And so people are beginning to relax a little bit.



Ben Pykare 13:17

That is true.



Dr. Irving 13:18

And so they get to share their research and connect with each other. And I think both aspects of that are great. And what's great about Notre Dame is I mean, for as a medievalist, it's so close to that, that you can go there easily. And then when you come back there, you see people from Notre Dame, and your colleagues who've come through there regularly. So you get to maintain those connections. Yeah. Yeah. I really like that.



Ben Pykare 13:44

That's fantastic.



Dr. Irving 13:46


Yeah.





Will Beattie 13:46


Have you made it to Kalamazoo yet?

 Ben Pykare 13:48
I have not. COVID has turned everything online.


 Dr. Irving 13:51
Aah, yeah,


 Ben Pykare 13:52
That was the end of my first year when everything's state.


 Dr. Irving 13:55
Yeah, yeah.

 Will Beattie 13:56
Yeah, it was the same [for me]. I had one year where I could have done it my first year, but I didn't have anything I felt I wanted to present. And I really regret that because COVID ever since. One day...

 Dr. Irving 14:06
Yea, you need to experience their really hot rooms and cheap wine. But you've got their joy awaiting you.

 Will Beattie 14:13
Can't wait, can't wait.

 Ben Pykare 14:15
Look forward to it. So what was your dissertation on, here? What what did that what? How did you end up lasering laser focusing these broader interests?

 Dr. Irving 14:25
Well, so um, I worked, wrote on a group of gospel books from Southern Italy from a monastery called Monte Cassino and I started that was because I got that you know those interests in

called Monte Cassino, and I started that was because I got that, you know, those interests in performance and things and history coalesced for me and liturgy. And then I wanted to focus on: "okay, so now I need A thing." And what I was interested in was the tension implied in a book that seems to be written for reading, I mean, it's, it is written for reading, but people are doing all kinds of other things with this book that are not about reading. They are swearing oaths on it. They're using it to make bishops, they're parading it around their armies. They're doing all kinds of interesting things with books. So I started with that, in general: the phenomena of doing things with sacred books. And then I decided to focus on a particular series of books. And that enabled me to then really seriously build some skills and manuscript studies and paleography and codicology... skills [where] you really need to analyze the manuscripts themselves, rather than just be on what people are doing in general with books.

B

Ben Pykare 15:46

How was... I'm assuming you get to then go and see these manuscripts. Well, how was that experience?

D

Dr. Irving 15:52

It was just amazing. I mean, I totally got the bug. So what happened... in here in Notre Dame we had the course - I'm sure you still have, you know - the paleography course. And so we had to, I had to do a description, I think of a Book of Hours or something in our special collections. So I did that. And that was... I kind of had a bug but, you know, I was interested and learned a lot. And then I met a woman from [University of] Toronto, actually, Virginia Brown, who's a specialist in southern Italian manuscripts. I decided to focus on southern Italy and Monte Cassino. And she was really one of the leading figures in southern Italian paleography, Virginia Brown. And so I went to a conference that was held at Ohio State, at the Center for Epigraphical Studies and Palaeography there. And she had... it was a conference in her honor. She had just retired. But I wasn't going to meet her. I sort of got there because it might also be useful to meet her. But I really wanted to meet the person, one other person was supposed to be there, the librarian from Monte Cassino, because I have to Monte Cassino, I have to meet him. He didn't come because he couldn't come. He was unwell. But I met her. And she totally took me under her wing, just completely generous, brilliant scholar. But [sic] she said, "Andrew, you must come to Monte Cassino when I'm there." And so then she took me in her little borrowed Fiat up the hill, every day. We would meet at 8 and go up the hill to the monastery, chatting all the time. She would sit at the table, you know, this very experienced scholar, and I'm, you know, for the first time handling these manuscripts. And so I could ask her things. And then she organised for me to go for the first time to the Vatican Library with her.

B

Ben Pykare 17:50

Wow, that's fantastic

D

Dr. Irving 17:51

So she could introduce me to people, and then tell me how it all worked. And then also, she was a fragment hunter. So she would... she was looking for any fragment of this script that is


characteristic of southern Italy called "Beneventan Script." And so she... anybody, any chance there was some fragment, she would try to hunt it down and record it. She traced down like thousands of fragments. And, and fragments were often using for rebinding early printed books. And so often libraries, you know, that have like, say, 15th century books, and they hadn't checked the bindings, and she would want to know what's in the bindings to see if there were some of these fragments there. And I went with her to, like, as seminary library that had been closed like five years earlier. And you know, and we opened the door and pigeons flew out. I mean, it really was, I mean, I completely fell in love with the whole, the whole thing.

 Ben Pykare 18:49

Yeah. You're treasure hunting.

 Dr. Irving 18:52

Yeah, yeah.

 Will Beattie 18:53

That really is a Dan Brown, kind of...

 Dr. Irving 18:55

Yeah. That's a Dan Brown moment. Yeah.

 Will Beattie 18:59

I mean, the librarys I'm guessing, I don't know if if she actually tried this with the libraries that were still functioning and everything, you know. Going in and saying, "can we can we take apart these bookbindings to see if there's anything?" I'm sure they didn't take fondly to that.

 Dr. Irving 19:12

Well, she knew who to play. I mean, she, she was from, from the south of the, of the US. And she she had years of experience, so she knew where you had to play what card. So yes, some, some libraries are very, very formal. In Italy, my experience has been that a lot depends on them knowing you. If they know you and they know that you're serious and you're to be trusted, then there's often a fair degree of room, except maybe in the very big central libraries like the, you know, the National Library in Rome, or the... then it tends to be a bit more formal and regimented. But once they know you, even The Vatican Library, they're very... they're strict, but you don't feel too intimidated, I would say. The intimidation happens in them getting to know you, I think really, that's where they're checking you out. It works differently [in different places]. What you have to get used to is every library has its own ethos, right? Some, somewhat determined by national standards, and somewhat determined by individuals. And,

and it can change as well. So you can't go in thinking, "well, it's like this and this library, I'm going to insist it works in the same, and the other libraries." You have to go and [remember] you're traveling to a different country. They have their own rules. The only thing you could... you must just abide by the rules. Yeah. You can't come in resistant.



Will Beattie 20:52

So the way these things usually work, just for anyone that's, kind of, interested in maybe hasn't had an experience in a library. Usually, it seems that you, kind of, you have to introduce yourself. Not anyone can show up at these places.



Dr. Irving 21:03

Yeah, yeah, that's, that's right. Well, well, that's true for the big ones, right. So. So the Vatican Library, yes, you have to... well, you're passing into a different state for a start. So you're crossing borders. You have to get a permit to enter the Vatican state, which you do at the entrance. It's not, it's not difficult. But you come with a letter of presentation. And as a doctoral student, you're allowed in at a somewhat limited time. So there's, I think, two or three weeks a year where they don't let doctoral students, and only senior researchers [are allowed]. But you come with letters of presentation, and it depends a bit... they read them. And then if you have a legitimate reason to look at things, then you... I certainly had no problem. I, in fact, at the Vatican Library I've never had any problem. Nearly everything that I've requested I've been granted to look at. Sometimes you might have to justify more extensively, if it's a real treasure item. And certainly, as a doctoral student, they might be more cautious because you've got less experience. Some other libraries, you know, they might have real treasures, but they're smaller. And so they have less pressure on them. And they might sometimes be combined with other functions. So there could be school children working on their school homework, and you may be at the same table working on an 11th century manuscript, it's possible. I've had that experience. So they're not, they don't always have a whole separate section for the rare books or something like that. So it depends on the resources and the structure of the individual, local library. And then they... what you do have to do is write in advance, and warn them. That doesn't mean they will have always read your letter. But it does provide you with a kind of, you can refer to the letter and you can check to see if they're going to be open or is the manuscript being restored, or all of those important things. You don't want to be there and the manuscript inaccessible, right? Well, then you've spent a lot of money to get there, and you're out of luck. Yeah.



Will Beattie 23:29

Because, I mean, these manuscripts... yeah, they sometimes they're being taken for displays elsewhere. They're being restored. They're being read by scholars. So they're not just sitting necessarily just collecting dust. They're actively being used.



Dr. Irving 23:41

Yeah. Yeah.

B

Ben Pykare 23:43

How difficult? Well, with Dr. Brown with you, was it was that easy, then to then access those gospel books for your dissertation?

D

Dr. Irving 23:51

Yeah, I think, you know, what's difficult at that time, about Monte Cassino, and still... the Cassius connection [sic] has not ... well, it has got... microfilms have been made, but they're not... so they're at the university. So what the way I work there: the abbey library is open in the morning, from 9:30 to 12:30. And it was every day of the week, if you... I don't know that it is anymore. So I would get up the hill with her as soon as it opens, then I have my three hours of intense work and then I come down the hill, have some lunch quickly before everyone went on siesta and then go to the university where there was a microfilm collection where I could work on microfilms. So I could still get afternoon work in and probably fall asleep while everyone else was having their siesta. I would be in the microfilm room, trying to stay awake. So sometimes it yeah, there's that challenge of, like, opening hours is a problem. But in terms of access. It was relatively easy. You know, back in the day in the National Library in Paris, then, you know if, if something was microfilmed, they - I don't know how it is now I've heard that it's changed a bit - often they would be [saying "do you really need to see the manuscript?"]

B

Ben Pykare 25:15

Tell us, yea...

D

Dr. Irving 25:16

Yeah, and why can't you just see the microfilm? And I know that could be... you know, people want to risk the amount of mechanical wear and tear on the manuscript right? I was usually wanting to see codicological features. So I needed to make measurements of things I needed. And I needed to see scratch marks and count lines and the things that are very difficult to do on the basis of... even, you can do it now with very good digital images. But microfilm was difficult to do, and you can't measure with a digital image. So I usually had a good excuse to... didn't always work but usually did. Yeah.

B

Ben Pykare 25:36

And, I'm sure, yeah, working on a microfilm staring into it. I always feel like it's like looking into a microscope. Yeah, high school biology, very different experience and seeing the...

D

Dr. Irving 26:18

Oh, yeah



Ben Pykare 26:19

... the object in front of you. And then yeah, imagining all of these functions...



Dr. Irving 26:24

Yeah, yeah.



Ben Pykare 26:24

... being processed and being laid on people and people... yeah, like that.




Dr. Irving 26:29


Yeah, then you have a sense of a physical object; how big it is, how heavy it is, the sound it makes when the pages turn. Where something strange has happened in the manuscripts: clearly something's missing, or something, or there's dirt in the margin, all of these kinds of things. I remember in Monte Cassino, working on a couple of the early gospel books. And the way that... what's really good is if you can work with this raking light, so light coming in on an angle. And I noticed that there was a kind of shiny substance on the pages, here and there underneath punctuation points. So from southern Italian script, there's particular way of doing full stop, which is a sort of three point full stop. And I noticed under them, there was just kind of shiny stuff. And then I got a UV lamp, because I was trying to use... check some arrangers. And then poof, all of these dots came up, all over the pages throughout the book. And I think originally they possibly had a color, which is gone away. Certainly, they're translucent now. Translucent but shiny. And they.... and so, maybe they never had any color. In some places, you get a wash, a kind of color was to accentuate the punctuation marks for performance practice, right. So you can really see, it's not just a punctuation mark, it really highlights it. And if it's in a shiny substance, and you've got flickering candles, I think - I haven't tested it with flickering candles, but I think - that this just helps these points to stick out and shine out more. And that tells you if you're chanting on a single note, it tells you where to inflict the note, how you're supposed to end the phrase It will help you prepare a little bit more. So that kind of physical [detail], you would never see that on a microfilm. And you wouldn't even see them on a digital image because it's translucent. So yeah, they're, they're real things, not only in terms of measurement, of physical dimensions, and that kind of thing, and weight and heft of a book. I also asked them to weigh my books. They looked at me very strangely when I asked that. But, but, I also... some things on the surface of the page you can't see so easily even with a digital reproduction. Yeah. Yeah.




Will Beattie 29:08


I'm gonna start asking people to weigh my books now. Well, because a lot of the stuff I work with are kind of homiliaries and things which may be traveling around.


 D Dr. Irving 29:16
Yes


 Will Beattie 29:17
I have to account for the modern, or the 17th century binding.


 D Dr. Irving 29:20
Yeah, of course, as always, it's always the case. It's not the original weight. But it gives you a sort of baseline of, you know, something right? So that's what I wanted justify it with

 Will Beattie 29:34
That's a great idea. Librarians across Europe are going to be furious.

 B Ben Pykare 29:40
Break out their scales, their kitchen scales, so like, I guess this will do.

 Will Beattie 29:44
This will have to do.

 B Ben Pykare 29:46
So, how did you come to me interested in this codex, in particular - the Uta Codex? And go about crafting a academic lecture?

 D Dr. Irving 29:57
Aha. Okay, so, so yeah, the Uta Codex - how did I start working on the Uta Codex? I started working on it because, mostly because it shared a scribe with a book that I was working on for my dissertation. So, in Monte Cassino, I was working on the gospel books in Monte Cassino. And initially, I wanted to work on any gospel book that was there. And there were two kinds of foreign objects there. One from England, made in England, Winchester, probably, that ended up at Monte Cassino. And a book that no longer is at Monte Cassino, but in the Vatican Library, that was made in Saint Emmeram, in Bavaria in southern Germany. And when I was working on that, that second book, which was an imperial gospel book, probably donated by Henry II, I was reading about the scribes. And then I found, "oh, these scribes are also known to have produced other works," And I thought, "you know, what I should do is find out if it's similar or

not to the other works produced by that same scribe, not only similar in production, but also similar in use." Are there. in the Henry II gospels, that's in the Vatican Library. It's super fancy, not with a fancy cover anymore, but super fancy interior. There are quite a number of little additions and corrections and alterations and I thought "hmmm." And markings. And I wanted to see if that's the same for the other one, made in the same place around about the same time by some of the same people. So that's why I discovered the Uta Codex. And I wasn't really, I wasn't initially even aware of the box.

B Ben Pykare 31:41

Okay. A

D Dr. Irving 31:42

And that's when I... and when I went to the, the Bavarian State Library and asked for it for the first time, I wasn't expecting to see the box. Because I thought the box would be in the treasury, and the, and the manuscript would be on its own. And, and then they were very reluctant to show it to me, because of the treasurer binding.

B Ben Pykare 31:59

Yes.

D Dr. Irving 32:00

Because they were, at that time they keeping them together. And I was totally amazed. when they brought it out.

B Ben Pykare 32:05

When they wheeled it out?

D Dr. Irving 32:06

Yeah, yeah, I was not expecting it at all. Yeah. Yeah. So that's how I got interested in it. And then, at that time, you know, what intrigued me then; somebody in that first meeting said to me that the book was bound into the box. And I, and then, and then I saw the hinges, and the hinges are on the right hand side of the box, not on the left. I thought, "well, if it's bound into the box, that means that it must have opened at... how did IT open?"

B Ben Pykare 32:45

Yeah, yeah.

D Dr. Irving 32:47

Did it open at the back or at the front? Or how, how did this actually work? And that question stayed with me, you know, the book actually didn't find its way into my dissertation. I didn't end up writing about that in my dissertation at all. I had too many other things to write about. But the question of the relationship between the book and its box stayed with me. And then I found a reason to sort of come back to it. Being invited to talk about something in Regensburg by my colleague there. I thought, "well, I can talk about the Uta Codex then." And I needed to revisit my notes and be back in contact with the Bavarian State Library. And, and they were very helpful to me in providing photographs of features. And then I started to think through a little bit more what what might be at stake here. Yeah. Yeah, with the Uta Codex. And it's box.

B Ben Pykare 33:39

It's box. It was beautiful. I was not familiar with this. And so seeing the the images last night at your lecture, it is stunning.

D Dr. Irving 33:48

Yeah., it's amazing. Yeah.

B Ben Pykare 33:50

And then the, again, the materiality that this box has lasted so long, and it's still fairly pristine with all the...

D Dr. Irving 33:57

Yeah, it's in amazing, good condition. And, you know, in, you know, at Monte Cassino, my own, you know, my "mother house" as it were, you know, there's nothing of that quality that survives. And not of gospel books. So, you know, when I was starting my dissertation, Professor Lawrence-Nees, a really important, early medieval art historian in Delaware. He said to me, "you know, I think you need to find out why they weren't making, you know, deluxe gospel books at Monte Cassino." I think they were, in fact! But what survives are not, not the top tier, not the middle tier, maybe like tier three gospel books. Good, still high quality, but not top of the line. Because I think they were all lost and damaged because Monte Cassino was too vulnerable to attack and didn't... It was highly visible, and it was constantly raided and, and also so for various reasons those treasure bindings were a liability, actually, for the books. So it's unusual to find the whole thing all still intact and Saint Emmeram did a good job and Niedermünster did a good job at keeping their treasure bindings.

B Ben Pykare 35:16

That is a fascinating problem for people interested in material history of "well, okay, in what periods was this thing in danger of being destroyed, taken apart, where...?" You know, certain things, it's like recent history might have destroyed things. And other places, you know, "oh, 800 years ago, I forgot about that raid that happened here that might have destroyed it then."

 **D** Dr. Irving 35:42


Yeah. When I was writing my dissertation, I got really interested in one problem in the manuscripts of the abbey is working on: ink flaking. So this might sound hopelessly obscure, and in some ways it is. So it's, it's a phenomenon of ink just flaking off the surface of the page. And so what you're left with is sort of ghost letters.

 **B** Ben Pykare 36:04

Yeah.

 **D** Dr. Irving 36:04

You know? Because the ink has bitten a bit into the parchment. So you can still see the letters, but the ink is all gone. And, and so I wanted to understand why this was happening. And the standard response was, "oh, they didn't, they weren't preparing the parchment properly." And I didn't really buy that response. Because these are top line manuscript producers, they're really producing really, very good works. And also, they knew this was a problem at the time, because they were retracing their letters. They would retrace the letters, sometimes you can see the shadow of the earlier letter underneath it. So at the time that they were producing manuscripts that would later flake, they were also correcting this problem in earlier manuscripts.

 **Will Beattie** 36:47

Interesting, okay.

 **D** Dr. Irving 36:48

So maybe it was parchment practice, maybe it was something wrong with that ink. But then I thought... I read an article by an English scholar that talked about humidity and parchment. And she had this fantastic case of a manuscript that the parchment had expanded and contracted with humidity. And all of the letters had popped off the surface of the page and just floated to the gutter of the... you know, closer to the central fold of the of the of the manuscript. And so she, and then she was able to sort of track where they'd encountered considerable humidity. And I thought, "well, that could be what happened at Monte Cassino." And that led me - sorry, this is a long...

 **B** Ben Pykare 37:31

No, no, it's fine.

NO, NO, IT'S TIME.

D Dr. Irving 37:33

That led me to look at space and the manuscripts. Where were the books kept? Because I needed to know about humidity conditions. And that led me to understand the whole... what is... where are, where are the books in the library? I mean, where is the library? Are they in the library? No, they're not. And so, so where, what kinds of furniture? What kinds of rooms are they stored in? And where are those rooms within the architectural complex? What is that architectural complex's relationship to seismographic shifts, to climate conditions? And in Monte Cassino is constantly struck by lightning. And geographical things like thoroughfares. And if you then take into... enter in the equation that you know, the abbey is highly visible by a medieval road. It's up on a high hill, but any marching army coming south...

B Ben Pykare 38:32

Yeah.

D Dr. Irving 38:33

... "oh! There's Monte Cassino." And then you you track through its history, how many people went up the hill to get some, you know, some cash as it were?



Will Beattie 38:42

Right.

D Dr. Irving 38:43

Then you have a much richer understanding of these manuscripts in space and time, right? How their... what vicissitudes they have encountered through, through their long existence. At Monte Cassino their, their library, for a while, was right next to the warming room.

B Ben Pykare 39:00


Oh.


D Dr. Irving 39:00


Yeah. So we would now probably said that's not ideal.





Ben Pykare 39:07


 Ben Pykare 39:07
Fire and parchments.


 Dr. Irving 39:10
And above an apple storage or fruit storage unit, which had some drains running alongside it. So...

 Will Beattie 39:21
Perfectly...


 Dr. Irving 39:21
A perfectly not ideal environment, we might say now. Who knows how that affected things?

 Ben Pykare 39:27
Yeah. Fascinating. Fascinating. Well, unfortunately, I think there's...

 Dr. Irving 39:31
Ran out of time?

 Ben Pykare 39:32
... all the time we have today I don't know when your next appointment.

 Will Beattie 39:35
Yes, we don't want to keep you.

 Ben Pykare 39:36
I'm sure you're busy. It's been a pleasure chatting with you. How can our listeners find out more about you or your work? If you have anything public-facing that you'd like to share?

 Dr. Irving 39:46
Yea. Well, you can look me up on my profile at the University of Groningen website and they have stuff about my research on material aspects of liturgical manuscripts. Stuff about the

digital schoolbook project act soon and Erasmus's commentary on the Distichs of Cato. So all of the stuff that I'm working on, and critical heritage studies now. So all of that is, I think, listed on...

B Ben Pykare 40:12
Fantastic and we will include a link in the description to YouTube where we have already posted your lecture from last night.

D Dr. Irving 40:19
Okay.

B Ben Pykare 40:20
So hopefully, you will find your way to that. So thanks again, Dr. Irving.

D Dr. Irving 40:24
Thank you.

B Ben Pykare 40:25
And thank everyone for listening and we hope you'll meet with us next time in the Middle Ages.

 Will Beattie 40:42
"Meeting In the Middle Ages" is sponsored by the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame, with a generous grant from "The Medieval Academy of America." If you have any questions for medievalist send them to us at "meetinginthema@gmail.com." You can follow us on Twitter at "meetingintheMA," and Instagram at "meetinginthemiddleages." For more information on some of the topics raised in this episode, head on over to the episode description. Thanks for listening