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Essay cluster: Medieval forgeries / Forging the Medieval

Forging the medieval on Wikipedia

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Abstract Wikipedia is a major source for public information. Wikipedia materials are proliferated across the Internet of Things, are reused in journalism and social media, and power search engines and digital assistants (Ribeiro et al. 2021; Miz et al. 2020). Yet Wikipedia's impact on public understanding of the past, particularly our medieval pasts, is under-researched. This article argues for the significance of Wikipedia for medievalists in terms of how it may shape research, pedagogy, and public-facing work. We examine three case studies—articles for the 'Black Death,' the 'Viking Age,' and 'Old English literature'—to explore how the medieval is forged, defined by us as *crafted* and *created*, 'on-Wiki.' We discuss what these forgings suggest about public understanding, desires, and interests, and the ideas about the past that emerge as a result. Our case studies demonstrate varied approaches to Wiki content, including citation review, readings of version histories, and pageview analysis. It is intended that this article provokes further discussion of Wikipedia as a site of medieval public history and inspires our colleagues to engage as critics, editors, teachers, or activists.

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Introduction

Our contention is that consideration of how the Middle Ages are forged today, especially in the Global North, is incomplete without attention to Wikipedia. However, despite plentiful 'participatory medievalism' scholarship, analysis of how the medieval is forged on Wikipedia is rare (Horswell 2019; Wyatt 2020; Ingallinella 2022). As this *postmedieval* cluster demonstrates, 'forging' is a slippery term. Questions of intention may influence whether an object is read as deceptive, fake, or beautifully, authentically—perhaps radically—crafted, and these properties are not mutually exclusive. Archival objects, spaces, and practices have also emerged as important loci in this cluster, and Wikipedia is both a primary source and an archive. Forgery's multivalence frames our engagements with Wikipedia, as we elaborate throughout our SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, in our review of the state of medieval Wiki-teaching and research, and as we address three Wikipedia article case studies.

Academic integrity and Wikipedia guidance on 'Conflict of Interest' declarations invite that we state our positions. We are Wikipedia editors, or 'Wikipedians.' Richard began editing in October 2006, and since November 2012 has worked at Wikimedia UK, a registered charity where he is paid to facilitate other people to edit, and he edits voluntarily outside of work. Lucy began editing in February 2019, and has undertaken a variety of voluntary and paid roles, including editing and training others to edit on behalf of organisations. Fran began editing in July 2016, is a volunteer trainer with Wikimedia UK, and has trained people to edit as part of paid roles. We have edited or intend to edit some of the articles discussed in this paper, and so we reflect upon our own practice as much as on the 'state of Wikipedia.' We should also note that our focus is on English Wikipedia. Work remains to be done on how the medieval gets made on other-language Wikis.[1]

We use a collective voice in this introduction, 'Part 1: SWOT analysis,' 'Part 2: Medievalists and Wikipedia,' and the conclusion. In our case studies we adopt a singular 'I,' reflecting our individual critical approaches. Our disciplinary backgrounds offer methods that may—metaphorically or literally—be transferred from analysis of medieval-origin primary sources to Wikipedia. Richard takes a historian's approach, attending to the historiography of the 'Black Death' article informed by statistics and contexts of data reuse. Lucy, an archaeologist, excavates the earliest layers of the 'Viking Age' article, revealing contexts and examining how later deposits and cuts sometimes disturb original features. Fran evaluates quotations and citations in the 'Old English Literature' article, to argue that content and form co-create meaning, and that types and structures of knowledge forge a limited early medieval world. Any of these methods may be combined in future research.

1 The high-profile 'Zhemao hoaxes,' where a Wikipedian falsified Russian-topic content, including medieval history, on Chinese Wikipedia, is one example of a deceptive forgery ripe for analysis (Cheung 2022).

Part 1: Wikipedia: A medieval SWOT analysis

The seventh-most visited website globally,[2] Wikipedia is part of a network of open knowledge platforms, including Wikidata (a Linked Open Data store) and Wikicommons (a multi-media repository). Humans and machines query and reproduce Wiki-derived information via search engines, artificial intelligence, machine learning, digital assistants, APIs, and interfaces. Subsequently, internet users may encounter Wikipedia material without realising its provenance. Indeed, Wikipedia's ubiquity has been found to influence—even subconsciously—expert knowledge (Thompson and Hanley 2018).

We are motivated by Wikipedia's utopian aims as much as its problems. In this *postmedieval* essay cluster, Jennie M. England explores forgery in the sense of fakery, examining medieval documents with little relationship to truth (whether presented as true, or believed to be, by creators and some readers). Users have been wary of Wikipedia because of its association to this sense of forgery-as-deceptive. Although some research has found that users trust the content they find on the site (Williams 2014; Thompson and Hanley 2018), the fact that anyone may voluntarily and anonymously edit Wikipedia, and Wikipedia's potential to change continuously, are features that other readers have perceived as unreliable compared with peer-reviewed, named-author texts (Franklin-Brown 2012; Steinsson 2024). Also in this cluster, Elizabeth Biggs, and Francesca Brooks and E.K. Myerson demonstrate how the archive—as an organising space and as a concept—forges specific interactions with the medieval. Wikipedia's fluidity and its fixity make it both an archive and archival object. Although Wikipedia's content changes, all edits are preserved via 'History' logs, accessible via a tab at the top of each article. These 'History' logs are vital sources for us. Wikipedia's participatory processes of perpetual forging and archiving (which counter institutionally-defined archival practices) and the way that editors may seamlessly combine facts and myths, mean that Wikipedia preserves collective imaginaries of the medieval in real time.

Key tenets stemming from Wikipedia's 'Five Pillars' principles include the importance of citation, 'No Original Research,' 'Neutral Point of View,' 'Notability,' and consensus.[3] This guidance has been created in 'good faith' to stymie proliferation of inaccuracy, conspiracy theory, and pseudo-scholarship.[4] However, when enacting such guidance, editors—intentionally or otherwise—may reproduce patterns of racist, sexist, and other discriminatory beliefs (Moore and NevellNevell and Moore 2021).[5] Wikipedians are disproportionately white North American or white European men (Ford and Wajcman 2017), and such demographics may account for Wikipedia's tendency to reproduce hegemonic knowledges

2 Similarweb. March 2023. 'Top Websites.' http://web.archive.org/web/20230419154138/https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/.

3 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Five Pillars.' Last modified 22:18, 12 October 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Five_pillars&oldid=1179858344.

4 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Assume good faith.' Last modified 19:51, 22 October 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Assume_good_faith&oldid=1181394304.

5 See also: Wikipedia. 2023. 'Systemic Bias Project.' Last modified 23:48, March 21, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Systemic_bias&oldid=1145960194.

(Roued-Cunliffe 2017). English Wikipedia's focus is skewed to North American and European topics, and editors mostly cite English-language sources, reinforcing knowledge gaps between languages (Samoilenko et al. 2017). Efforts to increase quality by improving use of citations to 'reliable sources'[6] means that Wikipedia is mostly 'closed to any information that is transmitted orally or through traditional practices' (Franklin-Brown 2012, 3). Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies, for instance, often fall outside of Wikipedia guidance, and, with most editors being from non-Indigenous backgrounds, 'democratic' decision-making processes can too easily reproduce colonial erasure (van der Velden 2013; Grisel 2023; Vetter and McDowell 2023).[7]

Articles vary in the attention they receive from editors, and articles tend to improve with more active editors, and participation in 'Talk' pages (Greenstein and Zhu 2012, 2018; Horswell 2019; Steinsson 2024). Every article has a 'Talk' page where Wikipedians may discuss the article's content. Differing interpretations of 'neutrality' can cause disagreement on 'Talk' pages, as editors evaluate articles against guidance and sort the badly-made from the well-made (Horswell 2019, 112). The principles of 'neutrality' and 'notability' disproportionately negatively impact the representation of women and people of colour on Wikipedia (Edwards 2015; Ferran-Ferrer et al. 2022). For example, the 'Talk' page for the article 'Jack the Ripper' preserves how feminist research may be dismissed as 'fringe theory' because it diverges from previous scholarship.[8] Discussions in 2020 concerned historian Haille Rubenhold's research which, among other points, argues that naming all of the victims 'prostitutes' reproduces Victorian misogynist reportage. References to Rubenhold's book have been repeatedly deleted, and 'consensus' against Rubenhold's research remains firm (as of February 2024). This example has parallels with the experiences of Society for Medieval Scholarship members in 2015, who saw well-intentioned edits removed (Edwards 2015). As Mary Franklin-Brown wryly notes, 'there is no guarantee of accuracy because Wikipedia depends on consensus, which is not quite the same thing' (2012, 2). It is worth remembering here that, for example, although long-established, early medieval feminist criticism remains marginalised in conferences and journals (Lees and Overing 2010; Norris et al. 2023, 13). Wikipedia risks mirroring and amplifying disinterest, suspicion, or hostility towards feminist, critical race, eco-critical, crip, queer, and other radical scholarship.

The 'notability' criteria for biographies can also reinforce patriarchal measures of success (Tripodi 2021). This phenomenon is illustrated by the 'Proposal for Deletion' discussion of medieval literary historian Carol Braun Pasternack's biographical article. Editors weighed the relative merits of co-written and co-edited publications compared to mono-graphs.[9] The decision was 'keep,' but the event reveals how collaborative

6 Wikipedia. 2024. 'Perennial sources.' Last modified 04:11, February 4, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Perennial_sources&oldid=1203071842.

7 'Whose Knowledge?' is one of several campaigns that seek 'to centre the knowledge of marginalised communities.' See: https://whoseknowledge.org.

8 Talk: Jack the Ripper/Archive 7. 'Hallie Rubenhold.' 2020–2022. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Jack_the_Ripper/Archive_7&oldid=1179748688#Hallie_Rubenhold.

9 Wikipedia. 2020. 'Articles for deletion/Carol Braun Pasternack.' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/Carol_Braun_Pasternack.

practices in humanities research—often intrinsic to feminist and queer practices—risk being undervalued by Wikipedians as much as they are by neoliberal institutional metrics such as the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) or the tenure portfolio (although disciplines vary, with co-written papers being a norm in archaeology and sciences) (Leonardi and Pope 1994; Breeze and Taylor 2018).

Part 2: Medievalists and Wikipedia

We believe that Wikipedia's problems, as outlined above, intensify the need for medievalists to engage as critics, editors, and teachers. For over a decade, scholars have advocated for the careful use of Wikipedia (Mueller 2010; Carver et al. 2012; Ford and Geiger 2012; Sheppard 2019), identifying its potential as a space for sharing knowledge as much as addressing harmful medieval myths (Utz 2019). Free resources, for instance WikiEdu, may facilitate research or classroom engagement.[10] Medievalists have embraced Wikipedia's pedagogic potential—with students assessing Wiki materials, or tasked with improving or creating articles (Edwards 2015; Mulder 2019; Wood 2020; Anderson 2020; Ingallinella 2022; O'Connor 2022; Lin and West forthcoming).[11] Wikipedia is a useful conceptual tool for outreach and activism, to encourage interest in medieval studies, or to persuade medievalists into editing: a British Library blog introduces a fourteenth-century encyclopedia as a 'medieval wikipedia' (McCall 2017), and contributors to the 2014 editathon at Kalamazoo International Congress on Medieval Studies (ICMS) were invited to '[channel] your inner Isidore of Seville' (Kim 2014a), and such metaphors are engaging starting points for addressing spaces and theories of knowledge-creation.

By grappling with perpetually self-archiving texts, students' critical engagement with Wikipedia may facilitate comparisons between medieval and modern practices of collation, textual mouvance, and historiography. Students might consider the contingency of knowledge, the 'highly polyvocal nature and tolerance of dissent, even outright inaccuracy' (Franklin-Brown 2012, 4) contained within encyclopedias, and the function and effects of such texts. The ability to track changes—across manuscripts or Wikipedia 'History' logs—facilitates researchers and students to evaluate 'reception history and the complexities of intertextual relations across time, languages, and religious identities' (Ingallinella 2022, 191; see also Mueller 2010; Burke 2012; Franklin-Brown 2012), and encourages nuanced engagement with medieval texts and contexts while facilitating digital literacy skills.

Wikipedia-literacy is increasingly important for responsible citizenship, as information we consume off- and online invisibly draws from Wikipedia (Ball 2019; Ingallinella 2022).[12] Errors may be woven into Wikipedia

10 WikiEdu, Student Training Modules. https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/training/students. Accessed October 20, 2023.

11 Correspondence alerts us to further examples: Andy Seaman's 'Britain in the Early Medieval World' module (University of Cardiff) incorporates an assessed review of Wikipedia articles. Seaman established this module at Canterbury Christ Church, which Heidi Stoner continued. Edward Roberts' 'Carolingians' module (University of Kent) includes self-reflective essays by student-editors.

12 Old English scholars have long recognised the key role the subject can play in facilitating general media literacy skills. See, for instance, Dockray-Miller (2010).

articles which ape a 'neutral tone of voice,' and include citations. As Yumiko Watanabe elucidates in this special issue, understanding the apparatus of a text and how authenticity effects may be forged via rhetoric and form are vital medievalist skills. Being able to evaluate citations, 'Talk,' and 'History' pages confidently—pages that reveal 'the social landscape of an online community,' framing 'the social context of its production' (Horswell 2019, 113)—may empower researchers and students to use Wikipedia as a resource, subject of study, and as a participatory forum. Using apps such as X Tools to track article histories and contributor trends may further serve as provocative teaching or research starting points.[13]

Collaborative examples of using Wikipedia to disseminate medieval research, and much medieval-specific peer-reviewed Wikipedia criticism, have been driven by feminist and women scholars (even as many individual medievalists have been quietly, and importantly, editing Wikipedia for years). Scholars of feminist, queer, and Black DIY internet cultures have advocated for open-access and social platforms to share knowledge to emancipatory ends (Joyce and Tringham 2007; Morgan and Eve 2012; Cook 2019). However, we note that marginalised scholars tend to be lower paid than white men, and are more likely to take on under-celebrated service labour, making time spent Wiki-editing hard to justify (Leonard 2023). Certainly, our own experiences of precarity have impacted our ability to contribute as editors or trainers.

Dorothy Kim and Mary Suydam co-organised the '#MedievalWiki write-in' at Kalamazoo ICMS in 2014, sponsored by the Society for Feminist Medieval Scholarship (Kim 2014a, 2014b; Edwards 2015).[14] Monica Green led the 'Medieval Medicine and Health Wikithon' at Leeds IMC in 2014.[15] In 2015, Sparky Booker and Deborah Youngs co-organised the 'Medieval Women Edit-a-thon,' during their AHRC-funded 'Women Negotiating the Boundaries of Justice' project at Swansea University.[16] The Women's Classical Committee Wiki Project (#WCCwiki) has improved and made hundreds of Classical, late antique, and medieval topic articles since 2017, reflective of the expertise of contributors, and the interdisciplinarity inherent to premodern studies (Millington, Leonard, and Bridges 2017; Leonard and Bond 2019; Warren 2019).

To mark International Women's Day in 2018, Fran Allfrey and Beth Whalley co-organised a 'MedievalWiki' Editathon with support from Wikimedia UK, and created a Project page as a nominal 'home' for encouraging and recording activity.[17] MedievalWiki's aims have developed in response to the scholarship of members of the Medievalists of Color collective and medievalists working across feminist, queer and critical race theories, and public history, and to events which foregrounded

13 X Tools scrapes Wikipedia-derived data and enables users to generate rich queries and visualisations, see: https://xtools.wmcloud.org/.

14 Wikipedia. 'Meetup/MedievalFeminist.' Last modified 10:16, May 13, 2014. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Meetup/MedievalFeminist&oldid=608358150.

15 Leeds IMC website. 2014. Monica Green, Medieval Medicine and Health Wikithon listing. Last accessed 5 February 2024. https://www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/imcarchive/2014/sessions/949/.

16 User:Whistlaw/Jan_28_Editathon. 2015. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Whistlaw/Jan_28_Editathon.

17 Wikipedia. n.d. 'Medieval Wiki project page'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_MedievalWiki.

the racism and sexism within medieval studies (Clarke et al. 2020).[18] While the first workshop focused on medieval women, MedievalWiki today encourages the creation and improvement of medieval topic articles with attention to the global Middle Ages (as formalised by Geraldine Heng and Susan Noakes, see Heng 2021), and citing work by scholars and artists of colour, queer scholars, and scholars of marginalised genders.

In various configurations, Fran, Lucy, and Richard have led editathons under the MedievalWiki banner (Allfrey, Whalley, and Moore 2018–2022), as have Victoria Leonard, Sukanya Rai-Sharma and Kate Cook (at Leeds International Medieval Congress 2019: see Warren 2019). We'd like to encourage anyone reading this with an interest in MedievalWiki—especially those with permanent contracts—to use the Project space as their own. Please edit, collaborate, and take the Project where you will. A difficulty and opportunity of Wikipedia is that no one is in charge, and such non-hierarchical collaboration can feel unfamiliar. There are certainly lessons to implement from feminist, queer, and anarchist collectives, and successful Wikiprojects such as Women In Red (to which Lucy contributes), that may build MedievalWiki momentum.[19]

To reiterate, we know that many medievalists have been individually, and quietly, editing Wikipedia for years, and we do not wish to institutionalise every hobby. Both a joy and trouble with being a Wikipedian is the option for anonymity, which makes it difficult for researchers to assess the intentions or expertise of editors. There are good reasons not to go public with your Wikipedia edits: Eunsong Kim has demonstrated the risks of being public on the internet, which are compounded by race, gender, and sexuality (Kim 2018; see also Edwards 2015; Cook 2019; Hall 2019). However, media coverage about the Women's Classical Committee, and individual editors such as Jess Wade, have helped to raise the profile of women in Classics and Science respectively, revealing Wikipedia's potential for shaping public perception of topics and scholars (Leonard 2018; Leonard and Bond 2019; Page 2022).

Case study 1: Shaping pandemics past and present, by Richard Nevell

The article on the 'Black Death' is one of the most widely-read medieval history articles on Wikipedia; since pageview statistics began in July 2015, the article has been viewed 28 million times, averaging 300,000 views a month (Fig. 1).[20] That makes it one of the ten most-read articles under the umbrella of WikiProject Middle Ages—a group of Wikipedia writers with a shared interest who write entries on medieval topics—with a similar number of views as topics including Joan of Arc, the Byzantine Empire,

18 We have gratefully directed participants to explore the bibliographies in Hsy and Orlemanski (2017) and Rambaran-Olm and Wade (2020) during MedievalWiki events. WCCWiki also maintains bibliographies for inspiring editing, see: Wikipedia. n.d. 'Women's Classical Committee/Resources.' Women's Classical Committee Resources page. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Women%27s_Classical_Committee/Resources.

19 See: Wikipedia. n.d. 'Women in Red.' Women in Red Project Page. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Women_in_Red.

20 WMCloud Pageviews tool. 2023. Monthly views for 'Black Death.' July 2015 to March 2023. https://pageviews.wmcloud.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=0&start=2015-07&end=2023-03&pages=Black_Death.

and Islam.[21] These are, then, important articles and their information has the potential to be reused in a variety of different venues, from news reports to academic journals: Lori Jones and Richard Nevell (2016), for example, provide a case study of Wikipedia's role in sharing images related to the Black Death.

The heightened interest in the 'Black Death' article around the start of the Covid-19 pandemic exemplifies how people look to the past to understand the present. In January 2020, as cities in China entered lockdown, the *BBC News* website featured a piece called 'Coronavirus: how quarantine has fought disease through the ages' (Williams 2020), which explained that the term 'quarantine' came about through measures to stop the spread of the Black Death; the following month, *The Washington Post* ran a news story titled 'Why treating the coronavirus like the Black Death is so dangerous' (Eisenberg, Mordechai, and Alpert 2020). These are two of many examples that draw on earlier experiences of pandemics to anchor developing understanding of a modern situation. English Wikipedia's 'Black Death' saw its monthly average pageviews increase from 247,000/month for the period from July to December 2019, to 1.3 million/month across January to May 2020, with a peak of 3.1 million views in March.[22]

There are numerous ways in which Wikipedia's coverage of the Black Death could be analysed in considerable depth. As well as the main entry—'Black Death'—Wikipedia has articles on the phenomenon in different regions. While there is insufficient space to analyse each article in full here, it bears noting that the quality of each sub-article varies considerably, especially in relation to the number of cited sources, as summarised in the table below:

Region	*Date created*	*# words as of May 1, 2023*	*# unique sources referenced as of May 1, 2023*
Denmark	24-May-20	529	3
England	07-Jan-09	4175	102
France	12-May-20	1262	5
Holy Roman Empire	11-May-20	990	1
Italy	11-May-20	1795	2
Middle East	30-Jun-21	1074	1
Norway	14-May-20	1326	2
Poland	23-Jun-21	1003	22
Spain	14-May-20	404	4
Sweden	14-May-20	2357	4

21 Wikipedia. 2023. 'WikiProject Middle Ages/Popular pages.' Last modified 00:50, April 9. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:WikiProject_Middle_Ages/Popular_pages&oldid=1148905112.

22 WMCloud Pageviews tool. Monthly views for 'Black Death.' July 2015 to March 2023. Last accessed December 12, 2023. https://pageviews.wmcloud.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=0&start=2015-07&end=2023-03&pages=Black_Death.

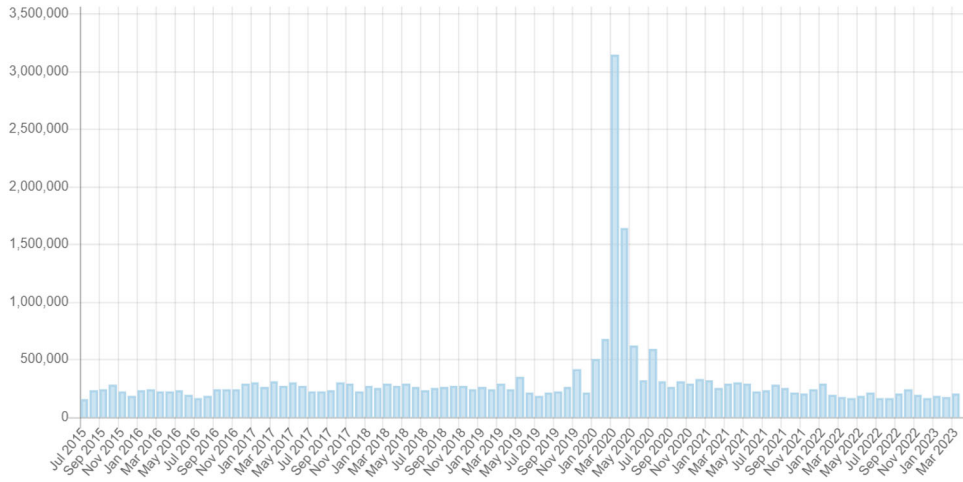


Fig. 1: Pageviews for the English Wikipedia's 'Black Death' article from July 2015 to March 2023. Note the spike in the first half of 2020 during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide. Credit: screenshot by Richard Nevell, CC0.

Topics such as the Black Death which cover several centuries and several cultures are especially challenging to write about on Wikipedia. There are more sources to consult to ensure an appropriate breadth and depth, and sources in different languages. An article in English about a subject that spans countries beyond the English-speaking world is likely to rely on sources further removed from the source material, and to have a stronger focus on English-speaking regions. Of the sub-articles on English Wikipedia, the 'Black Death in England' article has by far the most detail and cites the widest range of sources (as viewed 09:22, April 26, 2023).[23] Coverage of the Black Death in Africa and Asia is largely absent from English Wikipedia, despite recent scholarship in this area (Green 2018).

The Black Death is an especially challenging subject because of its interdisciplinary nature; to write a comprehensive summary, Wikipedia editors might draw not only on historical sources, but also genetic research and archaeological evidence. While ancient DNA analysis requires archaeological investigations on which the genetic research can be carried out, out of 167 distinct sources used as references in English Wikipedia's main 'Black Death' article, only five were explicitly archaeological. News sites are far more likely to be used than archaeological sources, with four

23 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Black Death in England.' 09:22, April 26, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Black_Death_in_England&oldid=1151799172.

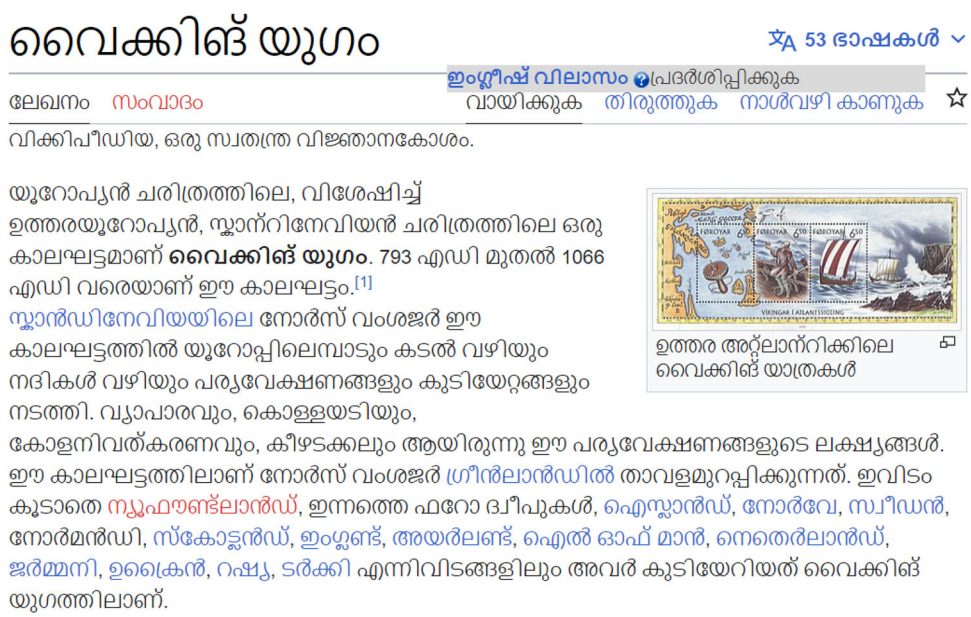
unique references to the *BBC News* website, two to *CNN*, and one each from the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, *Wired*, and *The Daily Telegraph*. The accessibility of sources written for a general audience means they are more likely to be incorporated into Wikipedia, but relies on their accurate reporting of the findings from the research works they are covering. Key research findings may be unintentionally or otherwise misrepresented in mass media, sensationalising or reproducing stereotypes and myths of the past (Holtorf 2007), and digital open-access strategies are key for disseminating research in our own words (Morgan and Eve 2012). As people working in publicly funded institutions, with access to research often held behind paywalls, we arguably have great ethical responsibility to synthesise and share such information. Lucy, Fran, and I believe this to be a key facet of public archaeology, developing on Lorna Richardson and Jaime Almansa-Sánchez's proposed frameworks (2015).

Wikipedia's articles are live documents, and their content reflects the biases and focus of their successive writers. As more people read the Black Death article in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, its contents radically changed. It ballooned from approximately 5,400 words and 120 references in July 2019 to 7,400 words and 180 references by April 2023.[24] A result is that some text within the article, which may be more than a decade old, is preserved with the appearance of being current. In discussing the causes of the Black Death, the article notes that 'no single alternative solution has achieved widespread acceptance.' This statement was added in August 2010,[25] before a draft genome of *Yersina pestis* recovered from Black Death victims was published in 2011 (Bos et al. 2011). Since then, the consensus has solidified around *Yersinia pestis* as the cause of the Black Death (see Lewis 2016; Barker 2021), and while parts of the article have incorporated this genetic evidence, segments of earlier summaries persist. This gap highlights that editing Wikipedia and maintaining articles is not a straightforward matter of adding new information; done carefully, it involves pruning old or outdated information, adjusting emphasis, and recontextualising.

The Black Death is a complex topic, informed by fast-moving research, so it is understandable that the Wikipedia article may not keep up. However, an analysis of the content of the article, linked topics, and the references show that significant improvement can be made, with the potential to reach an ever-growing, engaged readership.

24 See: Wikipedia. 2019. 'Black Death.' Modified 17:50, July 16, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Black_Death&oldid=906565523; Wikipedia. 2023. 'Black Death.' Modified 15:23, April 30, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Black_Death&oldid=1152491232.

25 Wikipedia. 2010. 'Black Death.' Modified 23:03, August 30, 2010. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Black_Death&oldid=381965886.


വൈക്കിങ് യുഗം

53 ഭാഷകൾ

ലേഖനം സംവാദം

ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് വിലാസം പ്രദർശിപ്പിക്കുക

വായിക്കുക തിരുത്തുക നാൾവഴി കാണുക

വിക്കിപീഡിയ, ഒരു സ്വതന്ത്ര വിജ്ഞാനകോശം.

യൂറോപ്യൻ ചരിത്രത്തിലെ, വിശേഷിച്ച് ഉത്തരയൂറോപ്യൻ, സ്കാന്റിനേവിയൻ ചരിത്രത്തിലെ ഒരു കാലഘട്ടമാണ് **വൈക്കിങ് യുഗം**. 793 എഡി മുതൽ 1066 എഡി വരെയാണ് ഈ കാലഘട്ടം.[1] സ്കാൻഡിനേവിയയിലെ നോർസ് വംശജർ ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ യൂറോപ്പിലെമ്പാടും കടൽ വഴിയും നദികൾ വഴിയും പര്യവേക്ഷണങ്ങളും കുടിയേറ്റങ്ങളും നടത്തി. വ്യാപാരവും, കൊള്ളയടിയും, കോളനിവത്കരണവും, കീഴടക്കലും ആയിരുന്നു ഈ പര്യവേക്ഷണങ്ങളുടെ ലക്ഷ്യങ്ങൾ. ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിലാണ് നോർസ് വംശജർ ഗ്രീൻലാൻഡിൽ താവളമുറപ്പിക്കുന്നത്. ഇവിടം കൂടാതെ ന്യൂഫൗണ്ട്ലാൻഡ്, ഇന്നത്തെ ഫറോ ദ്വീപുകൾ, ഐസ്ലാൻഡ്, നോർവേ, സ്വീഡൻ, നോർമൻഡി, സ്കോട്ലൻഡ്, ഇംഗ്ലണ്ട്, അയർലണ്ട്, ഐൽ ഓഫ് മാൻ, നെതെർലാൻഡ്, ജർമ്മനി, ഉക്രൈൻ, റഷ്യ, ടർക്കി എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിലും അവർ കുടിയേറിയത് വൈക്കിങ് യുഗത്തിലാണ്.

ഉത്തര അറ്റ്ലാന്റിക്കിലെ വൈക്കിങ് യാത്രകൾ

Fig. 2: Malayalam Wikipedia's article for the Viking Age. Credit: screenshot by Lucy Moore, CC0.

Case study 2: Forging an Anglo-centric 'Viking Age' on Wikipedia, by Lucy Moore

This second case study focuses on the construction of knowledge in the Wikipedia article entitled 'Viking Age,' and suggests how content biases in Wikipedia articles change over time. This analysis is a first assessment of how the Viking world is constructed on Wikipedia and is necessarily limited in scope. Investigation into how Wikipedia shapes public consumption of Viking pasts is increasingly urgent as far right organisations, such as nationalist marchers at Charlottesville, the noted 'QAnon Shaman,' and others, adopt markers of a perceived Viking identity (Livingstone 2017; Mas 2021; Sandberg 2021).

The English Wikipedia article 'Viking Age' has been visited 4,844,842 times since the Pageviews tool began measuring on July 1, 2015.[26] Versions of this article also feature in 53 of the 300+ language Wikipedias: the Malayalam version of the article is exemplary of the way that editors

26 WMCloud Pageviews tool. 2023. Total views for 'Viking Age.' July 2015 to March 2023. https://pageviews.wmcloud.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=0&start=2015-07-01&end=2023-05-11&pages=Viking_Age.

will often translate English Wikipedia articles directly, adopting the same sources, structure, and content (Fig. 2). Articles in English, then, can have reach far beyond the English-speaking world. The highest daily pageview was on October 30, 2018, with 9,983 views, potentially influenced by the release of Series 2 of *Norsemen* that month. As Moore and Nevell (forthcoming) have observed elsewhere, Wikipedia pageviews are directly impacted by entertainment programmes. The third highest daily pageview of 7,873 was on February 27, 2022, which may relate to the release of the Netflix series *Vikings: Valhalla* two days previously.

On March 30, 2023, the article 'Viking Age' appeared to readers as a 14,000-word document, illustrated with twelve images (photographs and drawings), five maps, and one timeline.[27] The article was divided into headings, including, in the following order: 'Historical context,' 'Historical background,' 'Probable causes of Norse expansion,' 'Historic overview,' 'Northern Europe,' 'Eastern Europe,' 'Central Europe,' 'Western and Southern Europe,' 'North America,' 'Technology,' 'Religion,' 'Trade centres,' 'Genetics,' 'Scandinavia,' 'Settlements outside Scandinavia,' 'Old Norse influences on the English language,' 'Notes,' 'Cited sources,' and 'Further reading.' A glance at these headings demonstrates that there are significant gaps in how a global Viking world is represented, with no headings for Asia or Africa, despite the fact that Vikings were a significant presence in Byzantium and a Viking raid on Morocco is historically attested (Christys 2015; Föller 2021). This absence is further compounded by sections that have further subheadings: 'Northern Europe' nests over the subheadings of 'England,' 'Ireland,' 'Scotland,' 'Wales,' 'Iceland,' 'Kvenland,' and 'Estonia and Curonians;' 'Western and southern Europe' nests over 'Frisia,' 'France,' 'Italy,' 'Spain,' and 'Portugal;' and 'North America' over 'Greenland' and 'Mainland North America'. Listing countries as they exist today as locations for Viking activity adds national borders to a history that had little to do with them, naturalising ideas of ethno-genesis and the nation-state as organising principles (Geary 2002).

Moreover, the article emphasises not the experience of Scandinavians, nor a Scandinavian perspective on the Viking Age, but predominantly discusses Viking impact on northern Europe with a bias towards English-speaking regions. The inclusion of three hundred words on 'Norse influence on the English language,' but no other modern language, demonstrates this linguistic chauvinism.[28] The opening sentence further emphasises a north Atlantic version of the period:

> The Viking Age (793–1066 CE) was the period during the Middle Ages when Norsemen known as Vikings undertook large-scale raiding, colonizing, conquest, and trading throughout Europe and reached North America.[29]

27 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Viking Age.' Modified 14:55, March 30, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=1147375298.

28 See previous note.

29 See previous note.

Fig. 3: First version of 'Viking Age,' August 16, 2001. Credit: screenshot by Lucy Moore, CC0.

The Anglocentric perspective is further compounded in the first section, 'Historical context,' where the period is framed around the Viking attack on Lindisfarne in 793 AD, which exaggerates the significance of Britain for Viking activity rather than relating a more holistic view.

There is more to say about the construction of public understanding of Viking identity in this article than space allows, but an immediate question this bias raises is whether an Anglocentric approach to Viking history has always been embedded in the article, or whether it has changed over time. To address this question, I examine the first five years of the article's construction. This step-by-step account shows how articles are shaped through the ebb and flow of the interests and biases of editors, and how knowledge on Wikipedia aggregates.

The Wikipedia article 'Viking Age' (Fig. 3) was first published on August 16, 2001 and consisted of three unreferenced sentences:

> The Viking Age is the name of the period between 850 AD and 1050 AD in Scandinavia. This reflects [sic] to the latter half of the early Iron Age. During this period, several Scandinavian warriors – called Vikings – raided and plundered large parts of Europe.[30]

The next major addition to the article was made on December 29, 2001, where an editor added content on Viking longships, alongside detail of the impact of Viking activity on Francia, describing how the Franks could 'sail down the Seine without [sic] impunity.'[31] The impact of 'Scandinavians' on the region was emphasised with the addition of content on Scandinavian descendants becoming Normans. This contribution turned the focus to connection between Frankish and Viking worlds, rather than the focus on England and the English language as seen today. On December 3, 2002, an editor altered some of the initial wording published in 2001 to broaden the geographical imaginary of Viking activities. The sentence 'Scandinavian warriors – called Vikings – raided large parts of Europe' was expanded to close with '[…] Europe, the Middle East, northern Africa and according to some sources also America.'[32] This addition is significant

30 Wikipedia. 2001. 'Viking Age.' Modified 22:51, August 16, 2001. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=293314.

31 Wikipedia. 2001 'Viking Age.' Modified 02:43, December 29, 2001. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=293315.

32 Wikipedia. 2002. 'Viking Age.' Modified 16:21, December 3, 2002. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&direction=next&oldid=458258.

since it expands the Viking world beyond northern Europe, and arguably showed a broader view of the period than the content of the article today, on April 25, 2023.

On October 20, 2003, information on Viking expansion into Russia was added, focussing on Rurik and Viking movement to the Black Sea region and Constantinople.[33] Sections on technology and trading cities were added on February 29, 2004. The former section focused on nautical technology and included the Visby lens, in addition to an unreferenced mention of bones found in Scandinavia that belonged to 'a trader from the Middle East'.[34] The section on trading sites lists Birka, Hedeby, Kaupang, Staroja Ladoga, and York, as well as including an expanded section on Sweden, alongside referring to artefacts from China found at Birka. Both of these edits emphasised evidence for long-distance trade.

On December 2, 2004, another editor made substantial additions to the article, on shipbuilding, military tactics, and on how later sources shaped the reputation of the Vikings.[35] The same editor also added a section on 'Geography,' which added to the existing content on Viking expansion into Francia, added detail on the city of York, and used examples of material culture to demonstrate trading links: 'a silk cap, a counterfeit of a coin from Samarkand and a cowry shell from the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf'.[36] On April 24, 2005, an anonymous editor added detail on Scandinavian migration to England in the ninth and tenth centuries.[37] On May 2, 2005 a section on Ireland was added, including a claim that the Vikings 'seemingly came close to taking over the whole isle.'[38] In the same changes the editor added content on Battle of Clontarf, arguably weighting the article towards the Hiberno world, once more shifting the 'borders' of the Viking world in the article.

Additions on October 4, 2005 introduced romanticised descriptions of Vikings as 'tall, savage, and war-like' and 'wandering raiders and mercenaries.'[39] An uncited claim that 'the system of "feudalism" in Europe, which included castles and barons (and was a defence against Viking raids)' was

33 Wikipedia. 2003. 'Viking Age.' Modified 07:16, October 20, 2003. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=1747960.

34 Wikipedia. 2004. 'Viking Age.' Modified 15:56, February 29, 2004. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=2573873.

35 Wikipedia. 2004. 'Viking Age.' Modified 10:21, December 2, 2004. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&direction=next&oldid=8047635.

36 See previous note.

37 Wikipedia. 2005. 'Viking Age.' Modified 12:48, April 24, 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=12750658.

38 Wikipedia. 2005. 'Viking Age.' Modified 01:04, May 2, 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=13111428.

39 Wikipedia. 2005. 'Viking Age.' Modified 03:25, October 4, 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=24700395; Wikipedia. 2005. 'Viking Age.' Modified 04:05, October 4, 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=24703198.

also added.[40] On March 10, 2006, an addition to the article was made, claiming that there was a Viking settlement in Bolivia and Paraguay which was covered up by archaeologists.[41] All content relating to this conspiracy theory was moved to the article's 'Talk' page about an hour later.[42] Edits on this theme were the only contributions of the editor, and it is significant that this theory appears on the conspiracy site *Ancient Origins* (Brooks 2020).[43] Whilst this kind of material does enter Wikipedia, it is usually swiftly removed by the editorship, particularly when it is uncited or if the sources are blacklisted or deprecated (Hall 2019).[44]

By April 19, 2006 (Fig. 4), the article had expanded to include a broad geographical description of the Viking Age, with a sharp focus on its technology and showing a global view of the Viking world. This content was moderated by the community, with the removal of material rooted in conspiracy theories, demonstrating that editorial consensus understood that not all claims about Viking voyaging were credible. In this formative period, the article showed a pluralistic approach to the Viking world. Indeed, in its earliest form, it could be argued that it was weighted towards a Francophone version, then perhaps a Hiberno-centric version, of the Viking past. Today, the content over-emphasises the role of Britain in Viking activities and the colonisation of North America.

Further analysis of the construction of the article from 2006 to present would enable a granular approach to understanding key interventions, yet even with the limited analysis here, several questions about how this article shapes perceptions of the Viking world are apparent. These queries include whether British exceptionalism in aspects of the article has an impact that extends beyond direct readership and whether the absence of content on Viking impact on global majority countries influences popular understanding of the reach of the Viking world. Beyond this, the impact of the Vikings to the east is a significant absence to be addressed. Whilst these biases within one Wikipedia article may seem ephemeral, the choices within each edit represent a prioritisation of knowledge by those who edit and moderate, and each version of the article would, at one stage, have been a version of the Viking world consumed online. The changes in emphasis show how individual acts may shape public knowledge. Not all content consumers, whether human or artificial, will have the pre-existing knowledge needed to query a page's construction, and the danger is that such pages can continue to feed approaches to the Viking past that negate the full range of its global interactions.

Case study 3: Creating 'Old English literature' through quotation and citation, by Fran Allfrey

This section surveys practices of primary-source quotation and secondary-source citation, and the organisation of knowledge, in the 'Old English literature' article.[45] This article is complex yet manageable for a short

40 Wikipedia. 2005. 'Viking Age.' Modified 03:25, October 4, 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=24700395.

41 Wikipedia. 2006. 'Viking Age.' Modified 13:58, March 10, 2006. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Viking_Age&oldid=43135411.

42 Talk:Viking Age/Archive 1. 'South America.' 17:08, March 10, 2006. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Viking_Age/Archive_1#South_America.

43 User:Ohrdruf. User contributions. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Contributions/Ohrdruf. 'Ohrdruf' is also the name of a concentration camp, which further raises our suspicions that this user's editing is ideologically motivated by far-right ideas.

44 See also: Wikipedia. n.d. 'Perennial sources.' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Perennial_sources.

45 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Old English literature.' Modified 18:22, March 4, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&oldid=1142849281.

When I refer to the article 'today,' it signifies this version.

review, in terms of word count, structure, and citations. Helpfully, years ago, editors flagged several 'infelicities of fact, lack of clarity, and simple errors,' many of which remain, that I will not repeat here.[46] The articles 'Old English' and '*Beowulf*' would certainly benefit from analysis. They are arguably more important by pageview metrics: 'Old English literature' averages 407 views per day, compared with 2,858 for 'Old English' and 3,578 for '*Beowulf*.'[47] My, Lucy's, or Richard's analytic approaches may be developed for addressing these more complex articles. I should note, I made edits to 'Old English literature,' inspired by the University of Reading Old English (EN2OEL) cohort of Spring 2022, even if I ultimately became intimidated by the scale of the task. Writing this present article led me to make further minor edits (the urge to fix accompanies critique). Here, then, I also include reflections on my contributions.

'Old English literature' began life in 2001 as 'Old English poetry.'[48] Small changes followed until a huge contribution in 2005, which initiated the structure still in use, and included the creation of a 'Historiography' section and introduction of a manuscript image, showing Queen Emma of Normandy's portrait in British Library MS. Add. 33241 (which, as an editor quickly pointed out, is not an Old English manuscript).[49] Positively, since its creation, 'Old English literature' has included quotations in Old English language. Today these are: '*Beowulf*' (12 lines: 1; 371; 529; 562–70), 'Caedmon's Hymn' (all 9 lines); 'Battle of Maldon' (8 lines: 312–19, with 312–13 featured on the article since its creation); and 'Dream of the Rood' (7 lines: 50–56). Quotations are presented in 'Modern English' and 'West Saxon' ('Caedmon's Hymn' is additionally given in 'Northumbrian'). Such attention to dialect is a reminder of Old English's linguistic complexity. However, the dominance of West Saxon and descriptions of 'inconsistent,' 'deteriorated,' 'corrupt,' and 'degenerative' Old Englishes in the article implicitly reproduce colonialist ideas about purity of language (Blanquer et al. 2022). Furthermore, most quotations foreground violence (in the name of a pagan or Christian god), and only men act and speak. While many Old English texts have their own Wikipedia articles, and most are linked to from the 'Old English literature' article, there is a missed opportunity to illustrate a diversity of experiences within Old English texts (and translations) on this 'landing page.' Haruko Momma and Heidi Estes' edited issue of *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* (2015) and Erik Wade's reflections on the ossification of Old English through anthologisation and teaching syllabi (2020) may provide inspiration for alternative texts that editors may want to write into the article.

As noted, the 2005 major edit to 'Old English literature' introduced what was then a final section, 'Section 4: Historiography.' In 2012, this

46 Talk:Old English literature. 'This Page Needs Help'. 2011. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Old_English_literature/Archive_1#This_Page_Needs_Help

47 WMCloud Pageviews tool. 2023. Comparing pageviews for 'Old English,' 'Old English literature,' and '*Beowulf*.' July1, 2015 to March 1, 2023. https://pageviews.wmcloud.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=0&start=2015-07-01&end=2023-03-01&pages=Beowulf%7COld_English_literature%7COld_English.

48 Wikipedia. 2001.'Old English literature.' Modified 21:04, October 15, 2001. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&oldid=272070.

49 Wikipedia. 2005. 'Old English literature.' Modified 18:16, June 11, 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&oldid=15135780. Wikipedia. 2005. 'Talk:Old English Literature'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Old_English_literature/Archive_1#Lead_image

Fig. 4: 'Viking Age,' April 19, 2006. Credit: screenshot by Lucy Moore, CC0.

section was renamed to 'Reception,' with a (confusingly) separate 'Scholarship' section introduced.[50] In 2022, I consolidated what was 'Section 1: Scholarship' and 'Section 5: Reception' into 'Section 6: Reception and Scholarship.'[51] My decision to move this section down the article arguably de-emphasised the ways in which reception and scholarship are fundamental to what Old English literature *is*. The question is philosophical, but the order of information may fundamentally shift how a reader approaches Old English literature: as a set of texts, as material-manuscript remains, or as a cultural phenomenon that has inspired (and may be mostly encountered through) scholarly and creative work. Furthermore, placing 'Reception and Scholarship' at the foot of the article spatially reproduces the marginalisation of medieval*ism* studies within early medieval studies. Alaric Hall has argued for the importance of 'demonstrat[ing] how our understanding of the past has been shaped by ideologies—past and present—but also how it grows through reasoned

50 Wikipedia. 2012. 'Old English literature.' Modified 05:48, December 26, 2012. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&oldid=529795523.

51 Wikipedia. 2022. 'Old English Literature.' Modified 15:43, January 29, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&oldid=1068643947.

debate' (Hall 2019).[52] Wikipedia is one such forum for revealing the workings of history. Restructuring the article may help to make historiographic processes clearer for readers.

Today, although there is discussion of the 'Romantic Nationalist' roots of Old English literary study in the historiography section, 'Old English literature' would benefit from a summary of the latest research about how colonial and patriarchal desires—and indeed counter-hegemonic approaches—have forged Old English literature's modern meanings (Momma 2012; Jones and D'Arcens 2013; Davies 2019; Rambaran-Olm and Wade 2022). In 2022 I made a start, adding, 'Since the 1970s […] scholars continue to debate […] connections between Old English literary culture and global medieval literatures, and the valences of Old English poetry that may be revealed by contemporary theory.'[53] I included a 'citation needed' tag with the intention to return, and to encourage others. Unfortunately, I have not revisited the statement, and neither has anyone else.

Summaries of feminist, queer, and critical race approaches to the early medieval are similarly conspicuously absent on the more frequently visited 'Old English' and 'Anglo-Saxons' articles (in the latter 'women' appear only in the egregiously-titled subsection on 'Women, children and slaves').[54] Although the women of *Beowulf* have their own articles, discussion of gender is absent from the main article, and its 'Talk' page records a removal of (an objectively rather imperfect) 'Women in *Beowulf*' section.[55] Admittedly, I find synthesising interpretive work for Wikipedia harder than adding facts such as line numbers or manuscript information because, as Horswell (2019) and Ingallinella (2022) have remarked, such syntheses may present problems to Wiki guidance. On the 'Old English' and '*Beowulf*' 'Talk' pages, literary analysis and disputes on translation have been perceived as violating 'No Original Research' or 'Neutral Point of View' guidance—grounds for proposed or actual deletion—than what are understood by editors to be historical, philological, or archaeological notes.[56] This raises the question as to whether the encyclopedia can meet the theoretical and methodological needs of literary scholars any time soon: changing Wiki convention happens via consensus, demanding hours of labour, in Wikipedia's forum spaces.

Women have always been conspicuously absent from the 'Old English literature' article. With some irony, the (admittedly contentious) Emma of Normandy portrait was removed in 2006 around the same time that an image of J.R.R. Tolkien was added to the article.[57] In the 'Reception and Scholarship' section, the only twentieth-century scholars named are Alistair Campbell, Neil Ker, Barnard Huppé, and J.R.R. Tolkien. The creative writers are J.R.R. Tolkien (again), John Gardner, Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Morris, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Paul

52 Hall's work has inspired Lucy to always include a 'historiography' section in articles she edits.

53 Wikipedia. 2022. 'Old English Literature.' Modified 15:43, January 29, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&oldid=1068643947.

54 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Anglo-Saxons.' Last modified 16:08, July 26, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anglo-Saxons&oldid=1167245203#Women,_children_and_slaves.

55 Talk:Beowulf. 'Women in Beowulf.' 2022. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Beowulf&oldid=1123451311#Women_in_Beowulf.

56 See previous note, in addition to: Talk:Old English. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Old_English.

57 Old English literature: Difference between revisions. 17:25 January 19, 2006 compared with 18:23 February 3, 2006. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_English_literature&diff=38027640&oldid=35833354

Muldoon, Seamus Heaney, Denise Levertov, and U.A. Fanthorpe.[58] The latter four were added in 2010 by one editor who had not logged in, and never returned to add in citations.[59] This editor may be someone who follows scholarship because the timing of their contribution accords with two publications on the afterlives of Old English (Clark and Perkins 2010; Jones 2010). That this section has remained under-developed for over ten years suggests a lack of interest in reception on the part of the article's editors (or, the problems are so great with the article that would-be editors are overwhelmed into inaction).

Contributors to the 'Talk' page have noted the over-reliance on a single source (Angus Cameron's contributions to the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* is cited seventeen times) and have suggested that the article's age explains the messiness of the three bibliographic lists.[60] The article was created before in-line citations were standard, and editors have added to rather than pruned sections, so today's reader must wade through 'Citations,' 'General and Cited references,' and 'Further reading.' No matter the reasons, one resulting impression is that women, genderqueer people, and people of colour rarely engage with Old English literature. Across 90 'Citations' (formatted as footnotes), 74 sources are given, with 77 individual writers and editors named: 63 men and 14 women (I added 3 of these 14 in 2022). Two further men and one woman are behind citations which do not display an author name, but link to institutional resources. There are 14 men and 1 woman additionally named in the 'General and Cited references' and 'Further reading.' Across all three bibliographic lists, then, 79 men and 16 women are represented. BIPOC and Latinx scholars and creators are entirely absent.[61]

The 74 footnoted sources have an average publication date of 1980; 22 were published in the last 20 years. Over-reliance on older sources may somewhat explain the gaps, and, indeed, we may flag the difficulty of accessing newer scholarship outside of academic institutions. But these are flimsy excuses: marginalised scholars have been shaping Old English for decades (Brookman 2011; Lees 1997, 2017; Dockray-Miller 2017; Rambaran-Olm 2020). As Richard notes above, our awareness of barriers to access only place further onus on scholars to share. References to older work are not inherently inappropriate if ideas remain current or as part of a discussion of historiography—the issue is the narrow range of citations

58 On the 'Old English' article the picture is worse: in the 'Modern legacy' section, only Alistair Campbell, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Ransom Riggs are named as interlocutors.

59 Special:Contributions/188.223.212.152. User contributions for IP address 188.223.212.152, November 29, 2010. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Contributions/188.223.212.152.

60 Talk:Old English. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Old_English.

61 In addition to the Hsy and Orlemanski (2017) and Rambaran-Olm and Wade (2020) bibliographies, the following works could well update Old English-related Wikipedia articles: Houston (1936, cited by Rambaran-Olm 2020); Momma (1997; 2012); Barajas (2013; 2021); Rambaran-Olm (2014; 2020; 2023); Kim (2019); Miyashiro (2020); and Andrews (2022).

that creates an inaccurate, unjust impression of Old English literature's scholarly history and present state of the field. A decade ago, Kathryn Maude identified how publishing pressures on academics 'often [mean] that the production of editions of medieval texts is neglected and this forces scholars to use out-of-date and largely misogynist editions of texts' (2014). The effects of institutional metrics, compounded by interpretations of 'No Original Research' or 'fringe theory' guidance (where editions of texts are seen as more encyclopedic than interpretive literary criticism), manifest in Wikipedia's over-reliance on older scholarship, and the underrepresentation of minoritised scholars.

It can be seen, then, how Wikipedia's problems parallel those in medieval studies. To give further examples, in the last 20 years in the journal *Studies in Medievalism*, women as makers of the medieval are underrepresented (discussed in only 11.7% of articles), while only one critic examines an Old English text (*Beowulf*) as remade by a woman (Thomson 2021).[62] This figure is comparable to findings that show how, despite feminist and women's studies being long-established in early medieval studies, '4% of papers in the journal *Anglo-Saxon England* address "women or gender," with a high of 12% of papers given on these topics at the International Society of Early Medieval English Studies (ISEME, formerly ISAS) conference' (Norris et al., 2023, 13). Further work is needed, off- and on-Wiki, to forge a more accurate and equitable picture of Old English and its afterlives.

62 30 of 258 *Studies in Medievalism* XII–XXXII articles: I do note that recent CFPs have explicitly sought to address this iniquity. Women's creative engagement with Old English remains under-analysed, with exceptions: Halbrooks (2010); Lees (2016; 2017); Rogers (2017); Davies (2018); Lees and Overing (2018; 2019); Ferhatović (2019); Larrington and Headley (2020); Purvis (2020); Kendall (2022); Brooks (2023); Davies and Bergvall (2023); Vishnuvajjala (2024).

Conclusion: Forging better worlds, medieval and modern

Magna Carta (An Embroidery), by British artist Cornelia Parker, was commissioned by the Ruskin School of Art and the British Library.[63] The embroidery is a 13-meter-long version of the Wikipedia article 'Magna Carta' as archived on June 15, 2014 (Fig. 5), the 799th anniversary of the medieval document's signing. It was displayed in the Library's free-to-enter foyer, coinciding with the ticketed exhibition 'Magna Carta: Law,

63 The artwork is viewable via Wikimedia Commons: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Carta_(An_Embroidery)#/media/File:Entire-embroidery-magna-carta-cornelia-parker.jpg>.

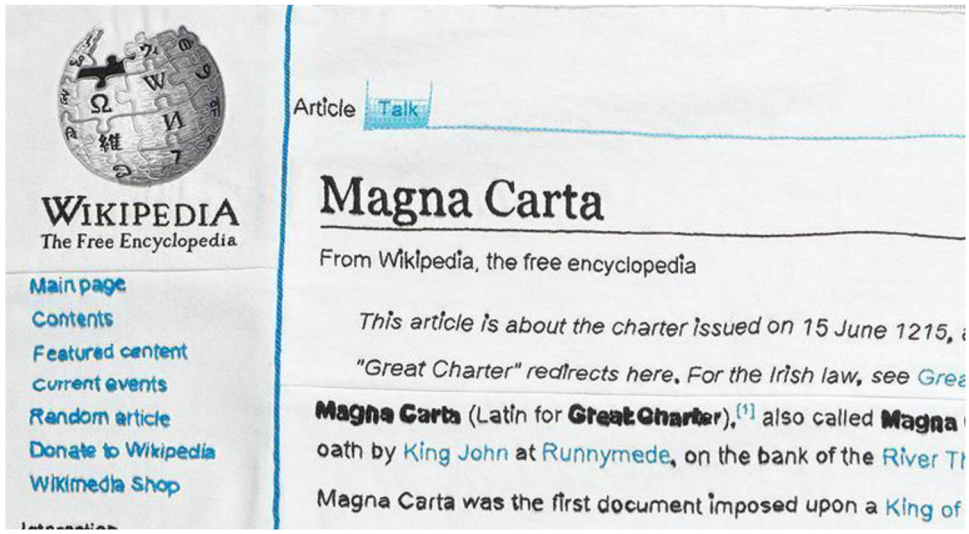


Fig. 5: Detail of *Magna Carta (An Embroidery)*, 2015, by Cornelia Parker. Credit: CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikicommons.

Liberty, Legacy' (British Library 2015a; British Library 2015b).[64] The creative labour was shared with over 250 participants, including 'almost 40' incarcerated people credited by first name, and public figures (Jones 2015). Alan Rusbridger, then-editor of the centre-left newspaper *The Guardian*, stitched 'contemporary political relevance' (Jones 2015), while then-director of Liberty (a UK-based civil liberties campaign group) Baroness Shami Chakrabarti selected 'Charter of Liberties,' and police reform advocate Baroness Doreen Lawrence contributed 'justice,' 'denial,' and 'delay.' Parker stated her intention 'to raise questions about where we are with the principles laid down in the Magna Carta […] and about the challenges to all kinds of freedoms that we face in the digital age,'[65] inviting us to imagine a future with reference to (fantasies of) the medieval past.

In this essay cluster, England, Biggs, and Mary Boyle raise questions of intention in relation to forgeries: is someone concealing their processes of invention? Are concealed intentions always aesthetically or morally a bad thing? The making processes of Parker's artwork introduce another question: that of who gets to forge the medieval. That 250 people contributed to the artwork is a reminder that Wikipedia is multi-vocal, no matter how its interface may appear as a coherent whole. Like Parker's participants, some Wikipedia editors are anonymous. Other Wikipedians maintain 'user' pages where they may share personal information or editing interests, and all editor accounts and IP addresses have a public 'contributions' log. When disputes arise, Wikipedia moderators may

64 British Library. 2015. 'Cornelia Parker unveils 13 metre-long Magna Carta embroidery at the British Library stitched by over 200 individuals, including Jarvis Cocker, Edward Snowden and Baroness Doreen Lawrence.' Press release. https://web.archive.org/web/20230517074046/https://www.bl.uk/pressreleases/2015/may/cornelia-parker-unveils-13-metre-long-magna-carta-embroidery; British Library. 2015. 'Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy.' Press release. https://web.archive.org/web/20170503024908/http://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2015/march/magna-carta-law-liberty-legacy.

65 See previous note.

consult contribution logs to determine a user's interests and intentions, to judge whether they are forging in the wrong way: for example, conflict of interest editing or vandalism. Analysing editor intentions on Wikipedia may be a fruitful—if challenging—avenue of future research. As an archive produced and consumed by nebulous publics, Wikipedia represents a collective imaginary that is complex to analyse. Medievalists have examined the reception of Wikipedia content in relation to their own expertise or student responses (Edwards 2015; Horswell 2019; Ingallinella 2022), but studies on broader reader- and editor-ships have not yet been attempted (surveys, focus groups, or big data analysis, would enable such analysis).

Magna Carta (2015) is a forgery, in many senses. It is an original artwork, beautifully crafted. It is a copy of another source, although its scale and material mean it could never be confused with the 'real thing;' indeed, it reveals that the 'real' is multiple. It is textile imitating pixels which describe a text preserved on animal skins a text which in contemporary discourse symbolically exceeds its medieval use. Parker's thoroughly postmodern work evokes medieval objects—the Magna Carta charters, the Bayeaux Tapestry—that have come to signify, for some, the nation, governance, and law (Kayman 2017; Schmahmann 2017). Exemplary of Magna Carta's multivalence, and ignorance of how Wikipedia works, one critic mawkishly surmised that Parker's artwork 'is curiously touching […] Magna Carta's history is one of innocent faith in democracy and a simple belief in rights […] its bold words about justice and liberty have endured 800 years […] Wikipedia is ephemeral light on millions of screens, but Parker has made a bit of it immortal' (Jones 2015). Jonathan Jones' prose, although purple, is half correct: Parker's work became an archive as soon as it was conceptualised; hundreds of Wiki-edits have been made since. Yet, we might query Jones' nationalistic romanticisation of Magna Carta and the artwork, and his denigration of Wikipedia, on several grounds—not least his elision of the ambivalent ethical stakes of collaborations with the carceral system, and hierarchies perhaps disrupted, perhaps reinforced, between celebrities and imprisoned people only credited by first name.[66] A rebuke comes rather appropriately in paragraph one of the 'Magna Carta' article today: 'A common belief is that Magna Carta was a unique and early charter of human rights. However, nothing about Magna Carta was unique in either its content or form for 12th–13th century Europe,' citing James C. Holt's *Magna Carta* (2015).[67] We might also propose Scala and Federico's provocation that the 'Magna Carta people were just a bunch of brutal warlords' (2009, 99). As Catherine Bernard surmises, what Parker's work 'makes tangible is the way digital media fashions a sense of historicity that is anything but amnesiac, but in fact reinvents our cultural bond with the past, weaves it

66 The matter is complex. Parker collaborated with Fine Cell Work, an organisation which aims to improve quality of life for imprisoned people (Halstead 2015).

67 Wikipedia. 2023. 'Magna Carta.' Modified 13:12, September 1, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Magna_Carta&oldid=1173284077.

together with our sense of a shifting present' (2020, 208). Together, the medieval Magna Carta, the Wikipedia article, and Parker's embroidery challenge us to reconsider how we value fixity and change, myth and tradition, and how forgeries may bind the real and the unreal.

Such tensions productively fuel Wikipedia. The Wikimedia Foundation aims to 'imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge,'[68] even as it acknowledges that, currently, Wikipedia perpetuates inequality. The case studies discussed here are only illustrative of how the medieval world on Wikipedia is influenced by, and may influence, the off-Wiki one. Knowingly or unknowingly, people are engaged with content on Wikipedia. Even if Wikipedia 'left the building' today, it is already embedded into AI technology that is revolutionising our lives, whether we like it or not. As Richard demonstrated in his analysis of the 'Black Death' article, interest in the medieval world can come at surprising times, but these occasions lead to a thirst for knowledge, and create opportunities for medievalists. Medieval-topic Wikipedia may reveal and influence nationalistic perspectives on the past, as Lucy argued in her discussion of the 'Viking Age' article. Equally, the construction of knowledge, as Fran examined in the 'Old English literature' article, can reproduce the exclusion of already marginalised people and ideas from discourse, scholarship, and creative practices.

So, what might we, as medievalists, do? Although elements of Wikipedia's form and content may perpetuate prejudices and inaccuracies, as the feminist-driven medievalist Wiki-activity discussed above attests, medievalists can positively shape Wikipedia. For us, the spirit of 'so fix it' has returned as a result of writing the present article.[69] As global minority researchers we are in the privileged position of having access to intellectual, digital, and temporal resources that enable our editing. Individuals can make small but impactful differences. As a collective, medievalists could use our analytic and writing skills as a powerful force to forge the medieval, to influence how both human and non-human intelligences view and understand the world, and to change perceptions of the past, present, and future.

68 Wikimedia Vision. https://web.archive.org/web/20230522165935/https://wikimediafoundation.org/about/vision/.

69 Wikipedia. n.d. 'SOFIXIT.' 'Be bold' guidance. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:FIXIT&redirect=n.

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or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.Conflict of interest Richard Nevell works for Wikimedia UK on a permanent contract, Lucy Moore was on the Northwest Europe Grants Committee for the Wikimedia Foundation from 2021–2023 and from September 2023 to February 2024 was Wikimedian-in-Residence at the National Trust. Fran Allfrey volunteers as a trainer for Wikimedia UK. Lucy Moore, Fran Allfrey, and Richard Nevell also voluntarily edit Wikipedia in their spare time.

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