

31 January 2010

Professor Rick Trainor. The Principal  
King's College  
The Strand, London WC2R 2LS  
United Kingdom  
principal@kcl.ac.uk

Professor Jan Palmowski, Head  
School of Arts and Humanities  
King's College  
The Strand, London WC2R 2LS  
United Kingdom  
jan.palmowski@kcl.ac.uk

Dear Profs. Trainor and Palmowski:

We write to you as elected officers of the Medieval Academy of America, the major association of medievalists in North America, with some 4000 members, to express our deep concern about the reported plan to eliminate the position of Professor of Palaeography at King's College London.

Most of us are, ourselves, members of educational institutions; and we include among our number, deans, former deans, directors, and even presidents of colleges and universities. We are therefore fully aware of the pressures you are facing at this moment of financial difficulty. Indeed, we are in principle reluctant to meddle in internal matters of independent institutions. But, we believe that the King's College plan is not simply an intramural decision but one with broad consequences; and so we are motivated to ask you to reconsider it.

As you already know, King's College has had a long history of distinguished teaching and research in medieval subjects, up to this very moment, including the threatened chair's incumbent, Professor David Ganz, an eminent historian and philologist. What we want to underscore, therefore, is not only our concern about the diminishing of that legacy, but also the importance more generally of the subject of palaeography itself. The study and interpretation of ancient handwriting is, of course, important in its own right; but it is also fundamental to many other medieval and early modern disciplines that depend on the accurate deciphering of manuscript documents and their proper understanding. Training in palaeographic methods, moreover, teaches complex heuristic techniques more generally and is valuable, therefore, to anyone interested in hermeneutical processes.

Decisions like that of King's College have been made in many universities for several generations, so you would not be the first. But we are now near the bottom and, in the

English-speaking world, more or less, reaching it. That is why the officers of the Medieval Academy of America are so concerned. Perhaps there is even some practical way that the Academy might, in the future, help you preserve this valuable tradition, for instance, by sponsoring joint seminars. In the meantime, however, we urge you very strongly to reconsider the decision.

Sincerely,

Herbert L. Kessler  
President (Johns Hopkins University)

Elizabeth Brown  
First Vice-President (Brooklyn College)

Alice-Mary Talbot  
Second Vice-President (Dumbarton Oaks)

Barbara Shailor  
Treasurer (Yale University)

### **Councilors**

Theodolina Barolini (Columbia University)  
Rita Copeland (University of Pennsylvania)  
Paul Dutton (Simon Fraser University)  
David Klausner (University of Toronto)  
Peggy McCracken (University of Michigan)  
Elizabeth Sears (University of Michigan)  
Danuta Shanzer (University of Illinois)  
Carol Symes (University of Illinois)  
Nancy L. Wicker (University of Mississippi)