



# MORAVIAN COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE IN MEDIEVAL & EARLY MODERN STUDIES

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**Students participating in the summer program in Paris often submit their papers for consideration with a 100% success rate! Please find abstracts from recent years below.**

## ***David Austin : "Defining the Maternal: The Evolution of the Virgin Mary in Art"***

The Virgin Mary's role within Christianity evolved immensely with the growing complexity of the religion and, from its onset, Mary as a symbolic image of motherhood and salvation permeated nearly every facet of Early Christian, Byzantine and Medieval art. As Christianity spread and transformed from a highly persecuted religious sect of the late Roman Empire to an imperial cult of the Byzantines, the depiction of the Virgin Mary evolved to fulfill the growing expectations her followers had for her. Thus, over time, Mary's portrayal fluctuated widely between that of accessible mother to one of unapproachable royalty. This paper will trace the development of the Virgin Mary's image in Western art, from the earliest Christian iconography within the catacombs of Rome, to the masterpieces of the Renaissance, and will focus particularly upon what influence the rise in popularity of the Marian Cult of the 12th century had in the Virgin's artistic and iconic representation.

## ***Rebecca Baltrusaitis : "The Fleur-de-Lis: The Evolution of a Symbol"***

The fleur-de-lis is commonly known as the symbol of the French royal family, but its evolution to that status is not widely known. Inspired by the wide use of the fleur-de-lis all over France, the intent of this paper is to discover the development of the symbol from one associated with purity and the Virgin Mary to one used by the royal family to assert its power. The image itself originated in Mesopotamia, but arrived on the Continent by means of Christianity where its tripartite structure evoked the Trinity and acquired strong Christic meaning ("I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys" *Song of Solomon* 2:1). Over time the symbol was linked to the Cult of Mary and became an accepted symbol of purity and chastity ("As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" *Song of Solomon* 2:2). After his conversion to Christianity, the Frankish King Clovis I adopted the fleur-de-lis as his personal symbol, and the French royal family continually used the image from that point forward. It was not, however, elevated to a true sign of royalty until the reign of Louis VII when the monarch commanded that his son Philip II wear an outfit of blue with gold fleur-de-lis for his coronation. From 1180 onward, the symbol appeared on everything over which the French royal family wished to assert their ownership and soon became known internationally as the emblem of France. Although the French Revolution ended the reign of the royalty of France and the use of the fleur-de-lis, the symbol lasted through the years and can still be seen on many monuments today.

## ***Natalie McLarty : "King of the Beasts: The Lion in Medieval and Renaissance Symbolism"***

In studying symbolism in Medieval and Renaissance art and architecture, it is important to keep in mind that many symbols have a variety of meanings, and that a single manifestation of an image could represent one or several ideas, depending both upon the intent of the creator, and upon the interpretation of the ancient or present audience. This paper explores one commonly used symbol with many different meanings: the lion. When represented in art and architecture from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the lion can be used to represent a guardian, the power of the sun, the gospel of Saint Mark as well as the Christian devil, the companion to Mother Earth and virgin war goddesses, and as a reference to the ancient Greek myth of Hercules. The lion paired with another beast creates new types of symbolism, including the regaining of the Christian Paradise, the summer sun defeating winter, and the completeness of the earth brought about by union of the opposing sun and moon, or the male and female forces. This paper is a reflection on the use of the lion in symbolism and iconography in the context of the world of Medieval and Renaissance Paris, France.

### ***Eniya Lufumpa: "Medieval Churches & Renaissance Chateaux: Architectural Reflections of Socio-religious Values"***

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance were two influential periods in French history. Despite the many similarities, there are just as many contrasting beliefs when principles and values come into play. The Middle Ages were a period known as the "Age of Faith" due to the fact that God was at the center of people's lives and they lived to serve him in hopes of a better life after their earthly one. This extreme religiosity and climate of fear can be credited to the undesirable living conditions during the Middle Ages. Since literacy was uncommon during the Middle Ages, religious messages were conveyed to the common people by means of visual representations, which came in various forms, including stained glass windows, tapestries and statues. For example, the importance of religion can be seen in the lavish decorations and designs of the churches. Biblical figures were sculpted onto the facades of the churches: the Old Testament on the northern façade, the New Testament on the southern façade, and the second coming of Christ on the western façade. Stained glass provided literal interpretations of the belief that "God is light" and corresponded to the representation of heaven in Revelations. During the Renaissance, however, many fewer cathedrals were built but the construction of chateaux flourished. An increase in economic stability and improvement in living conditions led to an emergence of religious skepticism and humanism. Men began living very rich and lavish lifestyles, ones which were meant to improve on the ways of life. The art and architecture served to show the power and wealth of the nobles. Engraved in King Francois I's castle are the letter "F" and various personal and royal emblems. This change in architecture shows that human fulfillment in the natural world had come to predominate religious values and expectations.

### ***Gabrielle Kuhn: "The Lion, the Unicorn, and Christ: Animal Symbolism in Medieval French Art and Architecture"***

In the works of art and architecture particular to medieval France, images of animals, both real and mythological, were often used to facilitate understanding of key values pertinent to the Christian faith. The lion and the unicorn are examples of animals that invoke religious symbolism as representations of Jesus Christ. The use of the lion and the unicorn in medieval art and architecture creates a fusion of the real and the mythical and presents a binary image of the Christ figure.. The lion, evoking power and strength, may symbolize the kingly nature of Christ, while the unicorn represents purity and abundance. In French medieval art, the the juxtaposition of the two animals depicts a clash of the physical and the spiritual, of wrath and innocence. By examining biblical, architectural, and artistic examples of these two creatures, I will explore the reasoning behind the use of these symbols in a time when the fear of the unknown after death attracted followers to the Catholic faith and will ultimately show how it is possible to create a holistic image of Christ as viewed during the French medieval .. The lion invoked fear of God in its use in sprawling stone cathedrals, while works such as *The Unicorn Tapestries* represent the love and humanity of Christ in his Passion and death. The divergence and union of these two symbols could both frighten followers into faithfulness through the ferocity of the lion, all the while reassuring Christians of a paradise where Christ awaits them with loving arms through the softness of the unicorn.

### ***Jenna Randall: "Adaptations in the Church's Representation of Mary: From Greek Goddesses to Marian Dogmas"***

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church is a male-dominated arena. Most of the important figures have been male, priests must be male, and God is always described as "He". Consequently, it is interesting see how the Church treats its main female figure, the Virgin Mary, Jesus' mother, especially in terms of the symbols used to represent her. The symbols used to represent the Virgin Mary were chosen to highlight her traits that the Church thought were important in her role as a model to other women, and were also symbols that were previously used in other religions and cultures, which madethem more easily recognizable to church-goers. Through an examination of several common symbols used to represent the Virgin Mary, including the color blue, flowers, and the mandorla shape, I will show that these symbols were each used to represent characteristics similar to those found both in the four Marian Dogmas and in ancient Greek and Roman mythology as well as in other ancient societies. I conclude that religious iconography, grounded in the pagan tradition, is an effective way to track religious evolution through history.

### ***Angela White : "Medieval Heraldry and Coats of Arms: Uncovering Family Secrets"***

Every coat of arms and heraldic symbol represents a small mystery of the past that is just waiting to be uncovered and understood. Family history and social standing are incorporated into different symbols that, when properly read, give the viewer a unique look into the past. Scholarly sources are certainly important in understanding heraldry, but the most interesting way of exploring its history and significance is to visit the places where people actually displayed their favorite symbols. For example, wandering through the medieval palace Fontainebleau, one notices the symbol of the salamander, which represented Francis I. To the viewer unfamiliar with heraldry, this symbol would seem to be no more than an animal, but once one understands that it represents bravery and courage even in the face of turmoil, one understands a bit more about Francis I and the type of king he strove to be. By analyzing examples from the Paris region and exploring the iconography, colors, line shapes, and history of heraldry and how it came to be so popular, I will and open a window into the lives of the past.