

FACULTY RESEARCH FUND

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Proposal Title: Saints, Hospitals, and Civic Identity in East Central Europe

Principal Investigator: Lucy Barnhouse
College of Liberal Arts and Communication
Department of History

ABSTRACT

The proposed project is a monograph examining how civic identity, saints' cults, and hospital patronage were all intertwined in East Central Europe. Hospital administrators, ecclesiastical and civic authorities, and those who interacted with hospitals as donors and tenants all responded to the changing criteria for religious status, which was intimately connected to hospitals' policies and relationships. This argument, advanced in my first book, allows for better understandings both of local dynamics and broader trends in how hospitals functioned as religious institutions, and as part of religious networks in urban environments and beyond. The spread of hospitals in medieval Europe occurred at the same time as the rise of a number of saints' cults for men and women, recently deceased, often laypersons, whose service of the sick was a key signifier of their holiness. Recent scholarship has called for more critical examination of how the examples of saints pursuing hospital work might have inspired staff and donors alike. This project examines the circulation of art and texts concerning St. Martin, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Hedwig of Silesia alongside the institutional development of hospitals in late medieval East Central Europe. Saint Martin appears not only in Mainz and Warsaw, but also in Opole, in western Poland. Opole, like Mainz, boasted a hospital dedicated to St. Alexius. St. Elizabeth and St. Hedwig are commemorated, both together and separately, in Wroclaw, Krakow, and Warsaw. This project builds on existing scholarship to examine communication among regional hubs, as well as the development of civic identity and urban piety in the later Middle Ages. In doing so, it incorporates an understudied region and underused archives into Anglophone scholarship. It also undertakes the kind of trans-regional comparative work that is still a rarity and a desideratum in medieval hospital studies.