

TEACHING MEDIEVAL ART HISTORY

Lordship and Commune as a Teaching Resource

By Jennifer M. Feltman

The ICMA's digital project, *Lordship and Commune: A Collaboratory* (<http://www.medievalart.org/lordship-and-commune/>), inspired by the work of the late Barbara Abou-El-Haj, provides a virtual space where scholars and students of medieval cathedrals can interact, respond, and pose new questions about the relation of economics, politics, and the design of cathedrals in the Middle Ages. Although the texts specifically address the Cathedrals of Reims and Amiens (the subjects of Abou-El-Haj's unfinished book manuscript), the concepts and questions presented on *Lordship and Commune* have broad application, and we hope that they'll inspire new thinking on these issues.

An excellent way to engage the *Lordship and Commune* project is as a teaching resource. Here are but a couple of options that could easily be incorporated into a course for the upcoming academic year.

1. Seminar on Gothic Cathedrals

The structure of *Lordship and Commune* can very easily be used as the basis for a 15-week seminar on the relation of economics, politics, and cathedral design. We have divided the work into the following three sections:

- I. Reims
- II. Amiens
- III. Modern Era

Each section has 5 subsections complete with a narrative overview, bibliography, and discussion questions.

The "Comments" section can serve several purposes for the seminar. You could ask students to participate in the online comments section. But if you are not comfortable with requiring that students post responses directly to the *Lordship and Commune* site itself, you might consider using questions from each section to create discussion threads in a course management tool, such as Blackboard. The idea is to create a dynamic space for discussion online, and you know what would work best for your students and institution. You could also require students to turn in one or more written responses to questions from each section. As

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Lordship & Commune Project. The main heading is "THE LORDSHIP & COMMUNE PROJECT: A COLLABORATORY". The page includes a navigation menu with links to HOME, ABOUT US, COMMUNITY NEWS, ADVOCACY, SUPPORT, SCHOLARSHIP, GRANTS & AWARDS, ICMA LECTURES, RESOURCES, and MEMBER SIGN-IN/ACCESS GESTA ONLINE. Below the main image, there are sections for "Resources" and "The Project". The "Resources" section lists Digital Projects, Graduate Programs, Census of Dissertations, and Lordship and Commune. The "The Project" section has a search bar and an "AN OVERVIEW" section with text about Barbara Abou-El-Haj's work.

The homepage of the Lordship and Commune Project: <http://www.medievalart.org/lordship-and-commune>

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a class, you might then choose some of the responses or questions to post online in the comments section.

2. Assigned Reading/Discussion

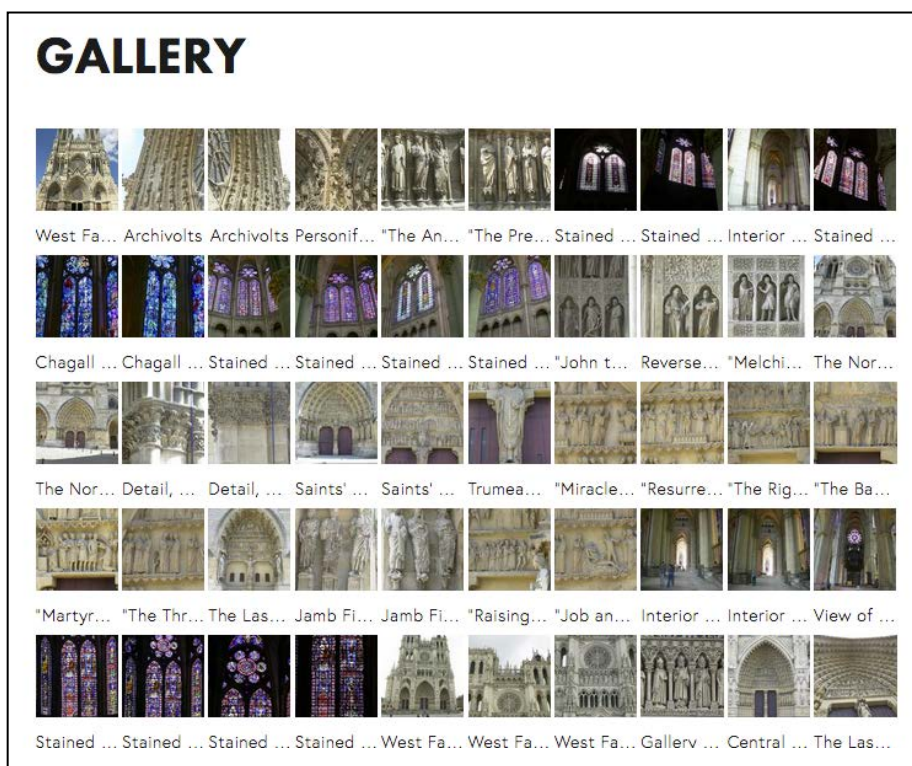
Lordship and Commune can also be a useful tool if you are teaching a survey of medieval art or introducing Gothic Cathedrals in survey courses on European Art History.

In a survey of European art, although time is constrained by the large sweep of history to be covered, a class assignment devoted to a deeper look at a subject can inspire students toward a greater understanding of how the past shapes our current understanding of the world. I often find that more recent (i.e. Modern) interactions with medieval art can provide such a bridge. Any of the subsections in the “III. Modern Era” section could provide useful ways to engage a survey class in a discussion of the ways in which the medieval past was used by and shaped concepts of national identity in Modernity. You might consider having your class write a short response paper on “Modern uses of Medieval,” using the subsection “Reims, Amiens, and the Aftermath of the French Revolution,”

and Andre Vauchez’s “The Cathedral,” in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, edited by Pierra Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, 37-68 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

In a survey of medieval art, you will likely have more time to discuss Gothic Cathedrals. After introductory lectures on the design of medieval cathedrals, you might consider an interactive class that delves deeper into one of the many issues presented in a subsection of *Lordship and Commune*. For example, if you devoted a class to a discussion of local saints and cathedrals, you might assign the section “Saints and the City at Amiens” and read and discuss John S. Ott on “Urban Space.” You could require students to turn in written responses to questions or to participate in an interactive discussion in class or on a thread in Blackboard (or whichever course management tool you use).

Of course, there are many other ways that *Lordship and Commune* can be introduced to the classroom. If you’ve used *Lordship and Commune* in your courses, we would be delighted to hear more about it. Please send a message to jmfeltman@ua.edu and let us know how you’ve taken advantage of the resource!



A view of the “Gallery” on the *Lordship and Commune* Project

How to Use Comments

You can interact in the Comments section of *Lordship and Commune* in three ways:

1. Add a New Comment

To post a new comment, simply type your text into the comment box at the bottom of the page and press “Post Comment.”* If you are not logged into Squarespace, you will be prompted to login to your account when you click on “Post Comment.” If you do not have an account, you can sign up for a free account by following the prompts.

2. Reply to a Previous Comment

To reply to a comment, click the arrow symbol located to the far right at the top of the comment to which you would

like to reply. Type your text into the comment box at the bottom of the page and press “Reply.”*

3. Follow a Comment Thread

To get email updates when new comments are added to a comment thread, click on “Subscribe via email” and follow the instructions.

You can also “like” responses by clicking the heart symbol. Or, if a response is inappropriate, you can alert the administrator by clicking the flag symbol.

*Please note that responses will be posted online immediately after clicking “Post Comment.” Once posted, they are not editable. You may preview the comment before posting by clicking on “Preview.” If you plan to post a lengthy response, we recommend typing the text in a Word document and then copying and pasting it once you are ready to do so.