

Threads of Knowledge in Middle Ages and Renaissance (New York, 4-5 Dec 26)

Columbia University, New York, NY, Dec 4–05, 2026

Deadline: May 1, 2026

Greg Bryda

Threads of Knowledge: Weaving and the Life of Textiles in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.
29th Biennial Conference of the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program of Barnard College.

For centuries, textiles clothed bodies and books, veiled relics, marked liturgical and political boundaries, and insulated and adorned walls. Their portability and preciousness made them ideal agents of exchange. They carried forms, materials, and techniques across vast regions and cultures. It is through textiles, perhaps more than any other artistic medium, that the global interconnectedness of this historical period comes into view. At the same time, their manufacture could remain insistently local and idiosyncratic, dependent as it was—before industrialization—on individual touch and rhythm. Textiles could be a luxury or a thing of everyday life, and medieval and Renaissance writers exploited the double entendre of the Latin *textus*—both a woven and written thing—in their expositions on divinity and knowledge. Jerome characterized the Evangelists as those who “wove the truth of history” (*historiae texere veritatem*), a metaphor Erasmus, among others, revived in describing eloquence as a woven fabric of words. In Arabic, al-Jāḥiẓ described poetry as “a kind of weaving (*ḥarb min al-nasj*).”

This one-day conference invites scholars from across disciplines (archaeology, art history and conservation, history, literary studies, religion, history of science, legal history) to explore how textiles, and the metaphors they inspired, shaped medieval and Renaissance life. Topics could include but are not limited to the following: production and labor; global trade and circulation; technical knowledge and transmission; gendered and domestic craft practices; liturgical and ceremonial textiles; clothing and identity; textiles as diplomatic or political gifts; conservation and material analysis; weaving and intertextuality; and the role of textiles in shaping networks and communities.

The conference will be held Saturday, December 5, 2026 on the Barnard College campus in New York City. Tours of local collections for conference participants may take place the preceding day, Friday, December 4.

Plenary Speakers:

Timothy McCall, Villanova University

Sharon Farmer, University of California-Santa Barbara

PLEASE NOTE: The conference will be in person. While we will give preference to submissions for

papers held in person, we also invite proposals from scholars who are only able to deliver papers remotely on Zoom.

Please submit an abstract of 250-300 words and a 2-page CV to Greg Bryda (gcb2128@columbia.edu).

Submission Deadline: May 1, 2026

Reference:

CFP: Threads of Knowledge in Middle Ages and Renaissance (New York, 4-5 Dec 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 11, 2026 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51726>>.