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Thank you for permitting an interloper within your comitatus. You are gracious to allow the imposition upon your digestion of a report on the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library.

A little background: In the 1990s I sought to launch a bilingual series, and proposed the notion twice to Harvard Press without success. My aim was to underpin the study of medieval languages and literatures. Beautiful books with approachable and reliable texts and translations minister to three constituencies. They provide scholars with tools for research and incentives for translating, encourage students to read and develop linguistic knowledge, and furnish the public with materials that stir interest in the Middle Ages.

Within my own mother institution, I have had three administrative and political objectives. The series can ensure that Dumbarton Oaks serves the larger world, it can bolster the role of the Press in tending the cultural capital vested in traditional humanities, and it can fortify medieval studies within Harvard as a whole.

In the mid 2000s I broached the idea again to the then-director of Dumbarton Oaks. Upon being named director myself in 2007, I rolled into action with a scheme that was swiftly accepted. I would like to record my appreciation for the enthusiasm of Sharmila Sen and Ian Stevenson, and of key players concerned with design, production, and sales, as well of the Press director.

Dumbarton Oaks is a unique, sixteen-acre paradise. Located in Washington, DC, it was given to Harvard by two extraordinary donors. This obviously informal and unposed image shows Robert Woods Bliss and Mildred Barnes Bliss in their Music Room, now the largest space in our museum and also biggest lecture and concert space. For public consumption they also gave spectacular gardens and a concert program, but the real thrust of their gift was a private institute of scholarly research, first just in Byzantine and later in Pre-Columbian and Garden and Landscape studies. This excerpt from the terms of their gift, inscribed to the left of the main entrance, gives a sense of their remarkable aspirations.

The gardens lack any trace of Old English, not surprising considering the distaste for German culture that the two world wars elicited from the Blisses, and their corresponding interest
in what they termed “the Mediterranean interpretation of humanistic culture.” Despite the Blisses’ reservations about Germanic, the grounds contain one snatch of Middle English, an inscription from Chaucer’s translation of Boethius.

Since 2006 Dumbarton Oaks has had a very fine library building, with comprehensive coverage of Byzantine and excellent holdings in Medieval Latin up to 1200, although without print resources for Anglo-Saxon or any other western vernacular.

My initial inspiration for DOML was the Loeb Classical Library, which celebrated its centenary in 2011. The Loeb Library, totaling now roughly 550 volumes, is well known in the Harvard Classics department, since it funds many activities. Outside Harvard the Loeb foundation supports research on classical antiquity. Classicists love to cast affectionate aspersion upon the Latin and Greek volumes, pocket-sized hardbacks in red and green, respectively, and they refer jocularly to “low-ebb” and “Loeb-otomies,” but deep down they cherish a vast series that has a foothold in many public libraries … and even on the covers of Martha Stewart catalogs.

With DOML I was merely proposing to fulfill the original vision for the Loebs. In the circular to announce the Library that went out in 1912, James Loeb proclaimed: “the Series is to include all that is of value and of interest in Greek and Latin literature, from the time of Homer to the Fall of Constantinople.”

In curtailing his bold design from the overly ambitious closing date of 1453 Loeb was probably swayed by the German classical philologist Wilamowitz, who advocated against venturing into Christian late antiquity. Classics still has a sense that classical and Christian are incompatible. Thus the Oxford Latin Dictionary aims to cover the language until 200, but excluding all Christian terms. The Loeb series goes up through Boethius and Procopius, with the latest volume being a most unsatisfactory Ecclesiastical History. As currently conceived, the Loeb is intended to comprehend Latin and Greek through late antiquity, but excluding explicitly Christian works. So Macrobius belongs to the Loeb, whereas Bede will be ceded to DOML.

In 2011, when the Loeb Library feted its hundredth, another series published by Harvard celebrated its first decade. The I Tatti Renaissance Library brought forth its first volume in 2001 under Jim Hankins, also a professor at Harvard. The ITRL, like DOML tied to a gorgeous site donated by a graduate of the university, picks up chronologically with Boccaccio, while geographically its purview is Italy.

DOML, now totaling 25 volumes, owes much to its predecessors. The Loebs were designed to fit inside a pocket in a gentleman’s overcoat, but not too many people get accused of
being gentlemen nowadays. We have achieved economy of scale and a better format for lines of poetry by adopting the larger I Tatti trim size.

DOML also differs from both its predecessors. Medieval studies came along too late to be constituted as Classics was, with Greek and Latin. DOML, by bringing together the two traditions, takes a step toward healing a schism among the tres linguae sacrae. At the same time it incorporates a stunning literature that constitutes a beachhead to other vernaculars. The Old English volumes deserve special fanfare for their quality, which owes to Dan Donoghue and the Old English editorial board, who have performed in exemplary fashion.

Beyond describing the series, I have come to engage in what is doubly the opposite of Old English wassailing. First, be relieved that I am not threatening to sing. Second, I ask for nothing. On the contrary, as in a potlatch I have on offer two programs to promote DOML while simultaneously benefiting languages and literatures I love.

The first is a teaching prize, to recognize and motivate teaching with DOML volumes. The second is residential support for DOML translators of Byzantine Greek, Medieval Latin, and Old English. A third program, to be announced soon, will facilitate short-term stays, so that scholars may come to DO to consult up to a week with collaborators and members of editorial boards.

Dumbarton Oaks is a scenic and serene place, intended to preserve the loveliness that its founders created in solidarity with the garden designer Beatrix Farrand. They left for her and for us a tablet that when viewed in context shows just how Edenic or Gatsbyesque the surroundings are.

Help out DOML by translating, using the series, and teaching with it. As Anglo-Saxonists you grapple with the splendor and difficulties of a language that was changed irrevocably by the battle of Hastings. At Dumbarton Oaks two different dates stand out. One is 1453, already mentioned; the other, 1204, when the Fourth Crusade stormed the city and occupied it for six decades. Memories are long among Byzantinists, and I could use reinforcements, my own equivalents to the Varangian Guard. That means you.