

IMC Leeds 2026 conference report – Giulia Freni, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici (Naples)

The International Medieval Congress (IMC) in Leeds, one of the world's most prestigious and widely attended annual gatherings dedicated to medieval studies, took place from 6 to 9 July 2026, at the campus of the University of Leeds, UK. The event gathered a vast international community of scholars, researchers, academics, and postgraduate students, reaffirming its role as a vital platform for intellectual exchange and the advancement of medieval research.

During the conference, I had the opportunity to attend several sessions dedicated to my research topic, ancient and Byzantine medicine. For instance, those organised on 7 July by the Horizon Europe project *Storytelling as Pharmakon in Premodernity and Beyond* (STORYPHARM – Grant Agreement ID: 101169114), specifically:

- *StoryPharm, I: Embodied Histories - Memory, Medicine, and Suffering in Byzantine Culture;*
- *StoryPharm, II: Memory, Melancholy, and Healing across Traditions;*
- and *StoryPharm, IV: Time as a Factor in Medieval Storytelling on and as Pharmaka.*

The papers presented ranged from the perception of time in the *Cyranides* – a stratified Greek compilation on the use of various natural elements for medical and magical purposes – to maternal care in Byzantine *Iatrosophia*, and botanical illustrations in medieval manuscripts (e.g. in the *Vindobonensis medicus graecus* 1, the famous Vienna Dioscorides). Later that evening, I participated in the workshop *Vinegars, Vapours, and Virtues: Household Herbal Medicine*, led by the Historical Herbalists. During this hands-on session, we explored traditional domestic remedies by preparing an herbal vinegar, a medicinal tea, and a natural incense. It was a uniquely enriching experience that, for anyone working on the history of medicine, provides a valuable hands-on perspective to complement textual research, bridging the gap between written sources and material culture.

Two other sessions on Byzantine medicine were scheduled for 8 July. They concerned disability and, in particular, blindness and low vision, focusing on how such conditions were imagined, narrated, and visualised across Byzantine homiletics, religious poetry, and iconography, also in relation to urban violence, animal symbolism, and art.

On 9 July, I presented my paper *Another Regimen for the Nurse: A Fragment by Antyllos Quoted by Oribasios* in the session *Rituals of Mothering, I: Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*. I examined a fragment on the wet nurse ascribed to the physician Antyllos and quoted in Oribasios' *Collectiones medicae libri incerti*. It outlines a detailed regimen for wet nurses, with recommendations on physical exercise, dietary practices, and even the characteristics of breast milk. By examining this passage, I explored its significance within the broader framework of late-antique and early Byzantine medical

literature, shedding light on medical theories regarding female physiology, maternal care, and child health. The presentation sparked a stimulating discussion, offering valuable feedback for the further development of my research.

Following my presentation, in the afternoon I took the opportunity to visit nearby York with two colleagues. Exploring its extraordinary medieval heritage provided a fitting cultural backdrop to conclude an intellectually stimulating week.

Overall, participating in IMC Leeds 2026 was an exceptionally rewarding experience. Despite the massive scale of the congress, the event was seamlessly organised, striking a wonderful balance between rigorous academic exchanges and vibrant networking spaces – from the extensive Book Fair and scholarly stalls to the food kiosks scattered across campus. Most importantly, the sessions dedicated to ancient and Byzantine medicine offered crucial insights into current methodological trends, particularly regarding the intersection of textual tradition, material culture, and social history. Presenting my paper and engaging with these panels provided invaluable feedback, established meaningful connections with fellow specialists, and generated fresh ideas that will undoubtedly inform and enrich the next stages of my research.