

The Medieval Magazine

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From Samhain to Halloween

Ulrich von Liechtenstein

Ghosts in the Middle Ages

An Interview with Dan Jones



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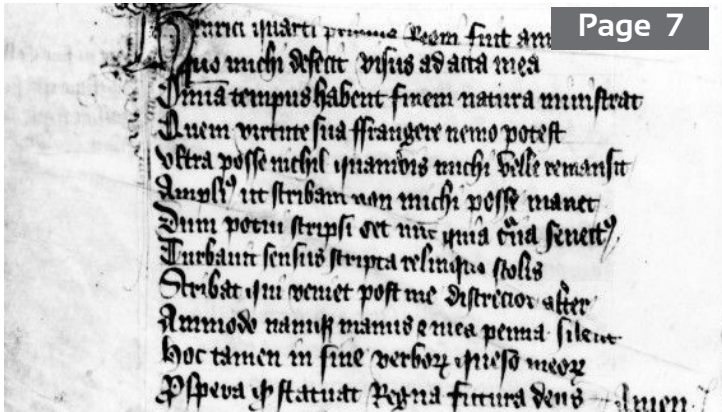


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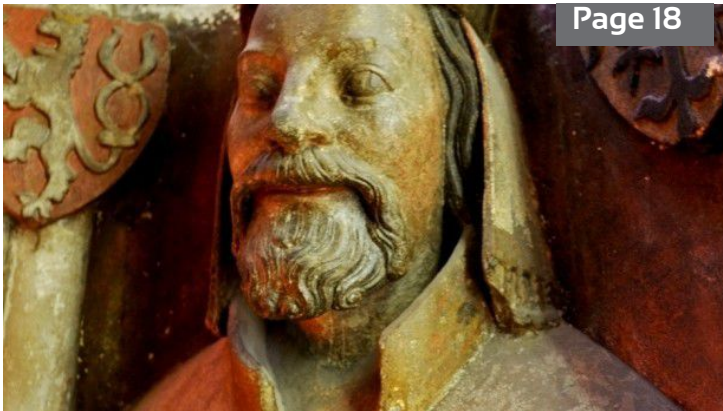
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Being Rich in the Middle Ages led to an unhealthy life | The Emperor's Spooky Night



John Gower's Handwriting Identified

John Gower, considered to be one of the greatest poets of medieval England, left behind several remarkable works. A scholar has now been able to identify poems that were written by his own hand, including a poignant piece about how he was going blind.



The Emperor's Spooky Night

Emperor Charles IV reveals in his autobiography what happened to him one night at Prague Castle, and how he saw a huge swarm of locusts.



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**Cover Photo: A traditional Irish turnip
Jack-o'-lantern. Photo by Rannpháirtí
anaithnid / Wikimedia Commons**

Being rich in the Middle Ages led to an unhealthy life

In the Middle Ages only wealthy town people could afford to eat and drink from beautiful, colored glazed cups and plates. But the glazing was made of lead, which found its way into the body if you ate acidic foods. This has been revealed by chemical investigations of skeletons from cemeteries in Denmark and Germany.

"Lead poisoning can be the consequence when ingesting lead, which is a heavy metal. In the Middle Ages you could almost not avoid ingesting lead, if you were wealthy or living in an urban environment. But what is perhaps more severe, is the fact that exposure to lead leads to lower intelligence of children", says Associate Professor Kaare Lund Rasmussen, Department of Physics and Chemistry, University of Southern Denmark (SDU).

Together with colleagues Rasmussen has published a series of chemical and anthropological analyzes of 207 skeletons from six cemeteries in northern Germany and Denmark. The paper is published in the Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports. The work was performed in collaboration with other SDU scientists: Professor Jesper Lie Boldsen from the Institute of Forensic Medicine and postdoc Lilian Skytte and Ph.D. student Anne Juul Jensen from the research group CHART at Department of Physics, Chemistry and Pharmacy.

"There really is a big difference in how much lead, the individuals from the cemeteries had

in their bodies. This depended on whether they lived in the country or in a town. We see almost no lead in the bones from rural individuals, while the levels of this toxic metal were high in urban individuals", says Rasmussen.

In the Middle Ages wealthy Danes and Germans mainly lived in towns, while the rural population was generally poorer and more isolated. The wealthy could afford to eat and drink of glazed pottery, and this was the main source of lead poisoning.

"In those days lead oxide was used to glaze pottery. It was practical to clean the plates and looked beautiful, so it was understandably in high demand. But when they kept salty and acidic foods in glazed pots, the surface of the glaze would dissolve and the lead would leak into the food", says Rasmussen.

In the country, glazed pottery was seemingly used more rarely. And even if you had the money, it would have been more difficult to get by. Instead, the country people used



**This is a photograph of a skull of young girl suffering from syphilis.
Photo by Birgitte Svennevig/University of Southern Denmark**

unglazed pottery and thus unknowingly saved themselves from exposure to the toxic lead.

Glazed pottery was not the only source of lead in the towns. Lead was also present in coins, stained glass windows and lead tiles on the roofs of important buildings. Drinking water was often collected from the roof, and this may also have been an important source of lead.

Rasmussen studied skeletons from six cemeteries.

The cemeteries in Rathaus Markt in Schleswig (Germany) and Ole Worms Gade in Horsens (Denmark) are both situated on the coast and people buried here were from medieval towns that were more wealthy and more in contact with the outside world than most rural population.

The rural population was represented by

cemeteries in St. Clements outside of Schleswig (Germany), Tirup outside of Horsens (Denmark), Nybøl in Jutland (Denmark) and St. Alberts Chapel on the island of Ærø (Denmark).

"The exposure was higher and more dangerous in the urban communities, but lead was not completely unknown in the country. We saw that 30 pct. of the rural individuals had been in contact with lead -- although much less than the townspeople."

There were different levels of exposure in the towns. 19 pct. (10 individuals) from the cemetery in Rathaus Markt had lead levels above normal. In Horsens all 25 individuals had levels above normal.

Mercury was given as medicine

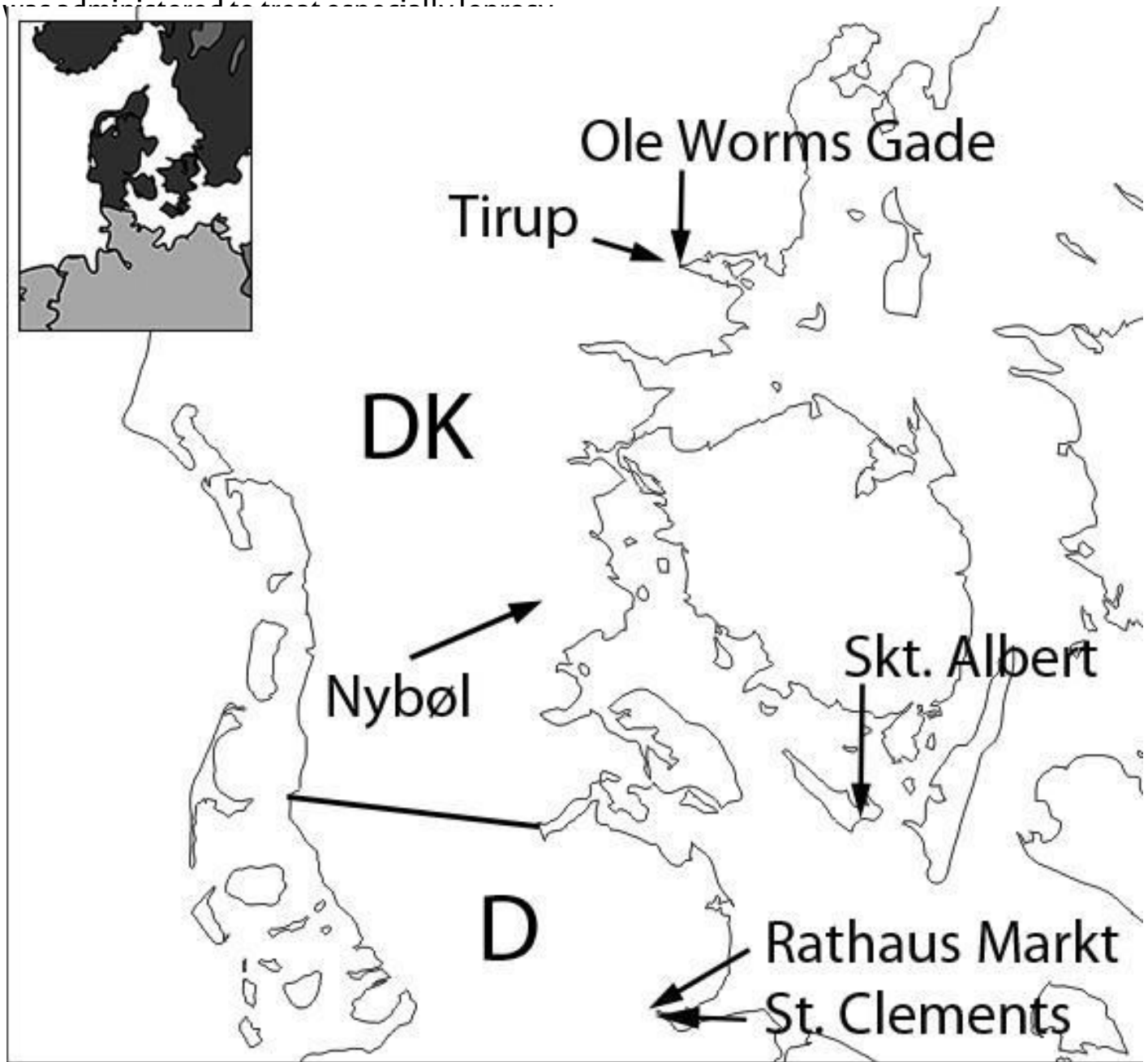
The research team also tested the skeletons for their content of mercury. Mercury was used to prepare the color cinnabar, for gilding and as medicine against leprosy and syphilis.

The results of the measurements show that the urban population was more exposed to mercury than the rural population. Mercury

which almost half of the individuals in the study suffered from.

However the study reveals a difference in how effective the treatment was in the towns.

"Maybe they had more expertise in mercury treatments in Schleswig than in Horsens", says Rasmussen.



Map showing the mentioned cemeteries in Germany and Denmark. Image courtesy University of Southern Denmark

The article, "Comparison of mercury and lead levels in the bones of rural and urban populations in Southern Denmark and Northern Germany during the Middle Ages," by Kaare Lund Rasmussen et al. appears in *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, Vol 3, Sept. 2015

John Gower's Handwriting identified

John Gower, considered to be one of the greatest poets of medieval England, left behind several remarkable works. A scholar has now been able to identify poems that were written by his own hand, including a poignant piece about how he was going blind.

These findings, by Sebastian Sobecki, appear in the article, "Ecce patet tensus: The Trentham Manuscript, In Praise of Peace, and John Gower's Autograph Hand" which is published in the latest issue of *Speculum*. Sobecki, Professor of Medieval English Literature and Culture at the University of Groningen, reveals that he discovered that the British Library's Additional MS 59495, known as the Trentham manuscript would have belonged to John Gower until the time of his death in 1408. Furthermore, he believes that one of the scribes who produced the manuscript was Gower himself.

Sobecki tells Medievalists.net, "I had been working on and off for a couple of years on In Praise of Peace when I decided to inspect the Trentham manuscript in the British Library. In a nutshell, my findings were made possible by the difference between the digitised images and the physical manuscript or, rather, by what digitisation couldn't capture: I had a hunch about the last two words of the ownership inscription on folio 42r, but it was only when I unfolded the dog-ear on that folio that I found the full inscription – "Will Sanders un Just D P.". Then

it only took me a couple of days to identify Saunders and realise that he was in charge of dissolving St Marie Overie, the Southwark monastery where Gower had spent the last years of his life.

"Finally, over the course of another week I started thinking through the consequences of this find, and it was then that I realised that this manuscript must have stayed with Gower until his death, and that the last scribe to write in it must therefore enjoy some degree of authorial approval. When I looked at the hand of this scribe, and his only other, equally brief, stint in British Library Cotton MS Tiberius A IV, the handwriting struck me as insecure and characterised by eyesight problems. That's when it dawned on me that I had most probably identified Gower's autograph hand."

In the article Sobecki argues that the Trentham manuscript was originally written in order to be presented to Henry IV, who had recently overthrown Richard II and become the King of England. Gower was hoping to influence the new king and his poem In Praise of Peace advocated that Henry renew the



British Library, Add. MS 59495, fol. 39v. – image from the International John Gower Society

truce with France. However, when Henry agreed to a twenty-eight-year truce on 18 May 1400, this project “lost its urgency” and the manuscript wound up becoming the English poet’s own book.

Sobecki goes on to explain that the one of the two scribes who wrote the manuscript was likely John Gower, and that with his own hand he added in two poems. This would have happened between the years 1400 and 1402, a period when the poet was slowly going blind, perhaps as a result of cataracts.

One of the items Gower included was an early version of a poem about how he was losing his eyesight. “It’s a beautiful poem,” Sobecki explains. “I had read it many times before, but only in the third and final version, when the modern title shifts to “Quicquid Homo Scribat (In fine)” [To Whatever a Man Writes]. But the Trentham version does not share the finality of blindness with the two later re-workings; it’s not about having lost eyesight,

but about losing it. Taken together, the three versions of the poem show how one of medieval England’s most talented writers tries to capture his personal misfortune in a formal and public context. The result is a struggle against form, where the personal gradually gains the upper hand over the conventional.”

Sebastian Sobecki’s article, “Ecce patet tensus: The Trentham Manuscript, In Praise of Peace, and John Gower’s Autograph Hand” is found in the October 2015 issue of *Speculum* (Volume 90, Number 4). You can access the article through **Cambridge University Press Journals**. You can read more of Sebastian Sobecki’s research on **Academia.edu** or follow him on Twitter @SebSobecki

You can also view the **Trentham manuscript online** at the International John Gower Society website.

John Gower's Poem:

*It was in the first year of the reign of King Henry IV
When my sight failed for my deeds.
All things have their time; nature applies a limit,
Which no man can break by his own power.
I can do nothing beyond what is possible, though my will
has remained;
My ability to write more has not stayed.
While I was able I wrote, but now because stooped old age
Has troubled my senses, I leave writing to the schools.
Let someone else more discreet who comes after me write,
For from this time forth my hand and pen will be silent.
Nevertheless I ask this one final thing, the last of my words:
That God make our kingdoms prosperous in the future.
Amen*



Gower the Archer, Vox Clamantis:
Glasgow University Library, MS
Hunter 59 [T.2.17] folio 6v.

Gore and glory: How Shakespeare immortalised the Battle of Agincourt

By Alison Findlay

Henry V's 1415 victory against the French at Agincourt is a key point of pride in British memory, and as such celebrations for last week's 600th anniversary are multiple and varied. Options include the Tower of London's exhibition, featuring medieval arms and armour, experiencing "the sights and sounds of twenty thousand arrows darkening the battlefield skies" at Leeds Castle or attending one of the many commemoration services in churches around the country.

What Shakespeare might have thought of all this commotion is interesting to consider, as it's largely down to him that Agincourt haunts British memory. His plays have kept "this glorious and well-foughten field" alive, championing its power as a myth of national unity and heroism. "King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long" is given an afterlife which raises him to the status of a superhero in *Henry VI* Part I:

*His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings;
His sparking eyes, replete with wrathful fire.*

The statistical significance of the victory at Agincourt by "we few, we happy few" is advertised in Shakespeare's listing of French

and English casualties in *Henry V*: 10,000 "slaughtered French" including 126 nobility, 8,400 knights, esquires and gentlemen and 1,600 mercenaries, contrast with just 29 English dead, whose names Henry reads: the Duke of York, the Earl of Suffolk, "Sir Richard Keighley, Davy Gam esquire / None else of name", and 25 commoners.

Rousing rhetoric

Henry V overflows with rousing patriotic speeches and these speeches have lent themselves remarkably well to versions of British patriotism over the years. Shakespeare's dramatisation of the battle champions rhetoric, Henry inspiring his troops with dreams of glory. The fact that they are outnumbered by the French just means a greater share of honour for those present.

Henry V promises that fighting at Agincourt will eliminate class boundaries: "He today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother" and that his soldiers' names will "be in their flowing cups freshly remembered" by future generations.

The "wonderful" victory at the Battle of Agincourt has been especially invoked at

Agincourt has been especially invoked at times of national or political crisis to awake feelings of patriotism. The play was staged just at the point when the Earl of Essex was miserably failing to establish imperial control over the Irish, and, some thought, to lead a coup for Queen Elizabeth's throne. Agincourt reminded spectators of the English victory over the Spanish Armada at a time when national stability and succession was precarious.

More recently, in Laurence Olivier's 1944 film, and Kenneth Branagh's 1989 post-Falklands film, Henry's speech celebrating the "band of brothers" and "we few, we happy few" engaged with the patriotic political agendas of Winston Churchill in World War II and Margaret Thatcher's attempt to retain power. Indeed, Branagh's delivery of the speech from a raised cart amongst his troops deliberately echoes Olivier's which is shot from the same angle.

Not so glamorous

So the seductive image of a "band of brothers" fighting against a common enemy is well remembered. But the play's equally sound critique of Henry's campaign has often been ignored.

Shakespeare does not depict the Battle of Agincourt as simply "glorious". The play repeatedly punctures its own representations of national unity and glory. The four Captains of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland are not as united as they first appear and doubts are raised about the number of Irish fighting for Henry. Before the army even leaves English shores, treason is uncovered amongst three noblemen, "English monsters" who have plotted to kill King Henry for French gold.

Although the Chorus proclaims that "all the youth of England are on fire", the cast includes characters who do not want to be there or are fired by the desire of looting, "to

suck, to suck the very blood to suck" as Pistol says. His boy servant is disgusted by English cowardice and petty theft.

The play insists on the brutality of war, in spite of Henry's insistence that the French people, including the women, are not to be harmed. Burgundy's plea for "naked, poor and mangled peace" hints at the damage done and tellingly observes that the French people "grow like savages, as soldiers will / That nothing do but meditate on blood". Henry's wooing of the French princess Katherine romanticises his conquest, but this scene can be played as a rape to heighten the cruelty of his imperialist power.

Most unsettling is the common soldier Williams who, in the wretched, mud-drenched English camp, challenges the disguised king by refusing to trust that his cause is "just and his quarrel honourable". Henry rewards Williams after the battle with crowns, but Williams cannot be bought off so easily. The most powerful moment of the current RSC production is when Williams punches Henry, "the mirror of all Christian kings" in the face, enraged by his deception.

Shakespeare's celebration of Agincourt is thus also a critique of the process of memorialisation, which creates elite superheroes but conveniently forgets sceptics like Williams in its list of casualties with "none else of name". On this 600th anniversary, we would do well to remember these less savoury elements of the play – and the battle.

*Alison Findlay is the Director of the Shakespeare Programme, Lancaster University. This article was first published in **The Conversation**.*

St John's Walk: what lies beneath?

Ongoing restoration work to St John's Walk is adding important insights into the history of Hereford Cathedral. Archaeological remains appeared as the builders lifted parts of the existing floor of the walk ahead of laying new stone slabs. Under the supervision of the Cathedral Archaeologist, Richard Morriss, the area was thoroughly investigated and a number of finds were recovered, which included human and animal bones, pieces of clay pipe, pottery and oyster shells.

'They do reveal some tantalising clues to the past lives of the Vicars Choral for whom St John's Walk was originally built,' said Richard "Unfortunately it appears that the finds are mixed up from different periods of history, so dating many of them will be impossible."

He added, "Some things have already proved fascinating, such as the copper stylus for marking parchment, and the fragment of a large tankard, suggestive of ale-drinking, which I am sure the vicars choral who lived in the cloisters would have enjoyed!"

At the southern end of St John's Walk, nearest the Vicars' Choral College and the river, archaeologists uncovered evidence of an earlier structure. Foundations of a wall dating from the 1400s and large pieces of decorated daub may have come from a high status building demolished to make way for the College, which was built around 1470. Evidence of industrial activity has also been recovered from this area hinting at yet more uses of the site. This links to similar

discoveries made during archaeological work undertaken by Headland Archaeology as part of the Heritage Lottery Funded restoration of the Cathedral Close (2009 - 2011), and presented in the book *Death in the Close: a Medieval Mystery* published earlier this year.

The new slabs are now in place and analysis of the finds has begun, after which all the human bone uncovered will be re-interred. The work to St John's Walk continues to reveal insights into its history and talks are being planned so that the public can learn more. These will culminate in an exhibition and conference at Hereford Cathedral in autumn 2016.

The restoration of St John's Walk is the core of a wider project which, as well as conserving the building and illuminating the beautiful carved timbers of the roof, will enable visitors of all ages to learn about the history of this fascinating place.



Jo Catling, Learning and Publicity Officer, St John's Walk Project, showing off some of the finds from the archaeological work

Meet the Real Ulrich von Liechtenstein

By Danièle Cybulskie

If you've ever seen *A Knight's Tale*, you'll know that the titular knight takes on the name of Ulrich von Liechtenstein in order to joust on the tournament circuit and win the hand of his lady fair. What you may not have known is that there seems to have been a real thirteenth-century knight named Ulrich von Liechtenstein, who spent his youth jousting to win the heart (and body) of a capricious lady, and then wrote a book about it.

Ulrich's book is simply called *The Service of Ladies* (all references here are to the J.W. Thomas translation), and it is a fascinating tale of tournaments, ladies, and unrequited love (or maybe just lust).

According to Ulrich, he spent four years of his childhood as the page of a (never-named) married noblewoman. He learned as he grew that the greatest ambition for a knight was to serve a lady steadfastly and well, and to hope to be rewarded for such good service – preferably by becoming the lady's lover. Ulrich took this to heart, bringing his lady flowers, and even going so far as to secretly drink the water she used to wash her hands before eating. Eventually, he had to leave that household to learn how to become a knight, and he began tourneying in order to win himself (and his lady) honour in his late teens. He claims to have been one of two hundred and fifty knights to be knighted by Leopold of Austria at his daughter's wedding.

Realizing that his lady has no idea that Ulrich's tournament successes are dedicated to her, he decides to ask her to accept his service by using his aunt as a go-between, sending the lady a love song to please her. The lady accepts the song, and remembers Ulrich's service

fondly, but refuses his love and service because of his "most unsightly lip" (verse 80). In speaking to a friend, Ulrich mentions that his mouth "looks like three lips" (verse 91), so it's possible he had a cleft palate or other long-standing physical difference. This is worth mentioning not only because it shows the shallowness of the lady, but because Ulrich opts for surgery to correct his lip, and then tells us about it. At first, his aunt and friends try to dissuade him – after all, any medieval surgery was potentially life-threatening – but Ulrich is determined, and finds himself a specialist in Graz who will operate. The doctor recommends that Ulrich is bound to keep him from moving, but Ulrich in his knightliness never moves "a fraction of an inch" (verse 95), despite the surgeon's cutting. After a long recovery, Ulrich's mouth is declared "just fine" (verse 106) by his aunt, but Ulrich's lady is only marginally impressed. She allows him to ride by her to speak his mind, but when he is too shy to speak, she tears out a lock of his hair while he lifts her down from the saddle as his just desserts. This is only one of the strange and violent episodes of this tale of chivalry. Another occurs when Ulrich severs a finger and sends a messenger to the lady for sympathy as it is slowly healing back onto his hand. She accuses his messenger of lying; after all, it



Ulrich von Liechtenstein depicted in the Codex Manesse, UB Heidelberg,
Cod. Pal. germ. 848, fol. 237r

to the lady for sympathy as it is slowly healing back onto his hand. She accuses his messenger of lying; after all, it doesn't count as severed if it's healing. As repentance, Ulrich re-severs the finger and sends it to her (she accepts it).

The central event of *The Service of Ladies* is an extended tour of southern Europe (referred to as the Journey of Venus) which Ulrich undertakes, dressed throughout in the guise of Queen Venus, in honour of love. On this tour, he gives out scores of gold rings, one for every knight who breaks a lance on him. He sends out advance notice to the cities he is going to visit, and knights come out in every city to win honour in the name of their own ladies against this knight in disguise. Although the description of the tour is much like Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in that there are lots of splitting lances, lovely ladies appearing, and knights of unsurpassed chivalry, it's fun to poke through and see what might have been true in this sea of larger-than-life moments. One of my favourites is the countess who insists that Queen Venus lift her veil to receive the kiss of peace at mass: although she laughs when she recognizes him as a man, she kisses him anyway, on behalf of all womankind.

Despite all his efforts winning glory during his Journey of Venus (with a brief stopover to visit his actual wife), his lady is still unimpressed, and accuses him of being devoted to another woman (presumably not his wife). She then tests him again by making him stand outside her castle with the lepers, disguised as one himself, and leaving him to sleep out in the rain. The lady then decides to let him climb up a bedsheet to her chamber, but only to thank him for his loyalty: she has no intention of sleeping with him. When he insists that he's not going anywhere until she does sleep with him, the lady says she'll let him down the sheet and when he comes back up, she'll relent. The moment Ulrich is halfway down the sheet, however, she drops it. Ulrich is so distraught he just about drowns himself, but his messenger saves him with lies about

the lady's promises. Trying to distract himself while he waits for the next rendezvous, Ulrich attends another tournament, at which point the lady tells his messenger that she'll sleep with Ulrich if he'll go on a sea voyage (the implication is of a crusade). He agrees, and she tells him that it's not necessary after all; she just wanted to see if he was loyal.

That summer, as he waits to finally be with the lady of his dreams, Ulrich says she does "an awful thing" (verse 1361), but he doesn't say what. He writes her a lament, and when she reads it, she does "a thing which hurt a lot" (verse 1363). After this unnamed thing, Ulrich finally gives up on serving his lady for good, and although he goes a while "lady-free" (verse 1376), he ends his book in praise of – and longing for – true love.

Ulrich's story tells us a lot about chivalry in that it shows there is a definite set of expectations placed on both the knight and the lady, not all of them healthy. For her part, the lady tells Ulrich over and over and over again in very explicit terms that she isn't interested in a relationship, and that she will never sleep with him, and yet he persists in the thinking that she owes him this in return for his good service. When she finally invites him to climb to her room, she has cleverly kept people around (including Ulrich's aunt) in the event that Ulrich may try to force himself on her. He admits that he'd "wrestle her", if those people weren't around, and that she would eventually "grant the prize of victory" (verse 1218), which tells you quite a lot about his romantic notions of the act. When she outsmarts him into climbing back out the window, it's not surprising that she drops him. One has to wonder what it could have been that finally made him give her up when being so blunt obviously didn't work. The fact that the narrative implies that she's being a tease and not saying what she means is a testament to the gender roles inherent in chivalry: both knight and lady have parts to play, and things don't end happily ever after when people deviate from the romantic ideal.

All that being said, it's impossible to know how much of Ulrich's story we can take seriously, especially because it so cleanly follows the narrative of knightly hardship in the name of a "coy" lady. Interspersed are vivid moments like Ulrich's surgery, the young boy drinking a washbowl of water, and the man huddled together with lepers and shivering in the rain. Taken as a whole, Ulrich's story is both a fascinating look at the self-

invention of a medieval knight, and a tall tale all its own.

It seems fitting to end this short look at Ulrich's story with his own take on things, so I'll leave you with a short section from The ***Service of Ladies***. Here's the lament that the lady found so offensive, called "The Twentieth Dance Tune" in this edition:

*You noble ladies, so refined and lovely, take my part;
before you all do I accuse the mistress of my heart
for she has robbed me so of joy and left me only pain
that because of her I must evermore complain.*

*I grieve that she'll not recognize my service, as is right,
although I've served her long and truly like a faithful knight.
That she is praised so highly everywhere by many a tongue
is because I've spread her fame with the songs I've sung.*

*I charge my lady with committing theft and robbery,
for it is robbery and theft (what other could it be?)
that she should seize my happiness without declaring war
and deprive my heart of joys, all for evermore.*

*I say she is a robber and is guilty of a theft
so great I'll ne'er replace the things of which I am bereft.
If she should give me back enjoyment, which she can and may,
yet imagine what I've lost: many a lovely day.*

*Because of her I suffer more than I can tell or share
from agonizing, yearning pangs which secretly I bear.
Alas! Alas, that she was born to cause me such distress,
she whose love I most of all wanted to possess.*

*Were I not silenced by manners and by hopes of love,
Then you'd believe, because of all the things she robbed me of
(should I reveal my longing heart and give each crime a name),
that the colour of her face would turn red with shame.*

*If anyone can reconcile us this would please me so
I'd not be angry anymore nor burdened down with woe,
no one would hear me say of her a word of censure then
and, whate'er she later does, this, at least, has been.*

You can follow Danièle Cybulskie on Twitter @5MinMedievalist

The Emperor's Spooky Night

Emperor Charles IV reveals in his autobiography what happened to him one night at Prague Castle, and how he saw a huge swarm of locusts.

Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor from 1355 to 1378, is remembered as one of the best rulers of the 14th century, in particular for the Czechs. It was under his rule that major landmarks in Prague were built, including a university, the Charles Bridge, and Prague Castle. He also wrote an autobiography, one of the few that were written in the Middle Ages, in which he covers the events of his youth, and how he came to manage the Kingdom of Bohemia as his father, John of Luxemburg, gradually lost his eyesight. This fascinating account includes this story of something very strange that happened one night at Prague Castle:

We arrived at a late hour at the castle of Prague at the old house of the burgrave, where we had lived for several years before the great palace had been built. When night came we went to our bed, and Busko of Wilhartitz senior was in another in front of us. There was a great fire in the room because it was winter time, and there were many candles burning. too, so that it was quite light. All doors and windows were closed. When we had just fallen asleep, something moved about in the room, ad we both awoke. We had Busko get up to see what it was. He got up and went around the room searching, but saw nothing and was able to find nothing. Then he built up the fire, lit more candles, and went to the cups which stood full of wine on the benches, drank from them, and put one cup near one of the great burning candles. Having drunk, he lay down again on his bed. We sat upright in bed covered by our blanket and heard someone walking about but were not able to see anyone. And while we were looking with Busko at the cups and the candles, we saw a cup thrown. It was thrown – we did not know by whom – over Busko's bed from one end of the room to the far wall, it bounced off and fell in the middle of the room. Seeing this, were were terribly afraid; we could still hearsomeone continuing to move about, but saw no one. After making the sign of the cross in Christ's name we slept until morning. Getting up in the morning, we found the cup which had been thrown in the middle of the room, and we showed all this to our servants when they came to us in the morning.

Charles also writes about what he saw in July of 1338 while in Austria:

After this, when our brother-in-law had invited us to breakfast for the following day, about sunrise one of the soldiers wakened us from sleep, saying "Lord, get up, for the last days are upon us and the whole world is full of locusts!" We got up, mounted a horse and quickly galloped off, wanting to see where the swarm ended. We rode all the way to Pulkau. That was where it ended; was seven miles long, and there was no way we could tell how wide it was. Their voice was like the sound of a great tumult. Their wings looked as if they had black letters written on them, and they were as thick as a snow storm, so that it was not possible to see the sun because of them. A great stink arose from them. They divided, some going toward Bavaria, some towards Franconia, some towards Lombardy, others scattering everywhere throughout the world. They multiplied rapidly, because in one night two became twenty and more. They were small, but they grew quickly, and they were found for the next three years.

The book ***Autobiography of Emperor Charles IV and his Legend of St. Wenceslas***, is edited and translated by Balazs Nagy and Frank Schaer and is published by Central European University Press.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the book from the publisher's website.



**Bust of Charles IV
in St. Vitus
Cathedral, 1370s.**

**Photo by Packare /
Wikimedia
Commons**

From Samhain to Halloween

October 31st is a night for kids to dress up in costumes and collect lots of candy. It is also viewed a time when the worlds of the living and the dead can intermingle. The origins of Halloween stretch back into ancient times, but it was during the Middle Ages that the festival was changed from pagan celebration to a Christian one. Here is a quick guide into the shrouded history of this holiday.

Samhain

In her book, *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween*, Lisa Morton writes that “any examination of Halloween’s history and its long line of misunderstandings must start by examining the Celts, an ancient people who themselves are often the subject of mistaken identity.” Inhabiting the British Isles and parts of Western Europe, the Celts were one of the ancient peoples who clashed with the Romans. Some of their culture and mythology was preserved by medieval writers, including details about one of their most important festivals - Samhain.

Taking place from sunset on 31 October to sunset on 1 November, Samhain was considered the beginning of the Celtic New Year and the start of winter. It was a time to celebrate the recent harvest, conduct tribal business, and to gather with the extended family. The night and day also represented an important spiritual function, for it was believed the time of the year when the barrier between the worlds of the living and dead were at their thinnest. Fairies and spirits of the dead could roam free, and Druids would be able to see into the future. Many stories of Celtic mythology take place during Samhain, frequently involving heroes entering the Outerworld where they meet and sometimes fight fairy creatures.

Morton adds that, “although historians have argued over how much Samhain really contributed to the modern celebration of Halloween, it seems likely that the Celtic festival’s peculiar mix of harvest, rowdy celebration and fearful supernatural beliefs gave Halloween much of its character.”

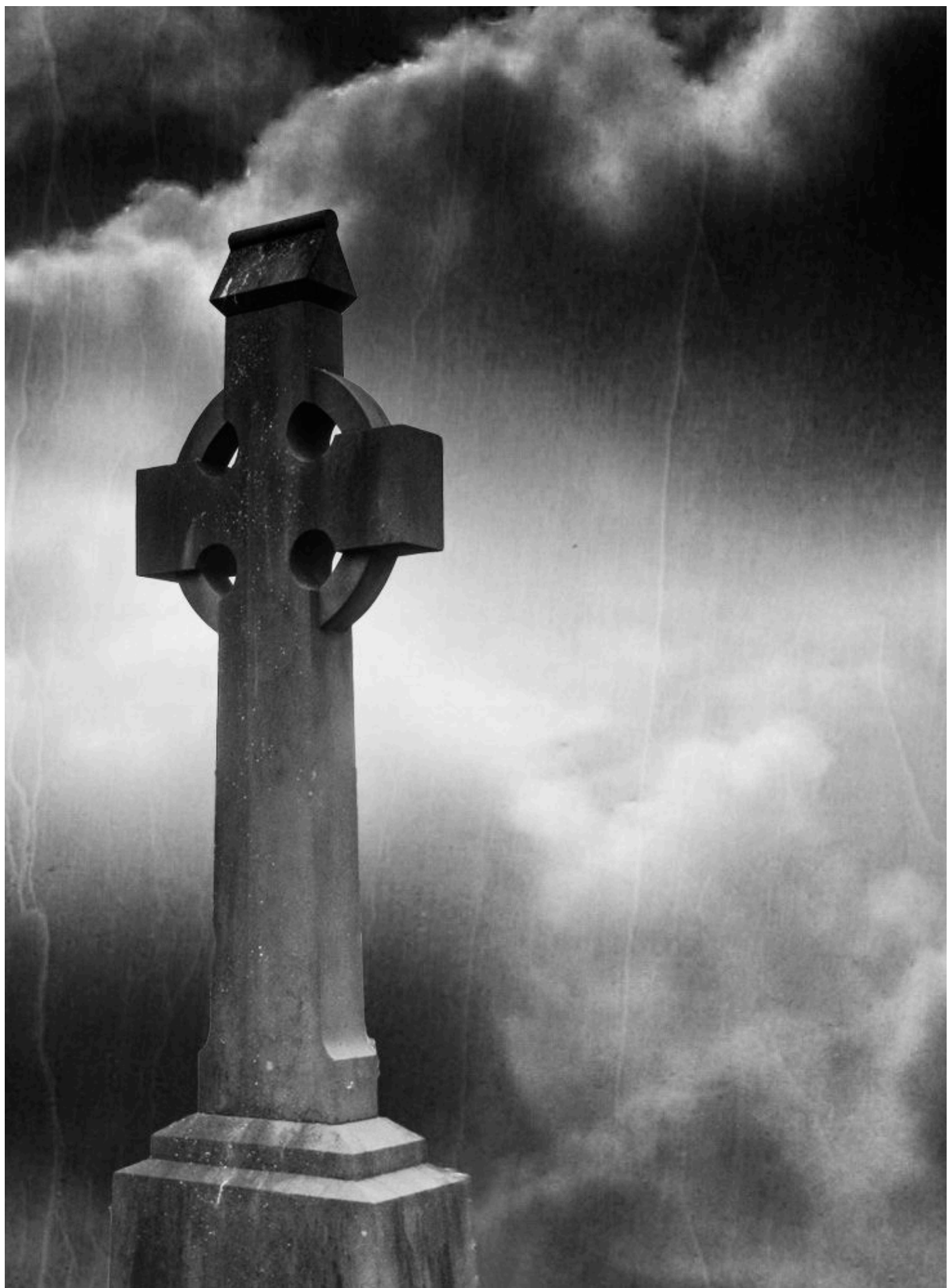


Photo by Steve Corey / Flickr

All Saints Day and All Souls' Day

Robert Barlett, in his book *Why Can't the Dead Do Such Great Things: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, notes that by the beginning of the ninth-century the Feasts of All Saints, taking place each year on the first of November. It has been suggested that this date was chosen as part of an effort to incorporate pagan practices into Christian worship, and specifically to replace Samhain with a Catholic holiday. A ninth-century Irish religious calendar even notes that they still called the feast day of 1 November 'samain'.

Barlett writes, "whatever the actual case for the adoption of 1 November, by the twelfth century western liturgical experts had their own story about the origin of the feast. According to this explanatory tale, Pope Boniface IV (608-15) had requested and received from the emperor Phocas the Pantheon in Rome a temple dedicated to all the gods, and had converted it into a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs - 'for the feasts of confessors were not yet celebrated.' The dedication feast of this church was in May, but subsequently, according to this report, Pope Gregory IV (827-44) moved the feast to 1 November because at that time there would be better food supplies for the crowds who came to attend, and, at the same time, he extended the feast to all saints, confessors as well as martyrs."

Although we cannot be sure how the feast started, All Saints Day would become one of the most important days in the Catholic liturgical calendar. Meanwhile, 2 November would also get its own feast day, officially called the The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, but better known as All Souls Day. It was started in 998 by Odilon, Abbot of Cluny, apparently after he heard of an island where a cave mouth emitted the agonized sounds of souls in torment. Martin writes, "the official explanation given for the new festival was that it would offer the living a chance to pray for the souls of the deceased, especially those in Purgatory; however, it seems more likely that the gloomy, ghostly new celebration was added to cement the transformation of Samhain from pagan to Christian holiday. By the fourteenth century, All Soul's Day was observed throughout the western Church and had been added to all official books and calendars."

She add that "by 1550, Samhain had been completely absorbed into the dual festival of All Saints and All Souls, and yet the Christian celebrations retained much of the pagan character, still offering both joyful celebration and sombre contemplation of death."

Halloween

One can find by the end of the Middle Ages the first written reports that a festival known as All Hallow's Eve was taking place. "Good frendes suche a daye ye shall haue all halowen daye," says one source from 1493, while the Festyvall, written in 1511, explains, "We rede in olde tyme good people wolde on All Halowen daye bake brade and dele it for crysten soules." In sixteenth-century England one can find more references to people going out on the night of Halloween to ring bells, even though the government threatened fines to those who were caught. The festival was becoming the unofficial start to the Christmas season, and was a time of "subtle disguisings, masks, and mummeries."

The Protestant Reformation would undermine the festival in England, and by the mid-seventeenth century Guy Fawkes Night, taking place on 5 November, would replace Halloween. However, in other parts of the British Isles, the festival continued, along with Celtic-folklore about Samhain. Eventually these traditions would migrate to North America, where Halloween re-emerged with trick-o-treating, costumes and other spooky fun.

Some traditions changed with the crossing over the Atlantic. In Europe, for instance, people would hollow out turnips, carving a human face into them, and then put a candle inside. Children would carry them in the night as they begged for 'soul cakes'. In North America a more plentiful vegetable was used: pumpkins.



What Medieval Ghosts can tell us about the Afterlife

People in the Middle Ages did tell tales of seeing and talking with ghosts. While these encounters could be quite scary, it was also an opportunity to learn about the afterlife. If one were to believe these ghosts, then you should expect to call your guardian angel Michael and that it was better to use oil lamps than candles.

In his article, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages", Robert Swanson of the University of Birmingham examines how medieval people thought of ghosts and episodes where they purportedly communicated with them. His research revealed that there was a wide range of opinion in the Middle Ages about what ghosts were, and offers some fascinating sources that involved people talking with these spirits.

Medieval theologians usually said very little about the possibility of ghosts. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, does accept the existence of ghosts, but does not analyze what they might be. Others dwell on the possibility that some ghosts, or even all of them, might be evil demons who are trying to trick the faithful. The 15th-century writer James of Clusa, for example, believed that true ghosts could only appear to Christians, while those that are seen by Jews and other infidels must have been demonic.

Swanson writes that:

Care was certainly needed when dealing with

ghosts which might be deceits. Evil spirits claimed to be the Christian dead, so all had to be tested, and could be found wanting. In 1458 one seemingly benign ghost was unable to recite a prayer when tested, thereby revealing itself as a diabolic spirit. In the the thirteenth century Jacques de Vitry reported a more dangerous case, of a young Catholic woman tempted into Catharism by what looked like the ghost of her dead mother in glory, ascribing her state to her adherence to Cathar belief. The apparition was a demonic fraud: when the woman sought advice from Catholic priests, their masses and prayers compelled the devil to bring back the real mother, bewailing her fate and urging her daughter to remain a true Catholic.

There are a few stories from the Middle Ages in which church officials determined that ghost was that of a Christian soul, and that it was in the realm of purgatory. Most often, these ghosts were communicating with the world of the living in hopes that masses or good works could be done for them so that their stay in purgatory could be shortened, allowing the spirit to enter heaven. For priests and other people, this situation could also be



Medieval churchyard in Mungret, Co. Limerick, Ireland. Photo by Neil Tackaberry / Flickr

used to learn more about the afterlife.

Gervase of Tilbury, for example, reports about how a young man died in the French town of Beaucaire in July 1211, but soon was appearing to his female cousin as well as a priest. For the next few weeks, church officials, including Gervase, came to Beaucaire so they could talk to ghost via the priest. Swanson writes:

The ghost says that he dwells in the air among spirits, experiencing purifying fires. His state is directly affected by events on earth: his clothing changes to resemble his earthly garments when they are distributed to the poor; and he must wear a girdle of fire until a borrowed belt is returned to its rightful owner. All souls which will be saved enter purgatory, other than saints, who go to heaven. Purgatory is a place of days and nights where souls are cleansed in agony, tinged with joy. The souls there receive some respite at weekends, and when masses are celebrated or other deeds

done on their behalf. Each soul has a guardian angel - all called 'Michael' to the name the office rather than an individual - and the souls join in commemoration of St. Michael's Day by praising their personal angels. The sufferings of the damned are visible from purgatory, but they are not yet in hell. That subterranean pit will remain empty until after the Day of Judgement - until then the damned suffer aerial torments while anticipating the fullness of their damnation. The just are meanwhile in the bosom of Abraham, pending admission to heaven.

Another ghost story comes from 15th-century Germany - Henry Buschmann had died forty years earlier, but in 1436 his ghost appeared to his grandson Arnt Buschman. "Moreover, this ghost appears initially not as a human, but as a dog. It is some time before Arnt realises that it is a ghost rather than an evil spirit, and only after taking clerical advice does he formally conjure the ghost to declare itself, allowing the conversations and

apparitions to begin. They then last for about six months, ending when the ghost secures release from purgatory."

Some of the revelations by the ghost of Henry Buschmann are similar to other ghost stories - he has a guardian angel, and part of his existence in purgatory involves him being on the Earth - but he also offers some tidbits of information about other spirits. One widow, for example, passed through purgatory and is now sitting in the eighth choir of angels. Meanwhile, the spirit of one father was serving his time in his son's home, and had killed seven of his grandchildren after their baptisms to punish his son and other relatives for their sins, at least until his daughter-in-law convinced his son to go to confession and penance.

One account from southern France in the 14th century involved a man who could communicate with the ghosts of many of the dead. Arnaud Gelis was a minor church official in the town of Pamiers, and apparently his role as a medium was a family trait. Swanson explains some of the details that Gelis revealed from his talks with ghosts:

The earth was crowded with the invisible dead, who had to be accommodated, and considered. Even energetic walking might harm them: 'People who move their arms and hands from their sides when they walk about ... knock many souls of the dead to the ground.' This is also a somewhat uncharitable afterlife: if the the dead fall over, they cannot rise of their own accord but must wait for help from other souls who knew them while alive. Those who did not know them simply walked over them.

The dead with whom Gelis mingled were mostly Christians and sought Christian salvation, by serving out their own post mortem purification and asking Gelis to contact their relatives to have them commission masses and other charitable acts for their souls (although some make no requests for aid). He had also seen Jewish ghosts, whose experience was different, and who remained separate from the Christians. Nevertheless, they would still be saved by Mary's intercession. The dead kept their earthly shapes

but were more beautiful. Dead clerics were recognizable by their clothing (a former bishop of Pamiers still had his mitre), but others simply wore albs. Most of the Christian souls were undergoing terrestrial purification, prior to admission to heaven - but this was not the purgatory of contemporary Catholicism. The 'good ladies' of tradition, Gelis said, were the great and rich who were being dragged in the carts by devils over mountains and valleys, and across plains.

A striking feature of Gelis's testimony is his emphasis on the connection between the dead and churches. The adult dead were constantly on pilgrimage, moving from church to church to purify their souls and secure salvation (the greater the penance, the faster they moved). They had a real affinity with their own parish churches, and with the churchyards where they were buried. They spent the night in churches. Any who had not made a pilgrimage to Compostella whilst alive did so after death. However, they rested from Saturday evening to Monday morning, could return to their family homes on Saturdays, and enjoyed wine and a good warm fire, but were fastidious about unclean houses. The dead preferred offerings of oil in lamps to altar candles, because the latter got blown out when walking. Dead women liked to return to check on young grandchildren; others returned to help people to sleep more soundly.

The ideas about ghosts are intermingled with medieval views of purgatory, a concept that had only developed in the Catholic Church in the late 11th century. For Catholics, this was both a reminder of the soul's continued existence and placed upon the responsibility of praying for the dead in order that they could leave that intermediate world behind and enjoy the rest of the afterlife in heaven. While today ghosts are often seen as things of evil, in the Middle Ages, they were spirits of men and women who probably just needed some help.

The article "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages" appears in *Studies in Church History*, Volume 45 (2009).

An Interview with:

Dan Jones

By Danièle Cybulskie

Bestselling author and TV personality Dan Jones has two new history books out this month: an American version of his *Magna Carta* which has just been released today (October 20, 2015) and an international version of *Realm Divided: A Year in the Life of Plantagenet England*. I caught up with Dan over Skype just as he begins his book tour in the United States (check out his [author page](#) and [Facebook page](#) for dates, or follow him on [Twitter](#)). Here's our (condensed) conversation about Magna Carta, Russell Crowe, Radiohead, and the brand-new book he's just started working on.

DC: Thanks for joining me. Appreciate it!

DJ: Thank-you for having me.

DC: We're talking about *Magna Carta* today, which is just coming out in the States (it's been out in the UK and Canada for a while). This American edition of *Magna Carta* blends your two books – *Magna Carta* and the new *Realm Divided*.

DJ: That's right. So, there was a short book about *Magna Carta* which came out in the UK and Canada last December. And in the UK this autumn, there is a book called *Realm Divided*, which is kind of like a social history of the year 1215. The American book combines the two elements, really. It's partly the short book on Magna Carta, but it brings in elements of the social, as well, because the more I looked at Magna Carta, the more I thought it was important to place it in its social context,

really. [Magna Carta] is so much about Runnymede, June, 1215, and quite often the context is lost: what the rest of the year was actually like, and particularly the latter half of the year when the consequences of Magna Carta and its failure played out.

DC: I think it's really important to put it in context, and that's what I like about the book. For example, your timeline starts at 1100, instead of 1214. Why was it so important to you to put it in context all the way back to Henry I?

DJ: Well, everyone's understood for a very long time [that] the idea that Magna Carta was a protest against John, but also it was concerned with issues that had been around for the previous sixty years at least, going back to the succession of Henry II – John's father – in 1154, and really its roots go back



Dan Jones - Photo courtesy Dan Jones / Wikimedia Commons

back to the succession of Henry II – John’s father – in 1154, and really its roots go back even further than that. If you look at something like the Coronation Charter of Henry I, you start to see these precedents for English kings granting, in a very loose sense, charters of rights, and establishing what the rights and customs of England are. So, on that side, it’s very important to look at the longer term historical context in order to understand why it was that things went so badly wrong in John’s reign.

DC: In Magna Carta you’ve actually listed the barons and given them short biographies, which I haven’t seen in other Magna Carta books. Why did you decide to include those?

DJ: Well, one sort of feels that there are just a lot of people involved in Magna Carta who really are reduced in normal tellings of the story to kind of “second baron standing beside the oak tree, looking stern” if we’re thinking of those classic Victorian renderings of Magna Carta in which Robin Hood is often sort of gazing round the corner, and there’s a Templar kind of smoking a fag. And there are so many people involved in Magna Carta. So many people. [There are] twenty some names of John’s advisors, lots of them bishops, but also people like William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, who are listed in Magna Carta. And on the other side, we know from Matthew Paris the identity of the twenty-five barons who were named as “The Twenty-Five” – the enforcers of Magna Carta. And it just seemed to me that it’d be very nice to have an easy, very potted biography of each of them. Otherwise, they’re just names, really. And I think it adds something to the book. And I sort of believe in books – in history books – as things that you want to treasure and keep and come back to. And I felt like it was rounding out the book, and making it something that people would want to buy.

DC: Well, it’s beautiful. It’s a gorgeous book.

DJ: Thank-you.

DC: And the appendices are certainly very

helpful.

DJ: Have you read the whole text of Magna Carta?

DC: Um... no. [Laughs]

DJ: It’s interesting. And very few people have. Because, I mean, why would you? It’s boring. Let’s be frank. It is boring.

DC: Well, okay. I have read it... skimmed it.

DJ: And so you sort of skim it and you go, “Oh, what’s this bit about a fish trap and whatever – on to the next one....” I read it aloud from start to finish when we were recording the audiobook. [Editor’s note: Jones is the reader for both the international and American audiobook versions of Magna Carta.] And it was only when I did that – read it aloud – you suddenly get hit by the realization that Magna Carta was designed to be read aloud. That was to be its primary, or certainly secondary, method of distribution after the creation of the charters, themselves. And you get this wonderful feel for how the ideas flow – or don’t flow – one to the other. And what you also sense when you read Magna Carta aloud is that effectively it’s a work in progress. It’s a deal in which the time ran out and they just sort of stopped. As happens in deals, right? Anyone who’s ever made a deal with a film company or whatever will know that eventually “deal fatigue” sets in. And that’s what you get from Magna Carta as well. It is a messy, slightly raggedy round the edges, unfinished piece of negotiation. It was a peace treaty.

DC: Yeah. It occurred to me that, for John, the vagueness [was] something that was useful to him, as well.

DJ: Well, there were certainly areas where John left himself wriggle room. Particularly with regard to his crusade obligation. I mean, very, very smart of John to take crusade vows. I don’t think we really believe for a second that he had any intention of going to annoy

vows. I don't think we really believe for a second that he had any intention of going to annoy "the Infidel" as he would've called them, and jolly good for "the Infidel" that he didn't, although actually, I doubt he would've put up much of an annoyance at any rate if his military record is anything to go by in France. But yeah, you're right, there was wriggle room there. It's a deal. It's a peace treaty, and it's designed... It's not the finished article: it's the basis for something else.

DC: And that's what I liked about the way you wrote this book. I think that many people who are writing the books on Magna Carta right now come at it from this view of "we've already accepted that it's this great document, and it's going to be a great document, and it's always been a great document" and especially if you read your introduction, it's almost as if you're coming at it from this place of astonishment, when you think about how it is rough, and it was a peace treaty. I liked that you were quite honest about it. Is that how you feel about it?

DJ: Yeah, I do. You have to detach. You have to sort of separate Magna Carta in your mind from the myth and the legend and the post-history of Magna Carta and see the two things as separate and actually not enormously connected. The myth that has grown up around Magna Carta is astonishing, and I think no one at the time could possibly have foreseen that we would be sitting here talking on Skype eight hundred years on about this charter. And in fact, I think I said this in the podcast you listened to with Helen, if you had been drawing up your list of all the important things that happened in 1215 at the end of 1215, I don't think Magna Carta would have been number one. I think if you were taking sort of a global view, you might've said Fourth Lateran Council, probably more important. If you were taking sort of a super global view, you might've said that the burning of Beijing – as it is now – by the Mongols was probably more spectacular than anything that happened in England. I

would probably say that, in English, terms, the civil war that had erupted following the failure of Magna Carta was more significant in practical terms at any rate than the charter, itself. And it's also unlikely that we've attached a set of "liberal" values to Magna Carta, and comb it for evidence of the origins of democracy and liberty, rather than anything else because actually, if you look through the charter, you can read it both ways. You can read it as the sort of origins of habeas corpus, and the right for a trial in front of your peers, for equality beneath the law – for all of that. Or you can say it's the most ultra, sort of right-wing document of all time, that it's total freedom from regulatory oversights for the Catholic Church, for the City of London... It discriminates heavily against Jews, against women, it demands that you kick all the foreigners out of the country. Top of its agenda after freedom for the Church is enormous tax breaks for the aristocracy (inheritance tax breaks). This is not necessarily a holy, liberal-minded piece of political bargaining. I'm not saying it is the most right-wing document. I'm saying that you can read it both ways. It's very much what you make of it.

DC: Absolutely.

DJ: That's why it's still important. Why we're still talking about it.

DC: We love controversy, right? Reading things two ways. You were mentioning Robin Hood standing in the wings earlier, and obviously, he's become enmeshed with the Prince John – King John – legend. Did you see the Ridley Scott *Robin Hood*?

DJ: I might have done. It seems like something I'd have watched, but I can't remember a single detail. It's the one with Russell Crowe.

DC: That's the one. Where Magna Carta was drawn up by Russell Crowe's dad, who was a stonemason, and it was hidden away for years. What I liked about this idea of Magna Carta

for years. What I liked about this idea of Magna Carta being written and hidden away is that it kind of gets at what you're saying. If it's been hidden away before John comes to power, then it gets at the rules that would have been under Richard, under Henry, so that's kind of interesting. But, in the film, of course, Russell Crowe gets up and starts talking about freedom and liberty for all men. But what would it have meant at the time when they said "free men" are to be bound by this?

DJ: Well, it's not available to everybody, right? So, in fact, as you allude to, Magna Carta was granted to "free men" in the first instance (in 1215, at any rate), which did not comprise manifestly half the population, because they weren't men, and didn't comprise probably even half the men because they weren't free, so we're talking about something that is, by its very nature, in that sense, limited to about a quarter of the population. Then add in to the fact that, at the top of Magna Carta, it is granted explicitly to John's faithful subjects, and the faithfulness is important because the terms of the agreement were not available to those who remained in rebellion against John and the barons who refused to renew their renounced homage to John. Some of them did on the 19th of June. So, even from that position, Magna Carta's not available to everybody. And then add in to the fact that Magna Carta specifically limits the rights of a number of people. It limits the rights of Jews, who'd had a relatively rough time in England in any case, under Richard (think about the sort of pogroms – the mass killings that accompanied Richard's coronation) and a very bad time under John, who decided to milk the Jews for as much money as he possibly could, while he was milking the Church and the barons and everyone else. The few clauses of Magna Carta that touch on women, well one of them grants widows the right to remain in their family after their husbands' death for a certain period of time, but then another says that no one can be [arrested or imprisoned] on the say-so of a

woman, except in the case of her husband's death. So, Magna Carta is not wholly friendly towards women. Magna Carta wants to throw foreigners out of the country, although it has a pretty good reason because a lot of those foreigners were mercenaries. Some of the foreigners are people around John who seem to have been misleading him. Leading him astray, I mean, particularly. But as we know, Hollywood is Hollywood, and has to do Hollywoodish things. You know, we don't watch Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* as a documentary.

DC: No, fortunately.

DJ: It's interesting. How do you tell interesting historical stories on the screen? Is it possible to do it and remain historically faithful? That's something we've been doing a lot of with the TV programs in the last couple of years. In the UK, we made a four-part series about the Plantagenets, we've just made a four-part series about the Wars of the Roses which hasn't been screened yet. And they're documentary-dramas. And you do have an interesting job where if you want to present history in TV format – I think, to make exciting television – you have to obey the laws of television as well as obey the laws of history and try to fit those together so that your story has this traditional screen shape, but your facts remain facts. I'm not talking about Hollywood things. You don't have to stick to the facts in Hollywood, do you? But, in terms of documentary-making, it's a big, and a very interesting philosophical question.

DC: So, how do you balance it, then? Making it so that you get the blood and the guts and the T&A and all that stuff, for the people who are expecting it, and still get them the facts. Is there a way that you come at it when you try to design your docudramas?

DJ: Yes. You look for stories that are going to fit, first and foremost. The first episode we made [of *The Plantagenets: Britain's Bloodiest Dynasty*] was about Henry II and

made [of The *Plantagenets: Britain's Bloodiest Dynasty*] was about Henry II and the rebellions of his sons and the murder of Thomas à Becket. And you know, if you know that story, that actually, naturally it has this sort of nice, dramatic shape to it because here you have two friends, in Henry and Becket, [who] fall out – one of them gets whacked. The consequences of that, so people thought at the time, included a great rebellion against the king; the king sorts it out by making atonement for the murder of his friend. I mean, that is a classic, dramatic story. It also happens to be true.

DC: It's perfect.

DJ: And it also happens to have people getting their heads bashed with swords, and charging around on horses, doing kind of war-y things, all of which we know work well on television. So, story selection is very important. There are different techniques to what you include in a book as to what you include on the screen, and it's just about saying, "which bits of this story fit a sort of dramatic shape?" And "which bits do we normally tell when we're giving the historical version of this story – which are actually irrelevant to TV storytelling?" And so it's a different way of sifting your material. All history is essentially sifting vast amounts of material and coming up with a story, but you just have different criteria, I think, according to how you're projecting that story.

DC: If I can just compliment you for a second, I like the style you've taken in the storytelling of the whole range of your books.

DJ: Thank-you.

DC: Do you have any other plans in the works? Do you think you're going to stick with the Plantagenets?

DJ: I'm not done with the Plantagenets, per se, but I think I've run out of Plantagenets. Certainly for the time being. I've just finished

the first chapter of a new book about the Knights Templar.

DC: Oh, nice! That's good. That's a challenge, too, because there are lots of people writing about the Templars all the time.

DJ: Yes, there are, aren't there? There's a similarity to the Magna Carta in that the reality of the Templars and the sort of post-life myth of the Templars – you have to separate them out. I suspect it's going to have parallels with bits of writing about the Wars of the Roses, particularly bits about writing about Richard III in that, like Richard III, the Templars tend so send people a bit mad, I think. That's sociologically interesting. It's also great, because people are enthusiastic. It also means there's a lot of white noise around that you have to try to shut out when you're approaching history. But, I'm really enjoying it. I've written all these books about England and France, mainly England, and now, the first chapter of this book is all about Jerusalem. It's fantastic. You know, spreading one's wings and writing about different places. Same time, but the geographical spread is different. And I love it. I really love it. I've got such a good feeling about it – it probably means it's terrible. But, yeah. I'm loving it. I'm really digging the writing. But that's going to be a little while. It'll probably be out in 2017.

DC: That's great. That sounds really good.

DJ: Yeah, I'm kind of excited about it. It's a challenge. Doing the work on Magna Carta was interesting because the first book I ever wrote was about the Peasants' Revolt [*Summer of Blood: The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*]. It was a little, short book about a short time. Magna Carta is like that. And now I'm going back to what I was doing with The Plantagenets with this big, epic, sweeping time and place, and people. And it presents different challenges in the writing and the framing of the story. I think a lot about storytelling, and story architecture, and story shape is really important to me. Really very

shape is really important to me. Really very important, as a writer. And [with] the Templars, you have this great story at the beginning (Jerusalem in the immediate aftermath of the First Crusade), you have this great story at the end, about France, on the thirteenth (that terrible day when they were all rounded up and shut down) and then in the middle, what do you have? A lot of books about the Templars just tend to get a bit saggy in the middle. But I don't want my book to be like that. I want my book to be really robust and just fire you through. And the questions I'm working on and the architecture at the moment are how you do that.

DC: I'm really looking forward to *Realm Divided* [available in Canada in January]. You end up talking more about daily life in that one, is that right?

DJ: Yeah. We've published a few books at Head of Zeus about a single year. Microhistory, I suppose: social history through the story of a year. And I thought 1215's a very good way to study society top to bottom, but it also has a story. You start in one place and you end in another place and things happen, and obviously, you've got Magna Carta in the middle. This is sort of the story of the year in political terms, that's the thread that runs through the middle, but it's really about life; real, everyday life for people of every social station. So, each chapter (as well as telling the story) has a theme, or is about a certain type of people, whether it's barons or bishops or knights or peasants. In between are some shorter, mini-essays, really, on aspects of life: clothes and food and swearing and sex and whatever. Make-up – that's my favourite one, as I said to Helen.

DC: The Trotula!

DJ: Love that one. So, it's kind of an experimental book in a way. I've been saying jocularly to people that if you like the band Radiohead – you must be familiar

DC: Yeah.

DJ: You remember Radiohead when they recorded *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* and went very electronic and kind of experimental. I feel a little bit like that. That must be grand, but, you know I wanted to see if it was possible to write social history the way I write and keep it about storytelling. Because most social history – it just becomes sort of, like I said, a list of stuff. Some of it's good lists of stuff [but] I'm not going to write a book like that. So, I've treated it like an experiment: can I write and produce a social history book? And I think I can – I mean, I have.

DC: It's done, so...

DJ: It's done. It was possible. Whether it's good, I don't know.

DC: I'll tell you in a couple of weeks!

DJ: Yeah, you be the judge and tell me. I loved it. I really liked writing it because I have a penchant for weird stuff. And I don't mean that in a sort of fetishistic way, I mean it like the bits of history that kind of push my buttons, like

DC: Like swearing. Yeah. I mean, that's where we live at Medievalists.net. All the weird stuff.

DJ: You like weird stuff. Right, okay. There's loads of weird stuff in *Realm Divided*. I mean, knock yourself out with weird stuff.

DC: I think there are lots of us that do! So, you wrote your first book on peasant rebellion, and you're back to rebellion again – Magna Carta, *Realm Divided* – did it seem familiar coming back to the same themes?

DJ: They're not wildly different. And I remember when I was writing *Peasant's Revolt* book that I did sort of feel as though this was 160-odd years on from Magna Carta. This was peasants having a go at the same thing and that what there certainly was was

this was 160-odd years on from Magna Carta. This was peasants having a go at the same thing and that what there certainly was was a sense over that hundredsome years between that divides Magna Carta and the Great Rebellion of 1381, the sort of “political class” has broadened. This was a realm now in which the rebels weren’t just a handful of rich men; they were ordinary people from villages in Essex and Kent. And in spirit, they’re probably really asking for the same thing, really, which is justice.

DC: Yes, absolutely. Although, they had more of the Russell Crowe idea later on. Maybe they need to make a film about that.

DJ: About the Peasants’ Revolt? I think you’re quite right. I think they should make a film about it. Melvyn Bragg has written a very nice novel about the Peasants’ Revolt [*Now is the Time*]. Maybe someone will make that into a film.

DC: I would watch it.

DJ: I think I’d watch it, as well. But what you’d have to do – you’d have to “Russell Crowe” it up because The Peasants’ Revolt doesn’t really... it sort of has a shape to it. You’d have to think carefully about which characters were interesting or important. Whose eyes you see it through. I found, writing the book, there was sort of a multiplicity of perspectives that made it quite hard to give the story true focus. If [you’re] going to write a screenplay about a novel about the Peasants’ Revolt, it’d be interesting picking whose eyes you saw it through. Who’s the most interesting?

DC: That’s a tough one. Russell Crowe as Wat Tyler... I don’t know because not everybody – not even most people – could be sympathetic in a modern sense when they’re going around cutting off the heads of people who are cowering in the Tower. And then you have Richard (II) who’s always controversial on his own...

DJ: Yes, Richard is an interesting character, isn’t he? None of the characters are enormously sympathetic. I mean, Melvyn, obviously, loves John Ball. You can tell that Melvyn’s sympathies lie with him. He is a very interesting figure. But I don’t know. I think if I was to do it, I’d sort of invent a character who’s... I don’t know. I thought about, for a while, [that] you could use the Peasants’ Revolt as the backdrop to create a sort of nightmarish, James Ellroy-style [*L.A. Confidential*], conspiracy thriller about medieval England. He works with characters that sort of sit just below the level of power. And so you have an enormous amount of freedom to do portraits of the big players, but you don’t have to live with one of the big characters as your primary view on the world because I think it’s a very difficult challenge for a novelist and a writer.

DC: I think that’s kind of the appeal of watching your barons get profiled in Magna Carta. You have these characters that obviously had a huge impact on history, and you actually want to know a little bit more about them, and here they are.

*Clearly, Dan Jones is up to the challenges of both books and television, and we’re definitely looking forward to his upcoming book on the Templars. For an informative and infinitely readable look at medieval history, pick up any one of his books (I especially love *The Plantagenets*), and catch him at a book stop near you.*

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