

The Medieval Magazine

Number 44

November 30, 2015



The Lighter Side of the Middle Ages

The Myths of Glastonbury
Abbey



7

The Two Wives of Robert II



15

In Search of Guinevere



27

7 Things One Should Know When Dealing with Kings: The Icelandic's Version



Page 4

Revealing the Myths of Glastonbury Abbey

Archaeologists for the University of Reading on what was the truth behind the connection between the abbey and Arthurian legends



Page 12

Bad for the Soul, Good for the Body

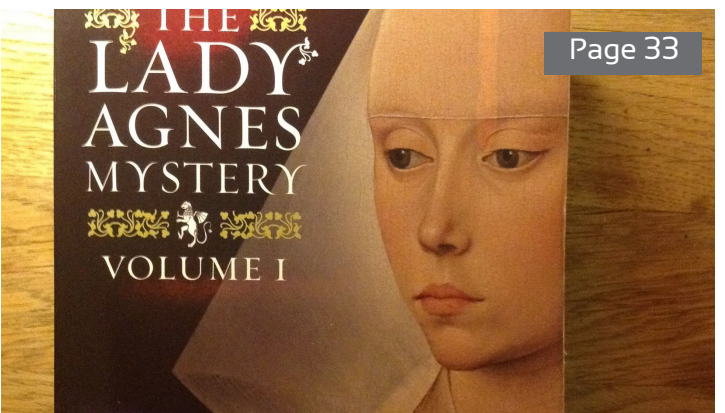
Katherine Harvey on religion, medicine and masturbation in the Middle Ages



Page 16

The Lighter Side of the Middle Ages

Some of our favourite tales from the *Facetiae* by Poggio Bracciolini



Page 33

Book Review: The Lady Agnes Mystery

Sandra Alvarez reviews the new novel by Andrea Japp

Table of Contents

- 4 Reveaing the Myths of Glastonbury Abbey
- 6 Reformation 'recycling' may have saved rare painting from recycling
- 9 Isidore of Seville on... The Language of God
- 10 The Duel between Guy of Steenvoorde and Iron Herman
- 12 Bad for the Soul, Good for the Body: Religion, Medicine and Masturbation in the Middle Ages
- 16 The Lighter Side of the Middle Ages
- 21 The Two Wives of Robert II, King of Scotland
- 25 In Search of Guinevere
- 27 7 Things One Should Know When Dealing with Kings: The Iclander's Version
- 30 In Search of Alfred the Great: The King, The Grave, The Legend
- 33 Book Review: The Lady Agnes Mystery

THE MEDIEVAL MAGAZINE

Edited by:
Peter Konieczny

Website: www.medievalists.net

This digital magazine is published each
Monday.

Cover Photo: British Library Royal MS I E
IX



Revealing the Myths of Glastonbury Abbey

The real history of Glastonbury Abbey, renowned for its links to the legendary King Arthur, has finally been uncovered thanks to ground-breaking new research from the University of Reading.

The four-year project reassessed and reinterpreted all known archaeological records from excavations at the Abbey between 1904 and 1979, none of which have ever been published. Analysis revealed that some of the Abbey's best known archaeological 'facts' are themselves myths - many of these perpetuated by excavators influenced by the fabled Abbey's legends.

Research revealed that the site was occupied 200 years earlier than previously estimated - fragments of ceramic wine jars imported from the Mediterranean evidence of a 'Dark Age' settlement. The analysis also showed how the medieval monks spin-doctored the Abbey's mythical links to make Glastonbury one of the richest monasteries in the country.

Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset holds a special place in popular culture. It was renowned in the early middle ages as the reputed burial place of the legendary King Arthur and the site of the earliest Church in Britain, thought to have been founded by Joseph of Arimathea.

Roberta Gilchrist, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading led the study. She said: "This project has rewritten the history of Glastonbury Abbey. Although several major excavations were undertaken during the 20th century, dig directors were led heavily by Glastonbury's legends and the occult. Using 21st century technology we

took a step back from the myth and legend to expose the true history of the Abbey."

The project explored the archaeological collections of Glastonbury Abbey Museum, including chemical and compositional analysis of glass, metal and pottery. A comprehensive new geophysical survey of the Abbey grounds was also undertaken. A key focus for the researchers was the work of Raleigh Radford who excavated there in the 1950s and '60s. Radford claimed to have discovered a Christian 'British' cemetery, a Saxon cloister that was believed to be the earliest in England, as well as the site of King Arthur's grave, allegedly located by the monks in 1191.

However this latest analysis disputes these findings, with the graves Radford judged to be 'Dark Age' shown to be *later* than the Saxon church and cemetery. Additionally the site of Arthur's 'grave' was revealed to be a pit in the cemetery containing material dating from the 11th to 15th centuries, with no evidence linking to the era of the legendary King Arthur and Queen Guinevere.

Professor Gilchrist added: "It's likely the judgement of excavators like Radford was clouded by the Abbey myths. They were also less critical of historical sources than we are today and did not have the luxury of 21st century technology. Our most amazing discoveries relied on radiocarbon dating and



Glastonbury Abbey - Photo by Chris Brown /Flickr

chemical analysis. We identified an early timber building of very high status, as well as a large craft-working complex of five glass furnaces radiocarbon dated to c. AD 700. This represents the earliest and most substantial evidence for glass-working in Saxon England."

Analysis has also highlighted how the monks crafted the legends to restore the Abbey to its former glory after a devastating fire in 1184.

Professor Gilchrist continued: "The monks needed to raise money by increasing the numbers of visiting pilgrims - and that meant keeping the myths and legends alive. We found evidence that the monks laid out the buildings in a very distinctive way to emphasise the 'earliest church' story. Uniquely, the religious and cult focus of the site was to the west of the Abbey church, centred on the Lady Chapel. This occupied the site of the legendary early church, allegedly founded by Joseph of Arimathea.

"The monks also deliberately designed the rebuilt church to look older in order to demonstrate its ancient heritage and pre-eminent place in monastic history, using archaic architecture style and reused material to emphasise the Abbey's mythical feel. This swelled pilgrim numbers - and the

Abbey's coffers.

"It was a strategy that paid off: Glastonbury Abbey became the second richest monastery in England by the end of the Middle Ages. Re-examination of the archaeological records revealed the exceptional scale of the abbot's lodging, a luxurious palatial complex to the southwest of the cloister."

The next stage in the project will see the researchers work with the Trustees of Glastonbury Abbey to enhance the visitor experience. Digital reconstructions and an interactive map will be developed as well as a new guidebook and education packs for schools.

Professor Gilchrist added: "Thousands of people from across the globe visit this magical monument every year, drawn by its history and legends. Our research has shed new light on the Abbey and its national and international significance, both in the middle ages and today. Future visitors will enjoy their experience even more and leave with the real history of the Abbey."

The project, conducted with partners **Trustees of Glastonbury Abbey** and funded by the **Arts and Humanities Research Council**, involved a team of 31 specialists.

Reformation 'recycling' may have saved rare painting from destruction

By Stuart Roberts

A rare medieval painting depicting Judas' betrayal of Christ may have survived destruction at the hands of 16th century iconoclasts after being 'recycled' to list the Ten Commandments instead.

Now on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum, The Kiss of Judas, is one of the rarest artworks of its type. At the time of the Reformation and during the English Civil War, church paintings were destroyed in their thousands. Few survive across the UK and of those that remain, many have been defaced. It is believed that up to 97% of English religious art was destroyed during and after the Reformation.

The brightly-painted wooden panel, with details picked out in silver and gold leaf, dates from c.1460, is all the more astonishing as it depicts the moment of Christ's betrayal, by Judas Iscariot. Devout Catholic parishioners often scratched and gouged at the hated figure of Judas, so the painting would have been at risk from Catholic and Protestant congregations alike during the intervening centuries.

The remarkable discovery of the painting's double life was revealed when it was purchased by the Fitzwilliam Museum in 2012 from the Church of St Mary, Grafton Regis, Northamptonshire. The church did not

have the funds to conserve the work and maintain it in appropriate environmental conditions.

When the panel arrived at the Fitzwilliam's Hamilton Kerr Institute for conservation, it had a considerable layer of surface dirt, bat faeces and heavily discoloured varnish which made it difficult to see the image.

But, it was a discovery on the back of the boards that revealed the remarkable story of how the painting survived.

The reverse was covered with a more modern backing board of plywood. When conservator Dr Lucy Wrapson removed this, she found the back of the planks making up the painting had, under close inspection, faint traces of writing. 16th century lettering was revealed using infra-red photography, proving the painting had been recycled at the time of the Reformation, the offending image turned around and the back converted into a painted board. It is thought that it may have listed the Ten Commandments, typical of a Protestant church furnishing.



Detail from The Kiss of Judas - Photo by Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Dr Wrapson said: "We cannot know for sure why the painting was re-used in this fashion, perhaps it was simple economy, reversed so it could still fit the space for which it was intended. Or perhaps it could have been deliberately saved. The painting is fascinating, and conservation and cleaning has revealed the vibrant original medieval colours."

The painting was dated by dendrochronologist Ian Tyers. The panel is made up of boards imported to England from the eastern Baltic, Ian looked at the growth rings and identified the tree was felled after 1423 and estimated a usage date of c.1437-1469. Further non-invasive X-ray analysis and assessment using infra-red and ultraviolet light identified details, pigments and possible areas of fragility. Cleaning, protection of the wood from further insect damage, and a new layer of modern varnish have preserved the object for generations to come.

The painting is on display in the Rothschild Gallery of medieval works in the Fitzwilliam Museum. Funds from the sale will now help fix the roof of St Mary's. Entry to the museum is free.

Article courtesy University of Cambridge



Isidore of Seville on...

The Language of God

An interesting section from Isidore of Seville's, 7th-century work *Etymologiae*, in which the Archbishop tries to answer what language God uses when he speaks:

It is hard to determine what sort of language God spoke at the beginning of the world, when he said (Genesis 1:3), "Be light made," for there were not yet any languages. Or again, it is hard to know with what language he spoke afterwards to the outer ears of humans, especially as he spoke to the first man, or to the prophets, or when the voice of God resounded in bodily fashion when he said (Mark 1:11), "Thou art my beloved Son." It is believed by some that the language in these places was that single onewhich existed before the diversity of tongues. As for the various language communities, it is rather believed that God speaks to them in the same language that the people use themselves, so that he may be understood by them.

Indeed, God speaks to humans not through an invisible substance, but through a bodily creature, through which he even wished to appear to humans when he spoke. Now the Apostle says (I Corinthians 13:1), "If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels." Here the question arises, with what tongue do angels speak? But Paul is saying this by way of exaggeration, not because there are tongues belonging to angels.

It is also asked with what language will humans speak in the future; the answer is nowhere to be found, for the Apostle says (1 Corinthians 13:8), "Or tongues shall cease."

The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville has been edited and translated by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof, and was published by Cambridge University Press in 2006

[Click here to visit the Publisher's website for more details](#)

The Duel between Guy of Steenvoorde and Iron Herman

By Peter Konieczny

When I first got interested in medieval history as a university undergraduate, one of the first historical sources I read was *The Murder of Charles the Good*. Written by Galbert of Bruges, it is account of how Charles, Count of Flanders, was murdered on March 2, 1127, and the chaos and warfare that took place in the weeks and months following his death.

What captivated me was how vivid Galbert's account was – he writes as if he is almost a journalist sending out daily reports on what he has seen and heard. At one point he comments that “among so many dangers during the night and so many conflicts during the days that I, Galbert, since I had no place for writing, noted down on tablets a summary of the events that were going on until at some point in a longed-for moment of peace, during the night or day, I could set in order the present description according to what had happened.”

Jeff Rider, a professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and Medieval Studies at Wesleyan University, has spent the last several years working on Galbert of Bruges and his account, and has produced a new translation of it, entitled *The Murder, Betrayal, and Slaughter of the Glorious Charles, Count of Flanders*. It is from this translation that I wanted to share one particular episode, a judicial duel fought between Guy of Steenvoorde and Herman

the Iron on April 11, 1127. The duel takes place in the town of Ypres, just after the brutal execution of one of the main conspirators involved in Count Charles' murder. Guy of Steenvoorde, “a famous and strong knight” is also accused of being part of the plot that killed Charles, apparently because he was married to the niece of another conspirator. Guy denied the accusation, but another knight named Iron Herman made a challenge to single combat. The duel was set, and Galbert writes:

...both fought bitterly. But Guy knocked his adversary from his horse and kept him down easily with his lance as he was struggling to get up. Then his opponent, running nearer, ran Guy's horse through with his sword, disemboweling it. Sliding from the horse, his sword drawn, Guy attacked his adversary. A continuous and bitter encounter followed with exchanges of sword blows, until, worn out by the weight and burden of their arms, they threw away their shields and hastened to win the

win the fight with their strength in wrestling. Iron Herman fell prostrate to the ground, and Guy threw himself on top of him, pounding the knight's mouth and eyes with his iron gauntlets. But just as one reads of Antheus, the prostrate man gathered strength bit by bit from the coolness of the ground and slyly made Guy think he was certain of victory while he rested. Meanwhile, having raised his hand very smoothly to the lower edges of the mail coat, where Guy was unprotected, and grabbed him by the testicles, he collected his strength for a single effort and threw him from him, breaking open all the lower parts of his body by this grabbing throw so that the prostrate Guy grew weak and cried out that he was defeated and was going to die.

The only other account of the duel is recorded by Walter of Théroanne, which shares some similarities, but is also very different:

When the judicial duel to determine the case between Guy and his accuser Herman, nicknamed the Iron, began, Guy had the better of the first and second exchanges of blows and fell on Herman and crushed him the the ground under the immense weight of his body and their arms (for Guy, like Herman, was armed with a heavy hauberk and a helmet). Then Herman, strengthened by God's virtue, got up as if he no longer felt anything weighing on him and, throwing down in turn him who, as was mentioned above, had previously had the upper hand, began to press him to confer the crime he had committed. What more can I say? He was ultimately vanquished by divine judgement and convicted of the crime of which he was accused and thus sentenced to die.

Why is Galbert's version so different, and more vivid? Ryder notes an important fact: Galbert of Bruges was not in Ypres to see this duel. He was relying on the reports of other eyewitnesses, and used that to recreate the fight. His imagination also makes use of how duels were written about in 12th century literature to help give the fight some extra

drama. Galbert even adds a reference to ancient mythology with the mention of Antheus – he was said to be the giant son of Poseidon and Gaia, and was invincible in battle when in contact with the earth. He gets killed in a wrestling match by Hercules, who held him over his head until the giant grew weak.

Rider explains:

There are, to be sure, certain elements of the fight – like resorting to fisticuffs, and the mighty testicle-tugging toss by which Herman vanquishes his enemy – that are out of harmony with the spirit of heroic literary duels and are unlikely to have been invented by Galbert, and the fight probably took place in much the way Galbert describes it. But probably did knock Herman off his horse and keep him down; Herman probably did then kill Guy's horse; they probably did fight with swords, then with fists; and so on. But here...Galbert has used an existing mental model – in this case, the narrative model of a duel – to grasp, analyze, and represent an event which, in this cause, he has not witnessed and must imagine on the basis of other people's accounts. By inserting it in a narrative tradition, moreover, this model makes his description richer, more vivid, and more detailed than Walter's, and lends it a resonance and familiarity that Walter's lacks

This is just one episode from Galbert of Bruges' fascinating chronicle, one that is filled with enough violence, warfare and political intrigue that one would think it was meant to be a Hollywood film. There are two translations of Galbert's work – the first by James Bruce Ross from 1953 – you can read an excerpt from it on the **De Re Militari website**. Jeff Rider's 2013 translation was published by Yale University Press, while his book, ***God's Scribe: the Historiographical Art of Galbert of Bruges***, offers in depth analysis..

Bad for the Soul, Good for the Body: Religion, Medicine and Masturbation in the Middle Ages

By Katherine Harvey

In the early twelfth century, reported Gerald of Wales, a demon physically attacked a young monk. Whenever this monk prostrated himself in prayer, 'an evil spirit approaches him, places its hands on his genital organs, and does not stop rubbing his body with its own until he is so agitated that he is polluted by an emission of semen.' Otherwise, the young monk behaved well. Yet when Bishop Hildegard of Le Mans (1096-1125) considered the case, he ruled that the monk could no longer be considered a virgin, since he has been 'polluted...through masturbation' and has been tempted by the devil to consent to a 'shameful act of fornication.'

Stories such as this one have contributed to the popular view that, throughout history, masturbation has been considered as inherently sinful; only in our modern, so-called sexually-liberated age has the taboo surrounding self-pleasure started to dissolve. There is certainly some truth in this view, for Bishop Hildegard was not the only medieval churchman to be concerned by the sinful nature of solo sexual acts.

According to the fifth-century monk John Cassian (whose works remained influential throughout the medieval period), there were three kinds of fornication: intercourse, masturbation, and fornication in the heart and

mind. The twelfth-century theologian Pierre de Poitiers condemned masturbation as monstrous because it combined the active male and passive female roles in one person, as in a hermaphrodite. Most medieval penitentials (handbooks for confessors) identified masturbation as a sin, and imposed heavy penances for it- typically around thirty days of fasting, but sometimes as much as two years. Some churchmen even argued that masturbation was too grave a sin to be dealt with by a parish priest, and insisted that only a bishop could punish and pardon one who had committed such an unnatural act.



**'The Sins of Sodom,' from the Egerton Genesis Picture Book - British Library
Egerton 1894 f. 11**

Even within the medieval Church, however, there were some who took a more relaxed stance. Many penitentials ranked sexual sins in order of severity, and typically placed masturbation towards the bottom of the hierarchy. Confessors were also permitted to make some allowance for the personal circumstances of the penitent, with laymen, youths, and those without a spouse typically receiving a lesser penance than clerics (who were supposed to show restraint) or married men (who were supposed to have procreative intercourse with their wives). A man or woman who was denied sexual intercourse by his or her spouse might also be considered to have extenuating circumstances, and the spouse who failed to perform his or her marital duty would share some of the responsibility for any consequent sexual sins.

These nuances within the penitential system perhaps reflect the medieval medical belief that **men** and women needed to have sexual intercourse for the sake of their health. Whilst nineteenth-century doctors worried about **the physical and mental consequences of**

masturbation, their medieval counterparts believed that it could have positive effects for their patients. According to contemporary medical theory, both men and women expelled seed when provoked to orgasm. This seed was necessary for conception, but if it was allowed to build up within the body, it could cause serious illness, or even death. In order to avoid such dire consequences, ancient medical authorities such as Galen had recommended masturbation as a form of preventative medicine for both men and women.

Later medieval physicians were rarely this explicit in their writings on sexual health, but doctors continued to recommend the stimulation of the genitals (either by the patient or by a medical professional) for those whose well-being was threatened by a lack of regular sexual relations. Such treatments were particularly suitable for women who were suffering from suffocation of the womb, as a consequence of the retention of seed. In such cases, marriage was the best solution, allowing a woman to expel seed through regular, Church-sanctioned, procreative intercourse.

Church-sanctioned, procreative intercourse. If, however, a woman could not marry (for example, because she was a nun), and if her life was in genuine danger, then genital massage might be the only solution and could even be performed without sin. The English physician John of Gaddesden (c. 1280-1361) thought that such a woman should try to cure her condition through exercise, foreign travel, and medication. But

if she has a fainting fit, the midwife should insert a finger covered with oil of lily, laurel or spikenard into her womb, and move it vigorously about.

Other medical writers echoed Gaddesden's teachings. The Dominican friar Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-80) wrote extensively about human health, and similarly argued that certain women needed to

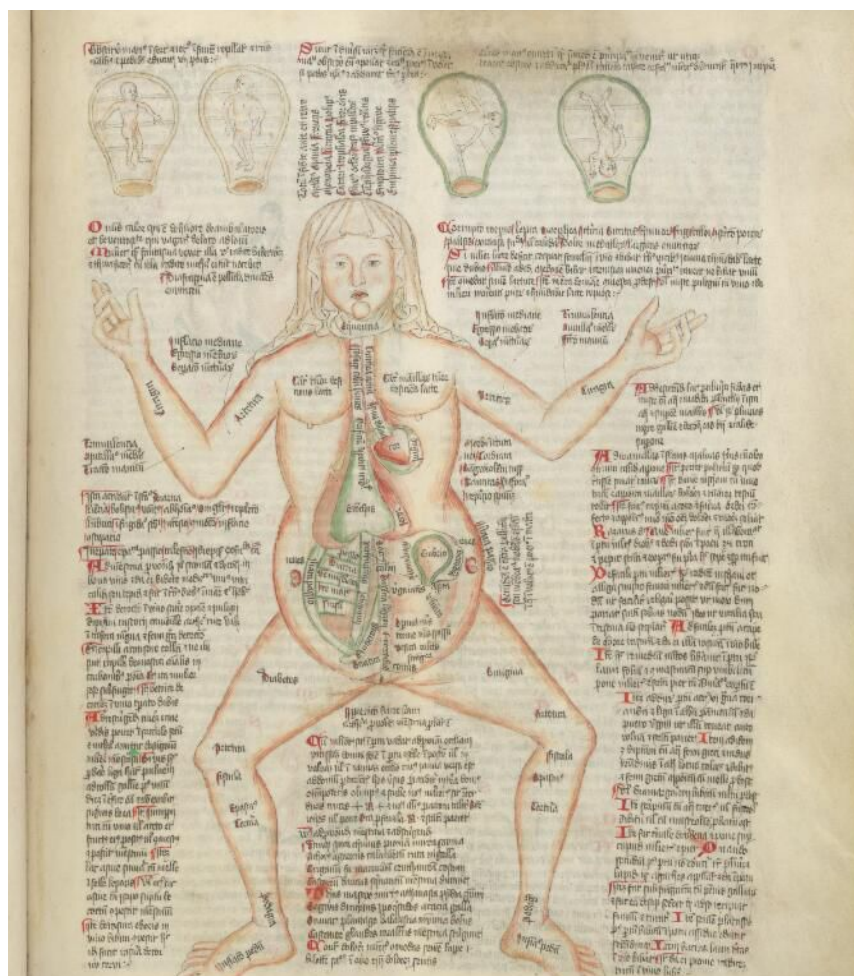
use their fingers or other instruments until their channels are opened and by the heat of the friction and coition the humour

comes out, and with it the heat.

Indeed, Albertus thought that such a course of action would not only solve women's health problems, but also lessen their desire for sexual intercourse, since 'their groins are cooled off and they are made more chaste.'

In most respects, the medieval world found female sexuality more problematic than its male equivalent. It is therefore surprising to find that many commentators were less troubled by women who pleased themselves than by their male counterparts. Such attitudes are partly explained by perceived biological differences between the sexes. Albertus Magnus argued that female masturbation does not involve any generative matter, and consequently was not inherently sinful. The semen spilled in male masturbation, however, could be viewed as a sacrifice to the Devil. Furthermore, medical theory suggested that men could experience **involuntary nocturnal pollutions** without impure thoughts or deeds. It was therefore

'The Female Body,' from the Wellcome Apocalypse (late 15th century) via Wellcome Images (thumbnail 38r)



possible for the male humours to be rebalanced without sin, thus there was no need for men to arouse themselves.

There were also strong social and cultural reasons why medieval society might condemn male masturbation, whilst simultaneously condoning, or at least turning a blind eye to, female self-pleasure. Laymen were less constrained by concerns about sexual reputation than their female counterparts and enjoyed alternative outlets for their sexual appetites, including prostitution. Women lacked such options, and thus one of the great benefits of female masturbation was its ability to prevent less socially acceptable forms of female sexual activity. According to the monastic author of the late medieval *Breviarium Practice*, the wives of Italian merchants frequently indulged in solitary sex, aided by a range of implements. There was good reason for their behaviour: their husbands frequently undertook long business trips, and it was better that they satisfy themselves than engage in extra-marital affairs which might produce illegitimate offspring.

Whilst the truth of such tales must remain unknown, they encapsulate medieval attitudes toward masturbation. Some sections of medieval society clearly were repulsed by any form of non-procreative sexual activity. The most vocal of these were clerics whose disgust embraced all sexual activity, whatever its purpose. Generally, there was an intriguing degree of pragmatism in medieval attitudes to masturbation: it was bad for the soul, but might be good for the body, and for the maintenance of social order. The Middle Ages were hardly an age of sexual freedom, and medieval Europe was too concerned with sin to consider masturbation a good thing. Yet the existence of such conflicting ideas about solitary sex meant that medieval attitudes to masturbation **were arguably rather more enlightened than those of the so-called Age of Enlightenment**, several hundred years later.

Katherine Harvey is a Wellcome Trust Research Fellow at Birkbeck, University of London, working on a project about 'Medicine and the Bishop in Medieval England, c. 1100-1400'. Her research focuses on the late medieval English episcopate. She has written a book on episcopal appointments - *Episcopal Appointments in England, c.1214-1344* (Ashgate, 2014) - and several articles about episcopal bodies, emotions and sexuality. You can find her Birkbeck webpage at <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/history/our-staff/post-doctoral-research-assistants/dr-katherine-harvey>. You can follow her on Twitter @keharvey2013



This article was first published on **NOTCHES (re)marks on the history of sexuality** - NOTCHES is a peer-reviewed history of sexuality blog that features critical and accessible discussions about the histories of sex and sexuality across period, theme and region. Notches' international collective of editors and contributors emphasize the ways in which the history of sexuality animates present-day societies, politics, economies and cultures while revealing the complexity and diversity of the past. Read more about the history of sexuality at **NotchesBlog.com**

The Lighter Side of the Middle Ages

Were all medieval writings dour and sullen, focused on religious piety or the often bloody lives of kings? While many works can be called that, some of the stories from the Middle Ages were meant to be funny. These include the fabliaux from France and the stories that make up *The Canterbury Tales* of Geoffrey Chaucer. There is also the *Facetiae* by Poggio Bracciolini, which was first published in 1471. Poggio was an Italian scholar who spent most of his career working for the Papacy, but he also wrote about a wide number of topics and was seen as one of the brightest minds of his time. He explains that he wrote the *Facetiae* because “it is proper, and almost a matter of necessity commended by philosophers, that our mind, weighed down by a variety of cares and anxieties, should now and then enjoy relaxation from its constant labour, and be incited to cheerfulness and mirth by some humorous recreation.”

Here are a few of stories that were included in the *Facetiae* - with a warning that some of these tales are adult content!

The Perugian Ambassadors to Pope Urban

The inhabitants of Perugia had also sent three Ambassadors to Pope Urban V in Avignon. When they came, the Pope was seriously ill; but, wishing not to keep them longer in suspense, he ordered them to be introduced, with the previous request that they should speak but few words. One of them, a Doctor, who had learnt by heart, on the way, a long speech which he intended to deliver to the Pontiff, took no heed of his sickly state nor of his keeping his bed, but was so verbose that the Holy Father gave frequent signs of fatigue whilst hearing him out. When the indiscreet speaker had got through his oration, the Pope, with his accustomed urbanity, enquired of the other Ambassadors if they had anything to add to what had been said. One of them, whom had escaped neither his colleague's silliness nor the Pontiff's weariness, at once replied: "Most Holy Father, we have express orders that if you do not immediately comply with our demands, we are not to leave your presence until our friend here has delivered his speech to you a second time." The Sovereign Pontiff smiled at the joke, and ordered their business to be expedited without delay.

A rustic's reply to his landlord

A peasant in our district was, one day, asked by his landlord which was the time of the year when he was most busy?

"In May," was the answer.

"How can that be?" inquired the landlord; "there seems to be nothing to do in the fields during that month."

"The reason is," replied the rustic, "that we have then to ply both our own wives and yours."

A Mountaineer who thought of Marrying a Girl

A mountaineer, of the village of Pergola, was inclined to marry the quite youthful daughter of one of his neighbours; but, after close inspection, he found her too young, too delicate, and refused.

"She is riper than you think," said the stupid father; "for she has already had three children by the Vicar's clerk."

A Priest who, while preaching, made a mistake in his numbers, and instead of a thousand, said a hundred

A Priest was expounding to his congregation the passage of the Gospel wherein is recited that our Saviour fed five thousand people out of five loaves, and, by a slip of the tongue, instead of five thousand, said five hundred. His clerk, in a low whisper, called his attention to the mistake, reminding him that the Gospel mentioned five thousand. "Hold your peace, you fool," said the Priest; "they will find it hard enough to believe even the number I said."

A Florentine Betrothed to a Widow's Daughter

A Florentine, who thought himself a very clever fellow, was betrothed to the daughter of a widow, and being, as is usual, a frequent visitor at his sweetheart's house, one day, whilst the mother was away, took advantage of the girl. Her looks betrayed the thing to the mother, who scolded her bitterly for having disgraced herself and the family, and told her that the marriage was anything but a certainty, since she would do all in her power to break it off. The young man had been keeping watch, and came back as soon as his intended mother-in-law had gone out again; he found the girl in tears, inquired the reason, and was told that the mother meant to break off the match.

"And you?" he asked.

"I wish to obey mamma," was the reply.

"Nothing easier," said he; and, as she wondered how it was to be done. "The first time," he continued, "you acted the inferior part; now take the upper one, and contrary action will dissolve our marriage."

She assented, and thus the match was broken off. Some time afterwards, she took another husband, and her former lover another wife/ She was present at his wedding, and the memory of the past brought a smile on their lips when they looked at each other. This did not escape the new bride's observation, and suspicious of something wrong, she asked her husband, in the night, the meaning of what she had noticed. He tried hard to evade an answer, but, by dint of urgency, she forced him into relating the story and exposing his former mistress's silliness.

"Confound the hussy who was such a fool as to tell her mother of it!," exclaimed the wife. "What was the use of letting her know about your doings? Our valet slept more than a hundred times with me, without my ever mentioning one word about it to mamma."

The husband remained silent; he felt he had been rewarded according to his deserts.

The Fat Abbot

The Abbot of Septimo, a very fat and corpulent man, on his way to Florence one evening, enquired of a peasant he met, "Do you think I shall be able to enter the gate?"

Of course, he thus meant to ask whether he was likely to reach the city before the closing of the gates. But the country-man, rallying his stoutness, replied, "To be sure, you will; a cartload of hay gets through, why should not you?"

A Word of Comfort to a Man who was Sad because of Debt

An inhabitant of Perugia was going along the streets, wrapped in thought and melancholy, and, being met by someone who enquired the motive of his concern, replied that he owed money which he could not pay. The man responded, "Leave that anxiety to your creditor."

A Priest who Ordered a Young Woman to Pay him the Tithe

In Bruges, an illustrious city of the West, a rather silly young woman was confessing to her Parish-priest. He inquired, among other things, if she was punctual in the discharge of the tithes she owed the clergy, and assured her that she was bound to pay the tithe even sexually, which she did on the spot, anxious to avoid being in anyone's debt. As she came home somewhat late, her husband seemed surprised, and she told him the reason as a matter of course. The man concealed his wrath, and, four days later, asked the Priest to dinner, in company with some friends, the better to expose him. When they were all seated, he related the story, and turning to the Priest: "Since you must have the tithe of all my wife's things," said he, "take this one too." And raising to the Priest's mouth a cup full of the woman's ordure and urine, he compelled him to empty it down his throat.

Amusing Remark by a Young Woman in Labour

In Florence, a young woman, somewhat of a simpleton, was on the point of being delivered. She had long been enduring acute pain, and the midwife, candle in hand, inspected her secret area, in order to ascertain if the child was coming.

"Look also on the other side," said the poor creature. "my husband has sometimes taken that road."

A Woman's Plea with her Father for being barren

The wife of a certain Nobleman was, after a few years, rejected and repudiated by her husband, on account of her unfruitfulness. She came home to her father's house, who secretly reproached her for not having contrived to get with child, were it by the instrumentality of others than her rightful lord.

"Father," she replied, "it is really no fault of mine; for, I have tried every man-servant, even to the stable-boys, and all to no purpose."

The father condoled the misfortune of his daughter, who was so free from blame for being barren.

A Reply to the Priest's words at the Offertory

A Florentine Priest, during a solemn service, was receiving, as usual, the gifts of the faithful at the Offertory, and to each he addressed the customary words, "It shall be returned you a hundred-fold, and you shall enjoy life everlasting,"

Hearing which, an old Nobleman, who was giving a silver coin, said, "I shall be well satisfied if I only get back the capital, as they say."

A Sensible Reply of the Cardinal of Avignon to the King of France

I have thought fit to recall, among these anecdotes, a tart reply of the Cardinal of Avignon, a most sensible man. When residing in Avignon, the Popes used to have, in advance of their retinue, a number of led horses, with gorgeous housings and trappings, to enhance the magnificence of their train. The King of France, one day, indignantly asked the Cardinal if the Apostles had ever resorted to such a display.

"By no means," replied the Eminence, "but the Apostles belonged to a time when Kings also lived otherwise, being only shepherds and cowkeepers."

An Inexperienced Youth who did not make the acquaintance of his wife during their first wedding-night

A young Bolognese, a simple-minded ninny, had married a beautiful maiden. The first night, not being in the least up to his business, since he had never before frequented any woman, he did not succeed in consummating the marriage. The next morning, being asked by a friend how matters had fared overnight:

"Sadly," he sighed; "for, after repeated endeavours, I could never find in my wife the aperture I was told of."

Seeing his silliness, the friend said "Hush, for God's sake, speak not a word about it; how unpleasant, and what a shame for you if the thing were known!"

The simpleton begged for his advice and assistance.

"I'll undertake," said his interlocutor, "to bore that aperture for you, if only you repay with a first rate supper; but I shall require eight days to perform the operation, which is a very difficult one."

The idiot assented, and, at night, secreted his mate with his wife, himself retiring to another bed. After the interval agreed upon, the road had been so well opened by friendly exertions, that no more thorns were to be feared, the husband was sent for.

"I have toiled and moiled for your service," said his obliging companion, "but the requisite orifice is at last made."

The young woman, now thoroughly initiated, congratulated her husband, praising highly his friend's labour. The fool, overjoyed at his wife's perforation, gave his best thanks to his comrade, and paid the supper.

A Good Joke on the Limited Number of God's Friends

One of our fellow citizens, a very witty man, was labouring under a painful and lengthy illness, was attended by a Friar who came to comfort him, and, among other words of solace, told him that God thus especially chastens those he loves, and inflicts his visitations upon them. "No wonder then," retorted the sick man, "that God has so few friends; if that is the way he favours them, he ought to have still less."

The Two Wives of Robert II, King of Scotland

By Susan Abernethy

Robert II, King of Scots and grandson of Robert the Bruce was a handsome, charming man who had many descendants. He not only had two wives who had numerous children but many mistresses who had babies as well. In fact, we will never really know how many offspring he had because the annals only name his male illegitimate children and none of the females. Due to these many progenies and some questioning the legitimacy of his children by his first wife, conflict over who should accede to the throne of the Scots would last for eighty years. Let's take a look at Robert's two wives.

The First Wife ~ Elizabeth Mure

Elizabeth Mure is a shadowy and elusive woman due to the lack of surviving historical record. The best guess of when she was born is 1320. She was the daughter of Adam of Rowallan in Ayrshire. When Elizabeth was probably sixteen and most likely pregnant, she was hurriedly married to Robert Stewart. Robert was the son of Marjorie, the daughter of Robert the Bruce and of Walter, the sixth High Steward of Scotland. Robert was good looking, congenial and liked by all. Many wished he was king.

Robert carried out a feud with his uncle, King David II and was able to sabotage or limit David's powers as king. Robert stood next in

line to the throne if David had no children, which he didn't. Robert was to have anywhere from nine to thirteen children with Elizabeth, including at least four sons. With his growing family, Robert married his daughters into powerful families and worked to advance his sons. Through this familial network he managed to gain control of the greater part of central, western and north-eastern Scotland by unions with eight of the fifteen existing earldoms as well as other lordships, royal castles and offices north of the Forth-Clyde line.

For some reason, in 1347, Robert felt he needed to legitimize his marriage to Elizabeth and they sought a religious dispensation. When he applied for the dispensation from the pope, he was

,dispensation from the pope, he was supported by King David, the king of France the seven Scottish bishops and parliament. There is some speculation as to why the couple did this. Robert and Elizabeth may have discovered they were related in the fourth degree which was prohibited by the church without dispensation. Elizabeth might have been related to another mistress of Robert's and they may not have known this when they married. Elizabeth may have been Robert's mistress and they didn't really marry in the first place. Or they may have had a marriage in the secular, Celtic tradition which wouldn't have been recognized by the church.

Pope Clement VI, the fourth Avignon pope, granted the dispensation and Elizabeth and Robert went through a formal marriage ceremony. Although all their children were legitimized by this process, the children of Robert's second marriage would always question their legality to inherit the throne of Scotland. Elizabeth died in 1353, possibly in childbirth in her early thirties. She was buried either at Paisley or Scone. Her eldest son, John Stewart, Earl of Carrick would eventually succeed to the throne upon the death of his father as Robert III.

The Second Wife ~ Euphemia Ross

Euphemia Ross was the daughter of Hugh, 4th Earl of Ross and his second wife Margaret Graham. She was born sometime between 1322 and 1330 and most likely was brought up at Dingwall Castle in northern Scotland. The Ross's lived far from court but her father was a friend of King Robert the Bruce and had been married to Robert's sister Maud as his first wife. Euphemia was betrothed as a young child and the marriage was most likely arranged by the king.

She was to marry the King's great-nephew John Randolph, second son of Thomas Randolph, 1st Earl of Moray. This match would unite two of the most important families of

the north. Thomas Randolph died of illness and John's elder brother was killed in battle. After the battle, John inherited his father's title and escaped to France. Euphemia's father was killed at the Battle of Halidon Hill in July of 1333.

John returned to Scotland and was named as Guardian of the country for King David II along with Robert the Steward. John and Robert soon quarreled as they were both young and ambitious. This guardianship was dissolved in 1335 and Sir Andrew Moray took over. About the same time, John was captured on the Borders by the English and after being captive in various castles was taken to the Tower of London. He wasn't set free until 1341 and then he went to France. He returned to Scotland in 1343 and he and Euphemia were finally married.

Her husband had a castle at Darnaway in Moray and estates in Dumfriesshire so this is probably where she spent her time. During her marriage to Randolph she had no children. In 1346, her husband, Robert the Steward and King David II crossed the border into England and fought at the Battle of Neville's Cross. John Randolph was killed and Euphemia was a widow and wealthy landowner and would remain so for the next eleven years.

Euphemia knew Robert the Steward well as he had made up his quarrel with her husband and their families became friends. She may have been attracted to Robert as he was tall, dignified, handsome, and affable with charming manners and a lover of pretty women. Euphemia may have been interested in Robert and Elizabeth Mure's young children. Euphemia may have been attractive to Robert due to her landholdings in the north. There was an agreement that they would marry. Euphemia and Robert were related within three degrees of affinity. They sought a dispensation and received one from Pope Innocent VI, the fifth Avignon pope, on May 2, 1355.



**King Robert II of
Scotland and his
wife, Euphemia of
Ross, depicted in the
Forman Armorial
from 1562**

Euphemia's uncle, the Lord of Lovat and a grand retinue accompanied her south to her wedding which may have taken place at Robert's castle of Dundonald in Ayrshire. This castle was most likely her home. She would come to have many children of her own. Her first son was named David after the King, her second son was named Walter and she had at least two daughters, Jean and Egidia. As mother to her own children, stepmother to her husband's older children and manager of her husband's estates during his absences, she was exceedingly busy. She would have attended masses, supplied charity to the poor, supported the local clergy, managed her own property and may have visited her family in Dingwall.

After sixteen years of marriage, Robert

became King of Scots in 1371. Euphemia was crowned in 1372 at Scone by Alexander Kinninmonth, Bishop of Aberdeen a few months after her husband. They moved to Edinburgh Castle. Like most medieval queens she would have encouraged and patronized the arts. Robert had mellowed greatly from his rash youth. He maintained agreeable relations with England and sustained good relationships with his nobles due to lavish gifts and his affable personality.

The kingdom was for the most part at peace during his reign. He had a lot of trouble with his many offspring fighting amongst themselves, especially the children of Elizabeth Mure. It is not known how Euphemia got along with her stepchildren but there is evidence she worked to promote the interests

the interests of her own sons. With determination and preserving influence, she managed to get the earldom of Caithness for her eldest son David in 1377. David also inherited the earldom of Strathearn from her directly. He began to claim he was the rightful heir to the throne, renewing the age old question of the legitimacy of his stepbrothers. We don't know if Euphemia supported him in this endeavor.

By 1384, Robert was weak and nearly blind. His eldest son, John, Earl of Carrick took over most of his duties as King and Robert retired to his castle of Dundonald. Euphemia died in 1387. Robert died three years later. They were both buried at Scone.

Further reading:

The Kings and Queens of Scotland, edited by Richard Oram

British Kings and Queens, by Mike Ashley

Scottish Queens: 1034-1714, by Rosalind Marshal

Five Euphemias, by Elizabeth Sutherland

Susan Abernethy is the writer of **The Freelance History Writer** and a contributor to **Saints, Sisters, and Sluts**. You can follow both sites on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/thefreelancehistorywriter>) and (<http://www.facebook.com/saintssistersandsluts>), as well on **Medieval History Lovers**. You can also follow Susan on Twitter **@SusanAbernethy2**

In Search of Guinevere

By Danièle Cybulskie

As a lifelong lover of Arthurian stories, I have always had a love/hate relationship with Guinevere. In some stories, she is the well-mannered and generous ideal queen; in others she is a jealous and spiteful adulteress. How can she be both? When did she change?

Not surprisingly, I am not the only one to whom Guinevere is a cipher. In her intensely-researched and aptly-titled book ***Guinevere—A Medieval Puzzle***, Ulrike Bethlehem studies fifty-six Arthurian stories in both English and French to see if there is a true and consistent Guinevere in the Anglo-French tradition. The short answer? No. But Bethlehem comes to some pretty interesting conclusions in this epic study.

In early French Arthurian stories, Bethlehem has found, Guinevere is a maternal figure, above the court instead of entrenched within its politics and scandals. That is, she points out, until “the troubadour concept of courtly love wreaks havoc with conventional morality” (p.410). As courtly love flourishes in the French courts, especially that of Marie de Champagne, so Guinevere’s adulterous romance with Lancelot is introduced and flourishes within the Arthurian stories of the day. When that tide ebbs and interest in the Grail quest narrative flows, Guinevere regains some morality – or at least, her adultery is seen in a “consequently lenient” (p.410) regard. Bethlehem notes that this

creates a splitting of French Guinevere narratives into those in which the authors “avoid incriminating elements” (p.410) in favour of a faithful queen (in all senses of the word), and those in which Guinevere’s adultery “leads to destruction” (p.410-411). Overall, Bethlehem concludes, “the French romances encompass a literary character fashioned according to contemporary taste and judged as such from an external, detached stance” (p.411). What makes this so interesting is that, for the English, Guinevere is anything but a trendy literary device: she is their literary queen of queens.

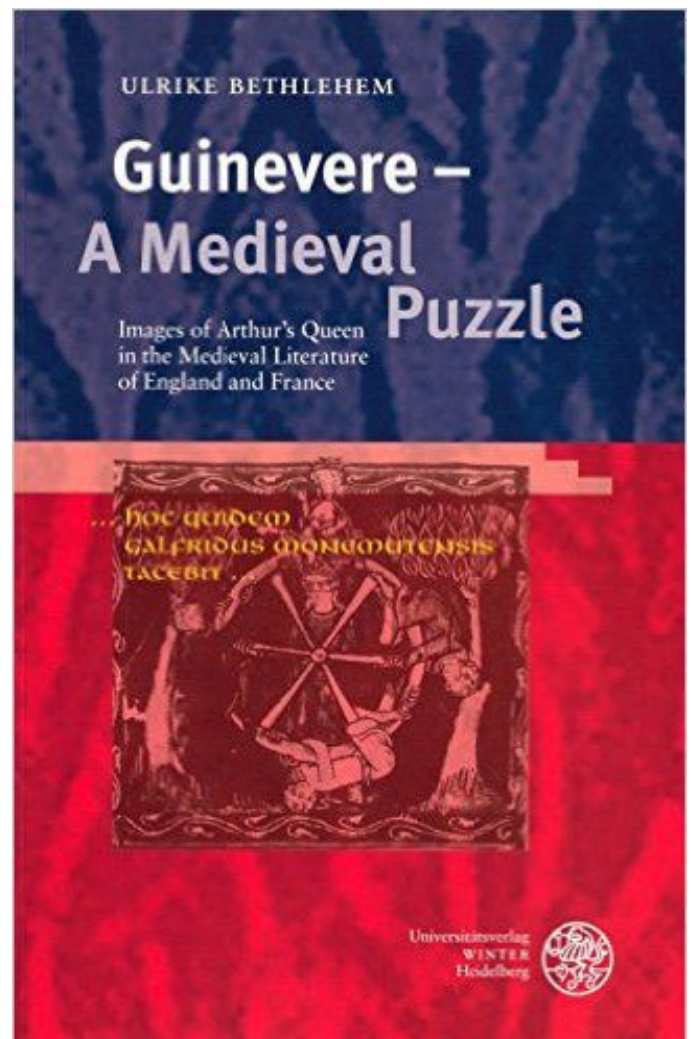
In all likelihood, it is because of the “hometown hero” effect of the Arthurian story being born in Britain that the medieval English authors are more concerned with Guinevere’s character being a good reflection of the English people than being simply a fictional character to be shaped by literary conventions. As an interesting result of this, Guinevere becomes more three-dimensional. Bethlehem states,

As a mirror of her beholders and their ideals, she is evaluated with an introspection and understanding that prevents condemnation as it would impede censure of oneself. As English authors and audiences reappropriate Guinevere as a national and personal identifier in defiance of the continental adversaries and their contribution, tradition gives over to individuality of characterization and evaluation[.] (p.411)

It is definitely understandable that, as tensions grew between the two nations, the English would be concerned with making a British queen as faultless as humanly possible. In fact, the further an author gets from France, the better Guinevere gets. The Arthurian stories from the north of England seem to be even more focused on humanizing Guinevere (calling her by her first name instead of title, for example) and redeeming her moral character, as adultery in these stories "is never connected with the queen" (pp. 395-398). Keeping Guinevere clear of outright adultery is important to all the medieval English authors Bethlehem studies, and she rightly points out that Malory's *Morte Darthur* is "the only English text to concede physical consummation of an adulterous relationship that is not against the will of the woman involved" (p.398). Even then, Malory tries to soften the nature of the sin by having Guinevere repent. In other words, the English authors' treatment of Guinevere is anything but detached. Rather, how Guinevere both represents and is represented is an intensely personal matter.

It is Guinevere's nature as a reflection that makes her so singular as a character, according to Bethlehem, and I would have to agree. "There is a multitude of Guineveres," she says, "and yet there is none" (p.411). Instead, Bethlehem concludes her study by comparing Guinevere to "a crystal ball which, colourless and tempting, will reflect colours and shapes from ever new backgrounds, spectators, and their minds." (p.411).

There is something both frustrating and freeing about being confronted with a character which so neatly defies all convention. Guinevere is both stainless and sinful; kind and cruel; the perfect ideal and the sum of all feudal fears. Whatever your feelings about Guinevere, there is at least one medieval story to support them. To continue your own search for Guinevere, check out Ulrike Bethlehem's ***Guinevere – A Medieval Puzzle***, or discover your own crystal queen in any one of her beautiful medieval romances.



7 Things One Should Know When Dealing with Kings: The Icelanders' Version

By MaryAnn R. Adams

This fall, the students in Dr. Kisha Tracy's medieval literature class ("A Feudal Endeavor") at Fitchburg State University were asked to write their own Five-Minute Medievalist articles as part of their term work, and as a contest for extra credit and bragging rights. It was my absolute pleasure to read their work and to select the best article to share with you. Here is MaryAnn R. Adams' winning advice on how to deal with Norse kings, based on "Egil's Saga" from *The Sagas of Icelanders*. – Danièle Cybulskie

1. Don't go berserker when not in battle.

If you are not in battle, it is extremely important to learn how to control the berserker within yourself. Controlling the berserker will help you in the long term because there will be times that you will originally freak out and kill everyone in your path, just as Thorolf did before King Athelstan who decided to divide his army and separate him from his brother Egil. The end result was Thorolf was not as used to the after effects of going on a wild killing spree. The exhaustion afterwards was not in Thorolf's favor, and he ended up dying; Thorolf was uncertain and did not know how to control his berserker attitude that exhausts the body. The strategy King Athelstan uses in separating berserkers on different lines of battle is thought to improve the outcome, which ends up making it beneficial to the king because he may win the battle.

2. Give your king more than half of your findings after traveling.

After finding furs, gold, and any other valuable treasures, you may feel the need to hold out on your king. If you actually do hold out on your king, you may want to rethink returning to his services. Would it be worth it to hold out on your king? Like Thorolf in the beginning of "Egil's Saga", King Harald was very strict about receiving his amount and Thorolf, his "first hand man," was accused of taking more than his share. Accusations like this can ruin your reputation for one, and it can also have a tragic ending to your friendship. Although King Harald did not have proof of Thorolf keeping a portion of his share, he proceeded in murdering Thorolf. Overall, keeping a king's treasures is a bad idea.

3. Speak highly of your king.

Whether you are in trouble with your king or not, you should speak kindly about him. Your king most likely has trust issues with his men, and he will be very observant of them. Icelanders are typically close due to their small population, so if there is a problem regarding a disagreement with your king, you should speak directly to him rather than with a family member or someone else that could ruin your reputation with the king. Although a family member might speak on your behalf and attempt to negotiate the king's feelings about your slander against him, he may be more infuriated because you should be the one speaking with him. If you are capable of sweet-talking your king into being on good terms with him, you may actually live, and your kinsmen may stay on good terms with him as well.

4. Bribery is always a positive.

Always keep your king happy because, when he is furious, things may not be in your favor. You may think of offering your king much more than he needs because he believes you were slandering his name because you want to prove your loyalty. Money plays an important role in the king and everyone's life because it provides them with a title and landholding. King Harald is the epitome of greed in regards to his men and riches: "I will accept money for the death of those men" (Thorsson 71). The acceptance of money for the deceased shows how wergild works during this time. Money talks, and it plays a big part in the presence of the king because the king takes the wergild and also uses it with his men to calm any wrongful deaths that may have taken place to their kin. This wergild is almost like a control for the king when dealing with his men.

5. Do whatever it takes to please your king.

A happy king means that you will not die; it is important never to betray his trust when

traveling. Some others may slander and convince your king that you have done him wrong and kept more riches of his than the share you were allowed. In case your king accuses you of stealing, outlawing yourself before he does may be a good idea. Even if your king is anything like King Eirik and does not accept apologies too well, you should try to convince him that you are worthy of him. Advice of your peers may or may not help just as Arinbjorn did for Egil when King Eirik was ready to kill him: "my advice for you to stay awake all night and make a poem in praise of King Eirik" (Thorsson 112). Egil was not actually murdered by King Eirik at this point, but when he had the chance to flee the country from King Eirik, he did. Either way, leaving or giving your king what he wants is beneficial to yourself and him.

6. Your king may have to bribe you not to berserk on him.

In order to get you to stay on the king's side during and after battles, the king may offer you gold or other riches. If you deny the riches you may gain the chance to work under his allegiance again. The king's powers over his men/army can potentially protect you and your family, and it is important to your success and overall life to stay on his good side. When your king does something like King Athelstan dividing brothers causing one of them to die during battle, he may be inclined to keep you happy by giving you money to keep you from killing him.

7. When there is a disagreement and you feel the need to disrespect him, do it when it is just the two of you or while he is unarmed.

King Eirik believes that he is right in different instances; he is the king, and he knows what he wants and is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure you suffer for any ill-doing to him. Disgracing him in any way may cause a conflict that will be internalized; it may explode at any given time: "I have no need to enumerate all the wrongs you have

to enumerate all the wrongs you have done...you are never leaving here alive...You should have known in advance that you would not be granted any reconciliation with me" (Thorsson 111). King Eirik demonstrates the vengeance that he will act on when he sees fit, and when Egil showed up at his table, it showed that the two had not resolved their differences and one of them is about to be punished.

MaryAnn R. Adams studies English Literature at FSU and is working towards becoming a secondary-school teacher. An avid reader and traveler, Adams is a big believer in the power of education for all.

Our congratulations and my personal thanks go out to Adams, Kisha Tracy, and all of the students in FSU's ENGL 3030 Middle Ages class. Thanks for making Medievalists.net a part of your learning!

**Picture of Egil in
a 17th-century
manuscript of
*Egils Saga***



You can follow
Danièle Cybulskie on
Twitter
@5MinMedievalist

Books

In Search of Alfred the Great: The King, The Grave, The Legend

By Edoardo Albert and Katie Tucker

Amberley Publishing, 2015
ISBN:: 9781445649641

Alfred, son of Æthelwulf, king of the West Saxons, ran. Behind him, the takers of his land and kingdom fanned out, searching for the fleeing king...

Buried in AD 899 as the king of the English at his capital city of Winchester, Alfred the Great's bones were thought to have ultimately been moved to an unmarked grave. His remains had been completely lost to us for centuries until researchers at the University of Winchester discovered what is in all probability a piece of his pelvis in a cardboard box. This exciting discovery has reawakened interest in one of our most notable monarchs.

The only English monarch ever to have had the epithet 'the Great', Alfred's reputation reaches down to us through the years. Christian hero, successful defender of England against the Vikings, social and educational reformer. There is a man and a life buried amid the myths. Within these pages, discover Alfred's dramatic story.

Read an excerpt from **Chapter 6: To Kill a King**

Guthrum had lost a fleet. He had renewed his oaths, given on pagan rings rather than Christian relics, and handed over hostages he was less inclined to lose. Alfred had faced him in two protracted bouts of negotiation, first with Guthrum holding the whip hand and then when he was able to enforce his own terms. Alfred knew his man well. He was confident he had beaten him. He was wrong.

As Alfred shadowed the Great Army out of Wessex in August 877, Guthrum noted the rich land his depleted army was marching through. Making his base in Gloucester, he took over the western half of Mercia from Ceolwulf, the puppet king, and began parcelling it among his chief men. This was as Halfdan had done when the Great Army split after taking Repton, leading his men up to York and dealing out the estates of Northumbria to his magnates. When news of Guthrum's actions reached Alfred, he must have felt a quiet satisfaction that he had finally seen off the Great Army.

But it appears to have been a ruse. While Guthrum handed out estates, he was also drawing in reinforcements to replace the men lost in the sea disaster that had overtaken his fleet. It is likely he also sent out messengers. Although Ivarr the Boneless and Halfdan were dead, there was another of the sons of Ragnar left alive: Ubba. After his role with the Great Heathen Army when it first descended upon Britain and then took the kingdom of East Anglia, Ubba disappears from the Chronicle. It seems he took his ships and men to Ireland, where the great Viking port of Dublin served as a hub for the trade in goods and slaves that drove the Viking expansion. But sometime in the later part of 877, Guthrum's messengers reached Ubba and the last of the sons of Ragnar gave his assent: he would join the final assault on Wessex.

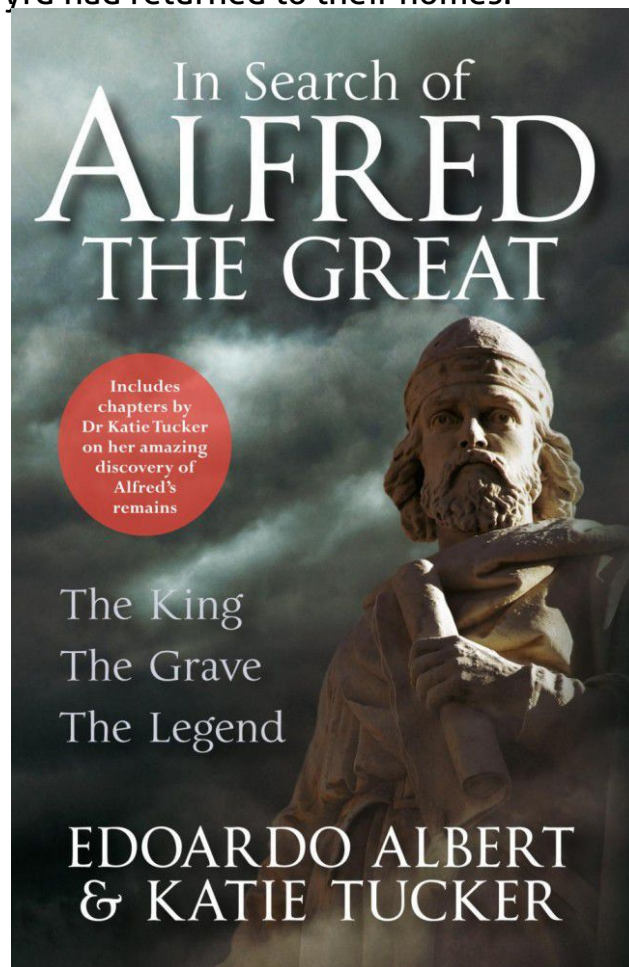
While his messengers sailed across the Irish Sea, Guthrum had been making other preparations. His previous attacks on Wessex had depended on surprise and secrecy, and this one was to be no different. Although Guthrum had failed to drive Alfred from the throne, the king's failure to defeat the Viking lord had weakened his prestige in the eyes of his magnates. Looking north, the powerful men in the land contemplated nervously the fate of the magnates of the kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia. Those who had not resisted the Great Army had generally been retained in their halls and their prestige, if not with as much power as they had had previously, but those who had resisted had been removed – either dying or fleeing. To the watching magnates, the Viking tide must have seemed inexorable: even when the Great Army suffered a reverse, fresh recruits flooded in from the Continent or the Viking homelands and it renewed its assault. Surely it was better to admit that God, for whatever reason, had deserted the Anglo-Saxons and come to an accommodation with the new overlords – after all, even the Christian bishops of the conquered kingdoms had managed to establish a working relationship with their new pagan kings. Besides, despite Asser's protestation that Alfred was 'victorious in virtually all battles',¹ in reality his most notable battle-eld achievement, apart from the solitary triumph at Ashdown, was getting out alive with enough of his army intact to fight again. This, though, was no inconsiderable skill: keeping a fighting retreat from turning into a rout, particularly in the days when there were very few long-range weapons to lay down cover, is the most difficult of all military skills. That Alfred had lost so many battles in his year of battles in 871, and yet still lived, shows extraordinary battle-eld ability and the absolute faithfulness of his household warriors. However, the magnates of Wessex were beginning to question their loyalty to Alfred.

From his base in Gloucester, Guthrum sent out spies, probably concealed as traders, into Wessex to keep tabs on Alfred's movements. Given the surreptitious nature of his operation we cannot be certain of its details, but hints in the records suggest that he also sent agents to at least some of the magnates of Wessex, with an offer. All they had to do was stand aside, keep their men in hall and their swords sheathed, while he made his move. It would not, after all, be a betrayal, but simply a failure to act – and the strike, when it came, would be so swift this time that there would be no blame attached to their inaction. Particularly since a new king, one more acceptable and beholden to Guthrum, would then be in place. It appears that at least one of Alfred's ealdormen gave ear to Guthrum's message: Wulfhere, ealdorman of Wiltshire and the magnate whose lands abutted the part of Mercia where Guthrum now ruled.

A charter, dating from the reign of Edward the Elder, Alfred's son and successor, states that Wulfhere 'deserted without permission both his lord King Alfred and his country in spite of the oath that he had sworn to the king and all his leading men'² and, as a result, had lost his position and his lands. The fact that Wulfhere appears to have escaped with his life suggests an alternative explanation: rather than actively betraying Alfred, he may have simply been too paralysed to act when Guthrum attacked and, taking fright, fled the country. Wulfhere's failure must have been a particular blow to Alfred, for he was an old and experienced ealdorman whose service stretched back through the reigns of his brothers, all the way to Alfred's father.

His plans laid, Guthrum waited for the night dark of midwinter to draw down upon the country. Alfred, with his household, repaired to Chippenham in Wiltshire for the Christmas of 877 and there he saw in the New Year as well. The Christmas feast stretched over twelve days, from the Nativity of the Lord on 25 December to the Epiphany, the

celebration commemorating the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus, on 6 January. Chippenham was a royal estate, some thirty miles south of Gloucester. Although Alfred had the men of his household with him, it seems that the other warriors of the Wessex fyrd had returned to their homes.



**Click here to visit
the Amberley
Publishing
website to learn
more about this
book**

Book Review

The Lady Agnes Mystery

By Andrea Japp

Gallic Books, 2015

ISBN: 9781910477168

Reviewed by Sandra Alvarez

Set at the turn of the fourteenth century, *The Lady Agnes Mystery* it tells the tale of Agnès de Souarcy, a young, beautiful widow, who lives in Normandy with her daughter, Mathilde, and her adoptive son, Clément.

A young Hospitaller knight, Francesco de Leone, is embroiled in a secret plot that would see the fall of the Church. He is on a perilous journey to find the woman who plagues his dreams.

Meanwhile, in the nearby Abbey of Clairets, where the Bernadine nuns hold secrets that could shake the world, sisters are being murdered by one of their own.

The three stories converge amid the backdrop of murder, heresy, the Inquisition and a power struggle between the French Crown and the Papacy.

'CAPTIVATING' *LE FIGARO*

THE
LADY
AGNES
MYSTERY
VOLUME I

ANDREA JAPP

The Story

Agnès is the the bastard daughter of a minor lord, Robert de Larnay, and a servant. Out of remorse for his transgression, Robert takes Agnès into his household where she is raised as his daughter, alongside his son, Edues de Larnay. His wife, Baroness Clémence, treats

Agnès as a daughter in spite of her being the result of her husband's affair and the two form a strong bond. Out of remorse, Robert legitimizes Agnès and marries her off to a kindly older lord, Hugues de Souarcy at age thirteen. They have one child, Mathilde, a haughty, vain eleven year old who is obsessed with little else but rising in the ranks of the

ranks of the nobility. Hugues dies and leaves twenty-five year old Agnès the reigning land he didn't squander as her dower, but it's only enough money to run the household, which is little more than a glorified farm.

Agnès decides to remain unmarried and avoid the "assistance" offered by her incestuous, half-brother, Eudes, a violent brute who is infatuated with her and will do whatever it takes to make her his or destroy her. Agnès is intelligent and sees through his thinly veiled attempts to get her into his bed. Now, that her daughter Mathilde is nearly of age, Agnes will do anything to prevent her brother from doing to Mathilde what he did to Agnès when they were children.

Clément is the son of Agnès' former maid servant, Sybille, a Cathar heretic who took her own life after she was raped, rather than bring child into the world who was a reminder of her sin. Mathilde and Clément couldn't be further apart from one another; Clément is shy, intelligent, and kind.

Unfortunately, Agnes is caught in a series of complicated political events and murders, that implicate her as a heretic and see her fall into the clutches of the Inquisition.

Hospitaller, Francesco de Leone, a deeply pious knight, undertakes a dangerous quest to save the Church, and Agnès, from the clutches of an evil Inquisitor, Nicholas Florin. Francesco is aware of the plot to ensnare the Knights Templar, and bring about their downfall. He tries to prevent his order from meeting the same fate.

Summary

It's nice to read a novel that isn't traditionally set in England. England seems to be the default "go-to" destination for most historical fiction set in the Middle Ages. The story focuses on a fascinating point in medieval French history, centering on the period of the murder of Pope Benoît IX

(Nicholas Boccasini - 1240-1304), the political turmoil between the Papacy and King Philip I "the Fair" of France (1268-1314) the burgeoning plot to get rid of the Knights Templar. Throw in a lot of poisoning, torture and the Inquisition, and you have a dark, intriguing, novel.

French author, Andrea Japp, who has translated the work of popular American crime writer, Patricia Cornwell, has done an excellent job of weaving together historical events, superstition, and mystery. Even where she catches herself succumbing to anachronisms, she duly points out her errors, and it doesn't detract from the story. She's provided the reader with an extensive appendix that explains the period, and the key players.

What makes the book all the more interesting is that Japp is a toxicologist. The toxicology angle figures heavily in the plot because many of the murders occur due to poison. Japp shines here because she's able to go into extensive detail and add an interesting layer to the story.

Japp has also created captivating, strong and memorable characters. Agnès is a formidable woman; she is clever, independent, and intelligent. She is not a weak and simpering heroine waiting to be saved; she goes head to head with her accusers and the insidious Inquisitor, Nicolas Florin.

Nicolas Florin is a fantastically evil character and based on the real life Dominican, Robert le Bougre, "Robert the Small", a notorious Inquisitor from the thirteenth century known as the "Hammer of the Heretics". Le Bougre had a penchant for extreme violence and enjoyed inflicting torture on his victims. His zeal for killing heretics became an embarrassment to the Church and he was dismissed in 1236. Through Florin, Japp provides an in depth glimpse into the French Inquisitorial procedure and ample detail about the development, rise and abuses of

the Inquisitors.

In Clairets Abbey, Japp gets to show off her toxicological background with the apothecary super sleuth character of Annette, who must find out who is murdering her fellow sisters and how this all relates back to Agnès.

By far, however, my favourite character has to be Clément, the bright young boy taken in by Agnès. His cleverness, and unwavering loyalty to Agnès make him her greatest ally and protector, helping her best Florin at his own game. Without giving anything away, Clément has the most interesting storyline of all the characters - a real plot twist that I didn't see coming.

Japp has written an intricate, dark, and riveting tale; an compelling book that I found difficult to put down. I look forward to reading the next volume as this book clearly ends in a lurch - it drops off, making you want to read more. It's kind of like what happens when a great moment in a show suddenly goes into a commercial and you're left with the "To be continued" at the bottom of your screen. This book leaves you at that exact moment, with much left unresolved, wanting to know how it all ends. In spite of the abrupt ending, the novel is enjoyable and highly recommended for any medieval mystery fan.

**Click here to visit
Gallic Books to learn
more about this novel**

**Get Your Next Tote Bag
from Medievalists.net!**



**Buy a Medievalists.net Tote Bag
from Cafe Press for \$15.99**