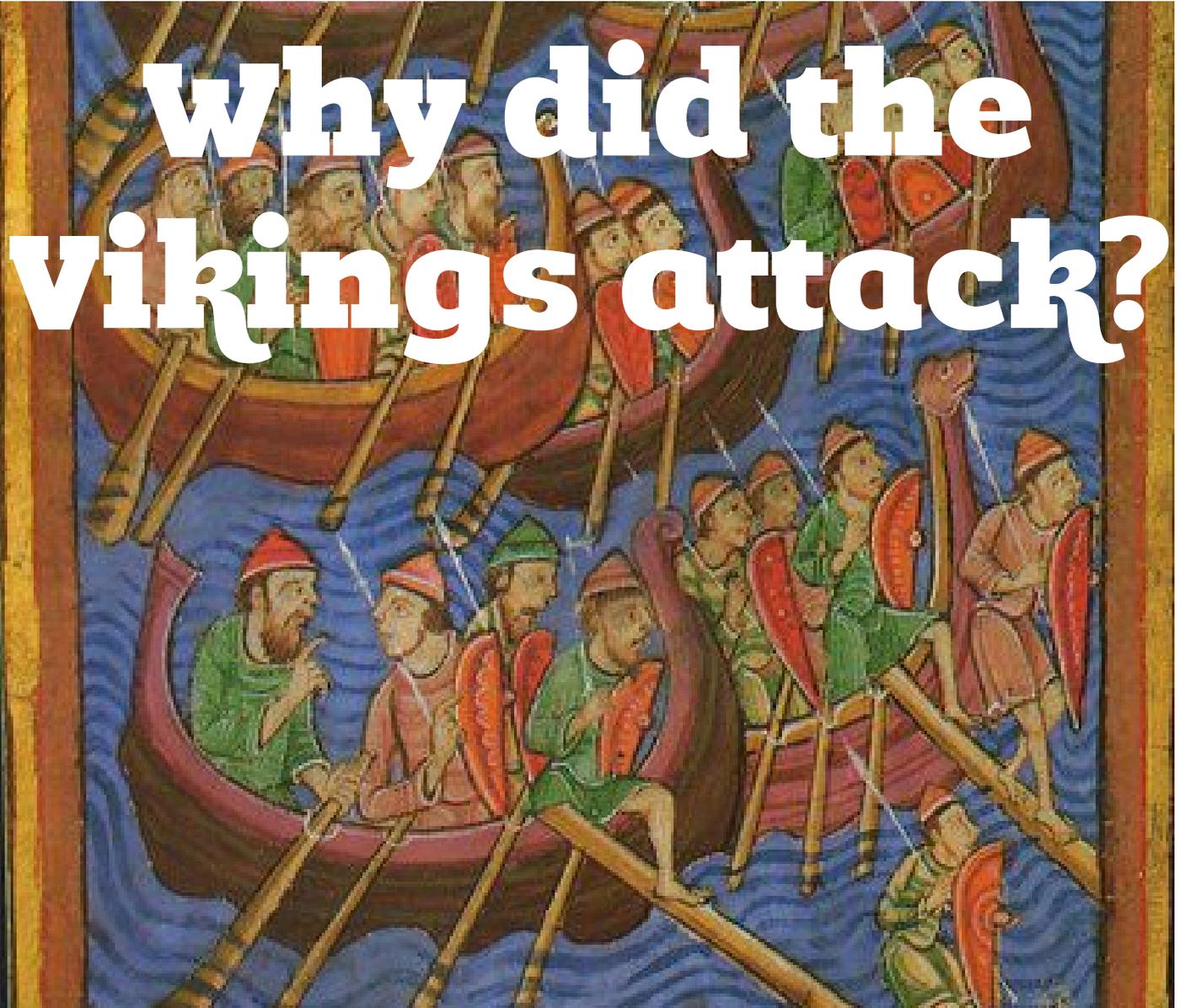


The Medieval Magazine

Number 19

June 8, 2015



why did the vikings attack?

The Tournament in the Middle Ages



10

Witchcraft on the High Seas



16

Genre Medievalisms



22

Five Medieval Tales Too Good to be True | Medieval poaching site discovered in England



Page 4

Viking raids were for more than just money, historian says

In his article, 'What really caused the Viking Age? The social content of raiding and exploration', Steven P. Ashby, a medieval archaeologist and lecturer at the University of Cambridge, outlines the many factors that would have prompted Norsemen - both the elites and the regular men - to conduct their raids across Europe.



Page 6

Medieval poaching site discovered in England

Archaeologists working in northern England have uncovered a stone-lined cess pit that was filled with dozens of bones from deer. The evidence suggests that they were dumped here by poachers.



Page 12

Five Medieval Tales Too Good to be True

We have five stories - funny, strange or just creepy - from the Middle Ages that are (probably) not true!



Page 20

From Runes to Ruins: Documentary looks at rediscovering the Anglo-Saxon past

In his latest film, *From Runes to Ruins*, Tom Rowsell examines how people in England are reclaiming their Anglo-Saxon heritage, including its religion.

Table of Contents

- 4 Viking raids were for more than just money, historian says
- 6 Medieval poaching site discovered in England
- 8 Caliph's palace on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to be restored
- 10 The Medieval Tournament: Swords and Swordfish
- 12 Five Medieval Tales Too Good to be True
- 15 Medieval Articles
- 16 Witchcraft on the High Seas: The Voyage of King James and the North Berwick Witch Trials
- 20 From Runes to Ruins: Documentary looks at rediscovering the Anglo-Saxon past
- 22 Genre Medievalisms: Geek Goes Chic!
- 25 Macbeth trailer released – first look at Michael Fassbender's upcoming film
- 26 Medieval Videos

THE MEDIEVALVERSE

Edited by:
Peter Konieczny and Sandra
Alvarez

Website: www.medievalists.net

This digital magazine is published
each Monday. You can buy a copy
or subscribe for up to 6 months
through joomag.com

Cover Photo: 11th century image of
a Viking fleet

Viking raids were for more than just money, historian says

On January 6, 793, the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne, off the east coast of England, was raided by the Vikings – the first recorded attack by the Norse on the British Isles. The Vikings killed many of the monks, enslaved others, and looted their religious relics.



Carolingian cup that was found as part of the Vale of York Hoard

Historians have put forward many ideas on why the Vikings began raiding throughout Western Europe in the late eighth-century, including a reaction against encroaching Christianity, a desire for land overseas, or just to make money in order to pay for the cost of marrying women back at home. While making a fortune was certainly a factor for the Vikings, one historian suggests that fame and glory were also important reasons for travelling long distances to attack faraway lands.

In his article, 'What really caused the Viking Age? The social content of raiding and exploration', Steven P. Ashby, a medieval archaeologist and lecturer at the University of Cambridge, outlines

the many factors that would have prompted Norsemen – both the elites and the regular men – to conduct their raids across Europe. He believes that while economic reasons were important, "one must consider the possibility that the rationale was the desire not for wealth that was falling into short supply in Scandinavia, but rather for a form of wealth or prestige that had not been – and could never be – available without leaving those shores."

Ashby explains: "What would make an individual fare overseas in pursuit of portable wealth? The demand for resources that could be used in various forms of exchange must have been an important component, but it does little to explain

explain the particular types of artefact that were brought back to Scandinavia from raids on the Continent and the British Isles. It is worth noting that these objects are not just silver; at least on the basis of the material still available to us, artefacts were not routinely melted down and recast, and though they were often cut up or adapted in various ways, in many cases original elements are preserved."

For example, items like silk, decorated metalworks, jewellery and religious artefacts would be kept by the Vikings, and often buried with them. Instead of just melting them down or selling them, the Vikings valued them as objects of prestige, to show to their friends and neighbours as proof of their exploits and how they were able to acquire things from far-off lands. "Unusual form, materials or ornament thus spoke of exotic places, people, objects and behaviours," Ashby writes, "invoking a sort of spiritual foreignness or even supernatural quality in addition to mere geographical displacement. The unknown holds great power, by virtue of its very mystery. This power could be transmitted to the owners of these goods, investing them with a certain political and ideological legitimacy."

This would explain why many Christian artefacts and artworks would be kept by the pagan Vikings – they could even be seen as magical items. But Ashby adds it wasn't just having the goods that offered prestige to the Vikings, as it was just as important to get them by going overseas and acquiring them in warfare. Honour was important for both elites and commoners in Norse society, and one way of gaining it was in taking part in these raids.

Ashby notes that: "individuals implicated in low-intensity forms of warfare (such as raiding) tend to attain elevated social status, while the heightened experience of the military context provides the opportunity not only for the doing of great deeds, but also for the display and recognition of skill sets and personal qualities that might otherwise go unnoticed. Individuals might be lauded for their strength or speed, courage or cunning, for skills in combat or caring for the sick, for sailing or ship repair. It is easy to imagine that this was the means by which warriors received their 'eke-names', and this

alone may have been justification enough for a young, ambitious man to want to join a raiding party. This situation has been recorded in diverse non-western societies (see examples cited above), wherein raiding provides something of an initiation experience for some individuals, and an opportunity for others to gain prestige by proximity to, and association with, members of the warrior aristocracy. Followers also had the opportunity to create and maintain relationships with other members of the retinue, through communication of shared values and bonding through experience. The formation of such group identities and dynamics may well have been a key motivating factor for many freemen involved in overseas expeditions."

He also believes that the first successful raids in the late eighth-century would have had a 'snowball effect' – as the stories spread of the Vikings' victories in places such as England, it would have encouraged future generations to try even greater exploits – to make bigger and better raids, and go further away from Scandinavia.

"On the face of it, these proposals are uncontroversial," Ashby concludes. "Popular accounts of the Viking Age do, after all, suggest that raiding activity was motivated by the search for treasure and fame, fortune and glory. Conversely, however, archaeological explanations have frequently sought to explain the phenomenon in rather reductive economic (or at best socio-economic) terms, and any reference to the significance of travel in and of itself has tended to be oblique or implicit, rather than explicitly theorized (notwithstanding some awareness of Helms's work). While it is not my intention to underplay the economic lure of raiding, trading and settlement, it is necessary to throw a light on their sociological content."

The article 'What really caused the Viking Age? The social content of raiding and exploration' appears in the June 2015 issue of the journal *Archaeological Dialogues* (Volume 22, Issue 1). **Click here to access the article from Cambridge University Journals.** You can also learn more about Steven Ashby's research on **his university webpage.**

Medieval poaching site discovered in England

Archaeologists working in northern England have uncovered a stone-lined cess pit that was filled with dozens of bones from deer. The evidence suggests that they were dumped here by poachers.



Medieval deer hunting scene – British Library Egerton 1146 f. 5v

The story is revealed in the article "Making a Fast Buck in the Middle Ages: Evidence for poaching from Medieval Wakefield," by Matilda Holmes, which appears in the recently published book *Deer and People*. Holmes examines a site near the northern English town of Wakefield, where in 2008 archaeologists uncovered a domed, stone-lined cess pit dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Over a hundred bones from fallow deer were discovered in the cess pit, most of which were lower leg bones but also included skulls and antlers. This represented at least 13 animals. Furthermore, by examining the size of the bones, it was determined that these were mostly young deer and fawns that were killed between May and July. Holmes notes that in medieval England, the official hunting seasons for deer took place between late summer and February, in order to

protect the animals when they were in midst of their birthing season.

Holmes also noted that the bones deposited in the cess pit were unusual compared to other archaeological sites, as she notes "there are considerably fewer meat-bearing bones, and greater numbers of lower fore leg bones."

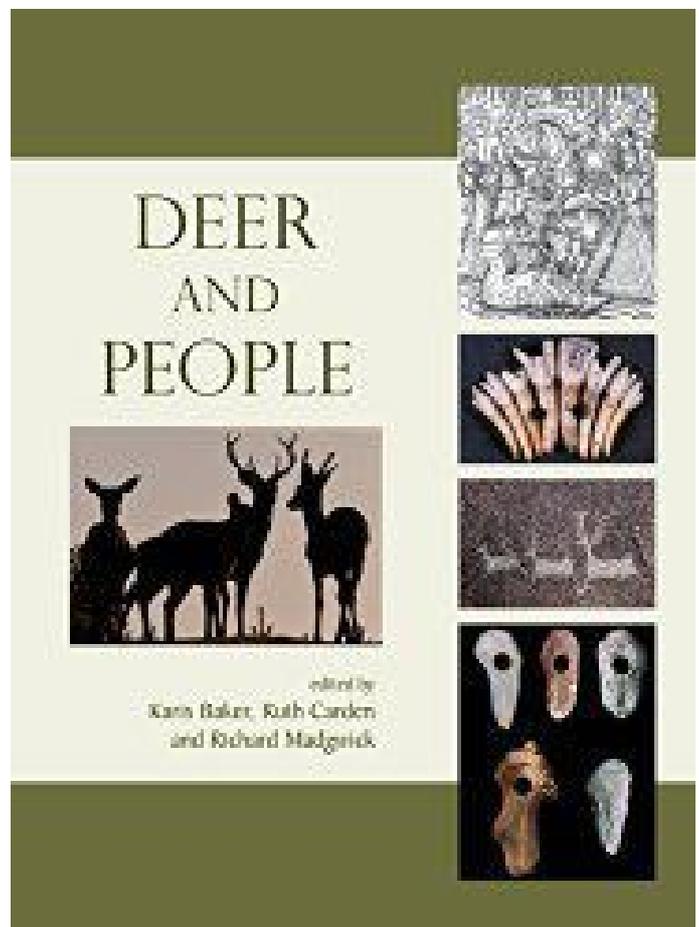
This leads Holmes to conclude: "at sometime during the fifteenth or sixteenth century, the evidence suggests that someone received the poached carcasses of at least thirteen fallow deer, the skins were removed and disposed of and the carcasses cut up and sold on as meat. The highly conspicuous antlers and the lower limb bones which contained little meat or marrow were put into a cess pit and rapidly backfilled to keep the evidence hidden. Those who lived here must have been willing to risk a fine and imprisonment for

imprisonment for this act, which suggests they were not above living outside the law."

It is not surprising to find evidence of illegal poaching. Holmes notes that "during the Medieval period restrictions on hunting game, and particularly deer, were not rigorously adhered to, so that by the end of the sixteenth century poaching was rife. Poaching was prevalent amongst the upper classes that did it for sport and social engagement, and the peasant classes who supplied a prolific black market in venison and deer skin. The act of poaching itself was a potent social statement, reflecting an unwillingness of the peasant classes to accept a law that considered wild creatures as possessions of the gentry."

The article "Making a Fast Buck in the Middle Ages: Evidence for poaching from Medieval Wakefield," appears in *Deer and People*, edited by Karis Baker, Ruth Carden and Richard Madgwick and published by Windgather Press in 2014. The book contains 24 articles about deer and how humans hunted and managed them from prehistoric to modern times.

Dr. Matilda Holmes is a consultant archaeozoologist who has written numerous articles and just published her first book –



Animals in Saxon and Scandinavian England: Backbones of Economy and Society. You can learn more about her research and services on her website archaeozoology.co.uk or follow her on Twitter [@archaeozoology](https://twitter.com/archaeozoology)



Caliph's palace on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to be restored

The German government will be funding archaeologists to help restore an Umayyad palace dating back to the early eighth century.



Aerial view of the excavated early Islamic caliph's palace Khirbat al-Minya (photo/©: Yaniv Darvasi, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz is to receive € 30,000 through the Cultural Preservation Program of the German Federal Foreign Office to help with the restoration of a caliph's palace on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The palace complex covers a site of about 5,000 square meters and was uncovered from 1932 to 1939 by German archaeologists from the Catholic Görres Society and the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. It sits on land that today still belongs to the German Holy Land Association (DVHL) and is managed by the Israel National Parks Authority.

The palace was built by Caliph Walid I (705 to 715 A.D.) of the Umayyads, which established the first caliphate in the Holy Land from 661 to 750 AD. Constructed from white limestone on a lower course of black basalt, it includes one of the oldest mosques in the Holy Land. A few years after construction started, a severe earthquake rocked the palace and caused a fissure right through the center of the mosque and the entire east wing of the building, and this probably put a stop to the work before the structure was fully completed.

Later in the Middle Ages, a sugar cane oven was

Later in the Middle Ages, a sugar cane oven was set up on the site. This brought considerable wealth for the crusaders who owned it but resulted in lasting damage to the environment thanks to the vast amounts of water and wood needed to operate it. Since being excavated in the 1930s, the ruins have been exposed and threatened by vegetation growth and weather effects.

The restoration project sponsored by the German Federal Foreign Office as part of their efforts to highlight the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel. "This project has been initiated just in the nick of time – there is no more time to waste", emphasized archaeologist PD Dr. Hans-Peter Kuhnen, Chief Academic Director of the Mainz University's Department of Ancient Studies. "Every year we have been witness to the gradual deterioration of the palace. By backing the project financially, Germany is assuming responsibility for an important archaeological site that would not

have been excavated without the German initiative in the 1930s. At the same time, we are supporting the work of the Israel National Parks management, our students have the chance to gather practical experience in archaeological conservation, and we are also setting an example within the archaeological community for a dialog with Islam."

Since 1981, Germany has been supporting the preservation of cultural heritage across the globe as part of the Cultural Preservation Program of its Federal Foreign Office. The aim has been to foster an independent national awareness in the partner countries and a collaborative approach to dealing with the world's cultural treasures. The Cultural Preservation Program is also an effective instrument of Germany's international cultural relations and educational policy. This strategy of cultural conservation as a means of promoting stability in crisis states and contributing to crisis prevention has become ever more important in recent years.



Researchers and students from Mainz University during a visit to the early Islamic caliph's palace Khirbat al-Minya on the Sea of Galilee (photo/©: David Eran, Tel Aviv)

The Medieval Tournament: Swords and Swordfish

By Danièle Cybulskie

To think of the word “medieval” is, for many people, to think of tournaments. Tournaments were a uniquely medieval phenomenon that were part-military training, part-sport, and of a character all their own. Full of colour, pageantry, and action, the tournament was a marked part of medieval society for centuries.

According to the romance *Perceforest*, Alexander the Great came up with the idea of tournaments from watching swordfish joust at each other as he was dragged under the sea behind a boat in a glass barrel (p.40). Sadly, that is not actually where tournaments stemmed from, although that would have been amazing.

In his book *Tournament*, David Crouch suggests that tournaments came out of peace bargaining in northern Europe around the first half of the eleventh century. He suggests that this early work to promote peace between squabbling aristocratic landowners may be the reason that tournaments were traditionally held on borderlands (p.6). I suspect that this may also be because tournaments used a huge amount of resources, and anything to spread the burden of the expense around would likely have been a good option. Tournaments were also something to distract sons who weren't likely to inherit, “aristocratic vagabonds” (Crouch, p.7) who might easily cause trouble at home. At least on the tournament circuit, they were causing trouble elsewhere.

Of course, tournaments did not begin as the individual jousting competitions that we – and Alexander the Great – may be more familiar with.

In the beginning, the main feature of the tournament was the grand *mêlée*, a massive team-against-team battle. To begin, knights on horseback would line up in single lines facing each other and charge, hoping to unseat their opponents (multiple lines would have led to people getting trampled on the first charge, as Crouch notes, p.90). After that, knights would turn around (“tournament” has its origins in the French for “to turn”) and try to unseat more people. Finally, the fight would end up on the ground, where knights would fight to capture other knights and nobles to hold them for ransom. As Crouch says, there was even a special holding pen for captured knights, who were honour-bound to stay there. Dishonourable knights might sneak away to fight some more (p.96-97). Captured knights usually forfeited their horses, although captors might ask for money, too.

Grand *mêlée* tournaments generally lasted for only one day, although the rise of fictional super-knights, like those in Arthurian romances, who could fight for days, as well as the increasing popularity of the joust, encouraged longer and longer tournaments (p.57), which culminated in the grand *mêlée* on the last day for obvious reasons (a.k.a. many, many injuries). Rules increased in order to make tournaments safer for the knights involved, including blunting the weapons and placing more emphasis on the individual joust. Crouch pins the end-date on the grand *mêlée* tournament as the 1340s (p.130), which makes sense because The Black Death in the late 1340s would have decimated the warriors who would have participated. From then on, the joust was king.



The Ms.Thott.290.2° is a fencing manual written in 1459 by Hans Talhoffer for his own personal reference and illustrated by Michel Rotwyler

Early individual jousting was about unseating one's opponent, and did not begin with a barrier between jousters. As Christopher Gravett says in *Knight: Noble Warrior of England 1200-1600*, "accidental collisions"—or deliberate collisions—and knee damage from getting too close were a real danger (p.131). As barriers began to be a part of the joust around 1400, the likelihood of lances shattering increased, and that became one of the goals of the game. Gravett notes that this kind of jousting "did not help increase skill for war" (p.189), which emphasizes the tournament's new place as a sporting activity, and (probably not coincidentally) coincides with the rise of gunpowder which was already changing the face of European warfare.

Tournaments were more than just war games: they were spectacles in which everyone got involved, from the farmers whose fields got flattened by tents, to the tournaments fans who stood and watched, to the merchants who fed the masses, to the ladies who provided favours, like their sleeves. Noble ladies also got involved by donating prizes, which, as Crouch says, were

"generally either live animals or expensively made and gilded representations of animals" (p.36), and they sat in the stands to watch the action. Even the clergy got in on the action by condemning Christians for fighting each other and sometimes dying needlessly, or by performing masses the morning the tournament began (Crouch, p.71).

Like so many other medievalists I know, I love *A Knight's Tale*— yep, the movie — because it captures the fun and the spirit of tournaments, even with all of its (acknowledged) anachronisms. Tournaments were a fun, fierce, competitive tradition, complex in their rules and their evolution. To learn everything you wanted to know about tournaments, check out David Crouch's book, and for a piece of the action, a quick Internet search will help you find a joust near you.

You can follow Danièle Cybulskie on Twitter @5MinMedievalist

Five Medieval Tales Too Good to be True

We have five stories – funny, strange or just creepy – from the Middle Ages that are (probably) not true, but still worth a read!



The Dead Queen on the Throne

In the year 1339, the 20 year-old Prince of Portugal, named Peter, married Constance of Peñafiel. However, he soon fell in love with her lady-in-waiting, Inês de Castro, and the two kept up their affair for years, having four children together. However, Peter's father, King Afonso IV, hated Inês, and tried to keep the couple apart. Eventually, he sent some of his men to murder Inês, and they beheaded her in front of her infant son. Peter would get his revenge on two of the murders, having them executed by ripping out their hearts. His love for Inês would not go away, however, and when, according to some sources, he ascended to the throne in 1357, Peter had her body exhumed from her grave, placed on a throne, adorned with the jewellery and royal clothes. and forced all the nobles to pay homage by kissing the hem of her garments.

The Miser's plan to fake his own death

"The True history of the life and sudden death of old John Overs, the rich ferry-man of London' was first published in 1637, but purports to be a tale from early medieval times, before the London Bridge was built. John Overs worked as the ferryman, taking people across the Thames from London to Southwark. Although he grew rich, the text explains he was a terrible miser, acting so cheap that he would not give light from his candles to his neighbours, and that mice and rats would stay away from his home because there was no bit of food left over. One day, he came up with an idea to skip on having to feed his servants a meal. He pretended that he was dead and had himself wrapped in a burial shroud. He believed that his servants would be so sad that they would fast for the day, after which John would feign a sudden recovery. However, when the servant heard of his 'death' they were over-joyed! Breaking open the cupboards, they took out the bread, cheese and ale and had a party around the shrouded corpse. Eventually John Overs was so upset by his servants' actions that he decided to end the charade and chastise them for their waste. As John struggled to get out of his burial shroud, one of his servants saw this, and thinking that it was a ghost rising from the dead, immediately grabbed an oar and beat his master to death. The story does not end here - because John Overs had been excommunicated for usury, he was refused a Christian burial. His daughter eventually bribed a monastery to bury him, but when the Abbot (who had been away) returned, he immediately had the corpse dug up, then placed it on the back of an ass. The animal then wandered through the streets of London before arriving at St.Thomas-at-Watering, the place where executions took place. The ass then shrugged off John Overs' body, and he was buried there.

Dinner with your Lover

A 13th-century story tells how Le Châtelain de Coucy, a troubadour, had an affair with the Lady of Fayel, who was married. The troubadour took part in the Third Crusade, but at the siege of Acre he was mortally wounded. As he was about to die, he begged a man to remove his heart and give it to its true owner. The man did so, but when he reached the home of the Lady of Fayel, he foolishly told her husband about the request. The husband took the heart, had it cooked, and then served it to his wife for dinner. After she had finished he revealed what the meat really was - after this she refused all food and starved to death!

The Cockamamie Plan to Destroy London

This story appears in an official government document - the Hundred Rolls - a census and taxation record that was commissioned by King Edward I. It relates how Sir Richard de Southchurch, the Sheriff of Essex, came to his manor in 1267, and requested supplies to help King Henry III retake the city of London against rebel barons. While there were normal requests - like chickens to feed the wounded and ropes for catapults, Richard also asked for "cocks, forty and more, to whose feet he declared he would tie fire, and send them flying into London to burn it down." Many scholars have wondered about the practicalness of a plan to setting 40 roosters on fire and sending them into London to destroy the city, and one historian believes that the Sheriff was simply was just saying this to scam the villagers out of their poultry.



The Penny that would not stay still

In Gerald of Wales 12th century account 'The History and Topography of Ireland', he tells how the city of Dublin was captured by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke. He writes: "When the city was captured, an archer, among others, offered a penny to the cross (in the Church of the Holy Trinity), and as he turned to go away, was hit in the back by the penny flung after immediately. He took it up and offered it to the cross a second time, but the same thing happened, while many people standing about looked on and wondered. Then the archer confessed before all that on that very day he had plundered the residence of the archbishop within the very precincts of that church. A penance was imposed upon him, and he returned whatever he had got from the archbishop's residence. He then brought back the same penny in great fear and awe for the third time to the cross. This time finally it remained and did not move."

Medieval Articles

Owain's Revolt? Glyn Dŵr's role in the outbreak of the rebellion

By Gideon Brough

SHARE: Studies in History, Archaeology, Religion and Conservation, Vol.2:1 (2015)

Abstract: This article asserts that Owain Glyn Dŵr was neither the instigator nor, initially, the sole leader of the revolt for which he has become well known. It also challenges the idea that there was just one rebellion and casts doubt on the notion that he proclaimed himself Prince of Wales on 16 September 1400. The familiar version of the outbreak of the revolt was popularised by John Lloyd in 1931 and then furthered by certain of Rees Davies's later works. Their influential writings have provided a compelling illustration of the events in question and no secondary analyses notably disagree. However, their works primarily focus on the deeds of Glyn Dŵr and so largely ignore or dismiss the other acts of violence in Wales between 1399 and 1401, which were unconnected to Owain. In contrast, consideration of the other revolts described by contemporary sources enables a different understanding of the beginning of the revolt. Owain did eventually become the head of the rebel movement in Wales but, in the early years of the conflict, the situation was more complex than has previously been presented. This article details those other acts of rebellion and contextualises Glyn Dŵr's actions within contemporary events.

[Click here to read this article from Academia.edu](#)

Yersinia pestis and the Plague of Justinian 541–543 AD: a genomic analysis

By David M. Wagner, Jennifer Klunk, Michaela Harbeck et al.

The Lancet: Infectious Diseases, Volume 14, No. 4 (2014)

Background: *Yersinia pestis* has caused at least three human plague pandemics. The second (Black Death, 14–17th centuries) and third (19–20th centuries) have been genetically characterised, but there is only a limited understanding of the first pandemic, the Plague of Justinian (6–8th centuries). To address this gap, we sequenced and analysed draft genomes of *Y. pestis* obtained from two individuals who died in the first pandemic.

Methods: Teeth were removed from two individuals (known as A120 and A76) from the early medieval Aschheim-Bajuwarenring cemetery (Aschheim, Bavaria, Germany). We isolated DNA from the teeth using a modified phenol-chloroform method. We screened DNA extracts for the presence of the *Y. pestis*-specific *pla* gene on the pPCP1 plasmid using primers and standards from an established assay, enriched the DNA, and then sequenced it. We reconstructed draft genomes of the infectious *Y. pestis* strains, compared them with a database of genomes from 131 *Y. pestis* strains from the second and third pandemics, and constructed a maximum likelihood phylogenetic tree.

[Click here to read this article from Cornell University](#)

Witchcraft on the High Seas: The Voyage of King James and the North Berwick Witch Trials

By Carolyn Emerick

Sixteenth century Scotland was a tempestuous place. The Protestant Reformation was fresh, and it appeared to be under constant threat. Religion and monarchy were intertwined. Mary Queen of Scots had returned to her homeland to find the government had initiated the Reform without her consent. She worked out a compromise which allowed her and her retinue to practice the Catholic mass, while it remained illegal in the rest of Scotland. Most of us know her eventual sad fate, to be captured and imprisoned by her own people, only to escape to the realm of her cousin, Elizabeth I in England, where she was imprisoned again. Due to these circumstances, Queen Mary was forced to abdicate her throne to her son, James VI, who was just thirteen months of age. Mary had hoped that her separation from her son would be temporary and that Elizabeth would come to her aid to restore her to her throne. How could she have known that her cousin would become her jailor, and eventually sign her death warrant?

Young King James VI of Scotland, later to become James I of England, was left essentially orphaned. His father, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, had been killed in a plot that Queen Mary may or may not have been involved in prior to her imprisonment. He was raised by people hungry for both secular and religious control in a strict Protestant mindset. A series of regents ruled Scotland until James came of age. Many of these men were killed or died under dubious circumstances. Protestants had plotted against his own Catholic mother. And Catholic plotters would eventually plan the famous Gunpowder Plot against himself, which infamously brought Guy Fawkes into the history books. And, an attempt on his own life in his young adulthood got so close that he himself wrestled the would-be assassin in his royal chamber, pinning him down while calling for the guards. Under these circumstances, fearing plots on your life is not paranoia – it's reality.

It is also important to note that the Protestant Reformation brought about a change in the way witchcraft was viewed in Europe. The Catholic

Church wasn't in the business of rooting out witches. In fact, the official stance of the Catholic Church was to deny that witchcraft existed. Not that people weren't practicing it, but the Church viewed it as a silly superstition and insisted that there was no power in it. The Roman Catholic Church did punish heresy against the Church during the Inquisition, and heresy could be construed with witchcraft, but not always. And, the Catholic Church had been tolerant of local festivals and allowed local deities to be modified into the Cult of the Saints, which enabled folk customs and beliefs to continue to some degree. The Reformation ushered in a new brand of severe and intolerant thinking. The Catholic Church was labeled as idolatrous and pagan. A new dichotomy of viewing the world through a dualistic lens of good and evil was preached. Satan and his demons were everywhere, and their mission was to take down the good Christians through the work of his soldiers, namely the witches.



The North Berwick Witches meet the Devil in the local kirkyard, from a contemporary pamphlet, *Newes From Scotland*

So, here we have a king separated from his mother very young, raised in the midst of plots, murder, and subterfuge, in this tense religious climate. What else do we know about James VI? He was considered an intellectual. He had a sharp mind and took a keen interest in many subjects. It seems that his interest could often border on obsession. For example, it was said at one point that he loved hunting and would become obsessed with taking down certain stags, to the point of neglecting important business of the crown.

He was eventually betrothed to Anne of Denmark, which was a political arrangement, Anne being the King of Denmark's sister. Although most royal marriages were arranged for political reasons, in the best case scenario the couple would grow fond of each other, perhaps even fall in love with each other. But, history tells us that this was not

the case for James VI of Scotland and Anne of Denmark. Apparently, their relationship was to remain aloof. James seemed to prefer the company of men. Indeed, he was known for enjoying spending time in what we might call today a "man cave," playing cards and bantering with his male friends. There have been suggestions that his affections for men went beyond the platonic.

How much these attributes and influences affected James' beliefs and actions regarding witchcraft, we can only guess. The Reformation and severe Protestant preachers like John Knox most certainly influenced his world view. Did his lack of an immediate family make it difficult for him to be emotionally available to his wife, or make him into a hard person lacking in humane compassion? Did his lack of a strong female presence cause him to mistrust women? Did his

obsessive personality trigger from psychological issues? These are questions we can never know the answer to. But, we do know precisely when his obsession with witchcraft began.

In 1589 King James VI sailed to Denmark to retrieve his betrothed. Anne had been supposed to sail to Scotland alone, but her ship was forced to turn back due to storms, so James made the gallant effort of setting sail to fetch her. The Germanic countries were another Reformation hotbed, and witch hunting was in full swing in Denmark. Both Protestantism and witch hunting were adopted with gusto in this region. It is known that King James met with Niels Hemmingsen, a Danish Lutheran theologian and expert on demonology. Hemmingsen had written a book on the topic in 1575. So while we can't say for certain what the two discussed, it has been speculated that James adopted the notion of "the satanic pact" from Hemmingsen. This is the idea that witches make a deal with a devil in return for power, a key belief of witch hunters at the time (but one that is not believed by modern scholars to have had any reality in the actual practices of the accused). James was fascinated by what he learned in Denmark. He must have felt that his eyes were open to a whole new world of evil existing right under his nose all along. Always eager to learn new subjects, James apparently absorbed this knowledge hungrily.

Upon the return voyage to Scotland, the King's entourage was beset by a terrible storm. The tempest caused the ship to turn back and dock in Norway to wait it out. Because the company carried royal personages, they were escorted by the Danish royal navy. It seemed to those involved that the ship carrying the King was jostled more so than the others. The admiral in charge of the Dutch fleet was insistent that witchcraft was the cause. And, due to James' recent education about the dangers of witchcraft, he suspected it to be true. Witches in both Scotland and Denmark were suspected, and witch hunts were launched in both countries.

Coincidentally, a peasant woman by the name of Geillis Duncan had just been accused of witchcraft by her employer, David Seton, when it became known that she had been curing illness

with seemingly magical methods. Seton was sure the devil was at work. Her interrogation elicited the names of other witches supposedly in cohort with Ms. Duncan, who were also interrogated. The confessions became more and more grandiose until they finally revealed that this supposed coven had conspired to poison and murder the King. This confession combined with the King's Denmark disaster culminated in the launch of the North Berwick Witch Trials.

Being a man with a strong curiosity, James was personally involved with the witch trials, which was unusual for a monarch. More than one hundred people were arrested and accused. King James took part in some of the interrogations. Many of the accused confessed under torture to such deeds as what is called "the obscene kiss," the act of kissing Satan on his posterior when swearing allegiance to him.

As an aside, acts like this in the confessions are one way that some scholars are now differentiating between people who were accused willy nilly verses people who were actually using ancient pre-Christian shamanistic practices. Those who really were engaging in real pagan sorcery were a tiny minority, and it is only recently that scholars such as Emma Wilby and Carlo Ginzburg have brought validity to this theory. But, those confessions bear little resemblance to the vast majority, which seem clearly built around the expectations of the witch interrogators. In other words, the interrogators asked leading questions involving the information found in witch hunting manuals, like the *Malleus Maleficarum* first published in 1487, such as "when did you first make a pact with the devil?" Eventually, the accused would answer whatever the accusers wanted to hear to make the torture stop. Acts such as kissing the devil on his derrière are found nowhere in the few records which do seem to demonstrate true shamanic practice (more on this in future articles).

The North Berwick confessions fit squarely within the parameters of what the witch manuals outlined, indicating that the confessions were led by the accusers under the duress of torture, or sometimes methods that were not considered torture such as sleep deprivation (which can produce hallucinations). The trials revealed a massive plot whereby large numbers of witched

massive plot whereby large numbers of witches traveled to North Berwick to meet at night inside a church. Their meetings were presided over by the Devil himself, and King James VI was described as the Devil's greatest enemy in all the world.

The witches supposedly began their plot with the use of weather magic, first to stall Anne's departure, then to disrupt James' return. Ms. Duncan confessed to meeting with a Danish witch to form their plot. It is telling that witch hunts had already been underway in Denmark by this time. And, the Scots did not initially blame the storms on witchcraft, until they realized that the Danes did. The accused also confessed to using "image magic" and plotting to use toad poison on the King. Image magic was the act of causing harm to someone by manipulating a small image of them, similar to what we know of today as "voodoo dolls." And toad poison retrieved by hanging toads upside down to collect the poison from their skin.

These confessions seemed so fantastical that James did not initially believe them. That is, until one of the accused, Agnes Sampson, was placed before him. When he professed skepticism, apparently Ms. Sampson asked James to come close so she could whisper something in his ear. She revealed private details about James' and Anna's wedding night that should have been impossible for her to know. That tipped the scales and from that point on James was an avid believer in witchcraft.

Bibliography

Ankarloo, Bengt, and Stuart Clark. *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)

Burns, William E. *Witch Hunts in Europe and America: An Encyclopedia*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003)

Lynch, Michael, ed. *Oxford Companion to Scottish History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Carolyn Emerick writes about history, myth and folklore in the Middle Ages. You can read her website at www.carolynemerick.com or her Academia.edu page, and you can follow her on Facebook or Twitter.

It should be noted that royal wedding nights were not private events during this period. The consummation of the royal marriage bed was, in fact, a public event observed by important personages at court. Because so much hinged on a royal union, witnesses were important. And in an age before media celebrity, who did people gossip about? The royals. So it is not outside the realm of possibility that peasants would have heard some salacious gossip about the King's wedding night. But, why Sampson would use this information against herself is very perplexing. Perhaps it was just another example of giving them what they want to end the ordeal once and for all.

In any case, this experience left James an affirmed believer in the dark forces of the occult, which in turn had a profound impact on his nation. Scotland would become one of the worst perpetrators of witch hunting, accusing and killing a higher proportion per capita of its own population than most of its European neighbors. The North Berwick Witch trials affected James so personally, that he would write his own treatise on the dark arts not long after. His book, *Daemonologie*, was written in 1697, and it was the first expose' on witchcraft penned in the English language. Just as the *Malleus Maleficarum* before it, James' *Daemonologie* became a key tool in the witch hunter's kit, and was used extensively in both Scottish and English witch trials to follow.

From Runes to Ruins: Documentary looks at rediscovering the Anglo-Saxon past

In his latest film, *From Runes to Ruins*, Tom Rowsell examines how people in England are reclaiming their Anglo-Saxon heritage, including its religion.



The documentary, which is available from www.fromrunestoruins.vhx.tv, follows Rowsell as he travels around England, roaming through early medieval sites and speaking with all kinds of peculiar characters including neo-pagan followers of Thor, historical reenactors and the swashbuckling leader of the London Longsword Academy.

Rowsell, who has been a filmmaker for over seven years, has made diverse works, ranging from music videos to *Boobs and Revolution*, a

documentary on politics and breast surgery in Venezuela. After doing a graduate degree in medieval history at University College London, he turned his camera on the Anglo-Saxon world.

"This was very different to my previous film, *Boobs and Revolution*," Rowsell explains. "There was no sense of immediacy, which made timing less of a factor. I was far more conscious of the need to make the subject matter appealing. Anglo-Saxon paganism is a subject which captivates me, so I thought about why that was and how I could make



Tom Rowsell in *From Runes to Ruins*

and how I could make this topic interesting to other people.”

The filmmaker talks to British people who are seeking a spiritual or cultural connection to the Anglo-Saxon past. For example, Andy Foster, a neo-pagan, remarks that there is a “need to rediscover our natural heritage, because in today’s society of fast food, fast cars, we are losing sight of where we come from.”

Rowsell shares in these ideals. “I passionately believe in our duty to preserve the knowledge of our history for the benefit of future generations,” he explains.

From Runes to Ruins offers viewers a glimpse into some of the mythic and spiritual past of the Anglo-Saxons as it talks about Wayland the Smith, the Uffington White Horse and the Ruthwell Cross.

Rowsell adds that the best part of making this documentary was “visiting all the historic places from my life; from Thursley, the cult site of the Saxon thunder god which I lived near to as a young boy, to Scutchamers knob where I camped as a teen and the Ruthwell Cross near to my Grandfather’s farm in Scotland. Each of these places has a part to play in the history of England and each also has a special place in my own personal past.”

You can watch ***From Runes to Ruins*** for \$3.99 at

<http://fromrunestoruins.vhx.tv/>

You can also learn more about the film by visiting **<http://www.runestoruins.co.uk/>** and see more of Tom Rowsell’s films on his Youtube channel **Survive the Jive**.

Genre Medievalisms: Geek Goes Chic!

Sandra Alvarez reports on #501: Genre Medievalisms, part of the 50th International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University.

I'm not going to lie, this was one of my favourite sessions this year because it pandered to my inner nerd. I came to medieval studies through a love of fantasy (Tolkien) and gaming (Dungeons & Dragons every Sunday night!) so these three papers were right up my alley. They touched on various aspects of medievalism in fantasy novels, TV shows, movies, and gaming. Is Cersei a collection of bad medieval stereotypes? Have nerds gone mainstream? Were American cowboys a modern retelling of the medieval knight? Put down that comic, put away your bag of dice, and indulge your inner nerd.

Kavita Mudan Finn, who also gave a brilliant paper on King John at the Pseudo Society, started us off with the lady we all love to hate: Cersei Lannister, played marvellously by Lena Headey on HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Her paper, **All Men Must Die: Medievalism, Feminism and "Realism" in the *Game of Thrones***, examined the ways in which the show has garnered praise and censure for its treatment of women, particularly Cersei Lannister. While many women are presented in strong roles on the TV series, the show has also been criticised for misogynist, racist and ableist tropes. So what exactly constitutes "realism" in this context? *Game of Thrones* author, George R. R. Martin made specific choices about how he portrayed women, but has said repeatedly that his books 'are not reflections of premodern Europe, they are refractions'. How far can we take fantasy in comparison to the medieval reality?

Finn decided to stick to one character to unpack these tropes – Cersei Lannister. She is one of the most reviled characters of the series, on paper and onscreen. She is the only woman on *Game of Thrones* giving speeches on women's rights but is rarely given the benefit of the doubt. Her father, Tywin Lannister (played by veteran actor Charles

Dance) is a dyed-in-the-wool Machiavellian ruler, and her brothers, Tyrion (played by Peter Dinklage) and Jamie (played by Nikolaj Coster-Waldau), despite their failings, have become fan favourites. What gives?

Finn suggests that Martin's reinterpretations of medieval tropes are part of the problem of how Cersei is viewed. The Vulgate Cycle, and the *Morte d'Arthur*, focus on the medieval problem of the adulteress medieval Queen, as demonstrated when Guinevere is reviled for her love affair with Lancelot.

The dangers in medieval queenly adultery lie in the lack of production of required heirs. Cersei also carries on a love affair with the greatest knight in the kingdom, however, her liaison is worse; she is committing adultery with her twin brother, Jamie. By passing off her three children as heirs to the throne, she becomes the epitome of queenly treason. Finn points out that, 'She comes to embody every bad trait ascribed to medieval women at once', whereas Guinevere is given some redeeming qualities. The TV series has made the choice to displace some of her evil doing onto other characters. In the books, she is behind the murder of all of Robert Baratheon's bastards. Cersei's character harkens to King Herod's Massacre of the Innocents, where he ordered the murder of all the male children in Bethlehem, and to King Arthur rounding up a boat full of children and sending them adrift to their deaths. The TV show displaced this crime onto her son Joffrey (played on the TV series by Jack Gleeson). Even Jamie, who tosses a child out a window in the opening chapter of the books and TV series, is given a redemptive story arc. He has a strong following of fans of the books, but a more neutral following on the TV show. Scenes like the one where Jamie rapes Cersei beside the **body of**



Detail of a miniature of Lancelot rescuing Guinevere from burning at the stake, with grotesque hybrid creatures surrounding the miniature, at the beginning of the Mort D' Arthur. (British Library)

one where Jamie rapes Cersei beside the body of their dead son caused some furor with audiences. In the book, Martin said that the sex was meant to be 'ambiguous consent'.

ALL of the negative stereotypes in one fell swoop. Finn argues that Cersei seems to be less of a character, and more of a bunch of medieval tropes slapped together.

So who is Cersei supposed to be modelled after in medieval history? She has often been compared to Queen consort Elizabeth Woodville (1437- June 8, 1492) who has been frequently portrayed as grasping and evil. Elizabeth Woodville is often proposed as a shadow of Cersei. Cersei has also been likened to Margaret of Anjou (March 23, 1430 – August 25, 1482) when it comes to her relationship with her sadistic son Joffrey. Finn pointed out Margaret of Anjou and her relationship with her son Edward, Prince of Wales, for comparison. Margaret had 7 year old Prince Edward attending and participating in executions that she encouraged and organised. The problem with Cersei isn't so much that she conforms to medieval stereotypes, it is that she embodies

In answer to the common question posed about fantasy meshing with medieval reality: Why bother with realism if it's just a fantasy show? Finn answers that it's important because the highest compliment paid to the show IS that it's realistic, so maybe we should try and demonstrate and encourage more positive viewpoints.

The next paper was given by Valerie Dawn Hampton (Western Michigan/University of Florida), entitled, **Save the Cheerleader, Save the World: Yesterday's History Today**, which looked at how geek has gone chic. Geekdom has reached mainstream audiences through shows like *Game of Thrones*, and *Once Upon a Time*, and *Arrow*. There was a stigma associated with Sci-Fi, and

and role playing games like Dungeons & Dragons. Comics were considered acceptable in terms of fantastical interests, as there was still a moral standard for good and evil in comics. As for other interests, they were stigmatized as “uncool” and “nerdy”. This paper looked at how the nerd is the new cool. Being into sci-fi and fantasy is no longer solely the realm of the high school outcast; shows like *Big Bang Theory* have embraced the nerd and made him/her culturally acceptable.

Early fantasy authors helped create groups like the Society for Creative Anachronisms. Mainstream audiences identified with the heroes, groups and culture and now and TV is flooded with genre programming. There are currently 16 comic book type shows on TV. Hampton said, “Genre is mainstream now, it is no longer disregarded”, people now know who the *Tudors*, the *Borgias* and the *Vikings* were thanks to these shows. European legends, Arthurian and Viking, are still the most popular. Shows like the *Originals*, where the protagonists are Vampires but were originally a Viking family, provide flashback scenes for a medieval past. In the fantasy programme *Lost Girl*, the show touches on the Valkyries.

The young adult book, and movie, *Mortal Instruments*, is filled with Arthurian legend; a grail, and a sword given by an angel from a lake, harkens to the Lady of the Lake scenario. People

are playing games again; there is a renewed interest in card games, and in Dungeons & Dragons, which have now achieved mainstream status. As Huey Lewis and the News once said, it’s “Hip to be Square” and this nerd, for one, is rejoicing!

Lastly, we had **White Hats for White Plumes: The Western Arthurian Romance Reimagined**, by Geoffrey B. Elliot (Oklahoma State University-Stillwater) with a look at the enduring popularity of the American cowboy. Although not a professed reader or fan of cowboy genre novels myself, it was still an interesting paper on the topic of the mythologised cowboy. Who exactly is the cowboy? The cowboy is of European descent, most commonly of English extraction, of landed heritage, and has military experience, lives according to a strict code of honour, and defends those who cannot defend themselves to the point of death. He is similar to the knight of the Arthurian romance in that the cowboy is chivalric and honourable. Elliot examined author William A. Johnstone’s Mountainman corpus, in particular, the character of Smoke Jensen. Elliot saw a lot of Lancelot in the character, especially in his propensity for violence, and noted that there is something of the Arthurian in the ‘Western wanderer’ that resonates with readers of this series.



The eternal cowboy, Clint Eastwood, in the Spaghetti Western classic, ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly’ (1966)

Macbeth trailer released – first look at Michael Fassbender’s upcoming film



The first official trailer for Justin Kurzel’s film *Macbeth* has been released and getting praise. This adaption of Shakespeare’s tragedy stars Michael Fassbender with Marion Cotillard portraying his wife, Lady Macbeth. The film recently received its world premiere at Cannes, receiving critical acclaim for its boldness.

While the film will not be released until October 2nd, it was recently shown at the Cannes Film Festival and got rave reviews. Jason Gorber called it “Shakespeare for the *Game of Thrones* set, and before many of the iconic lines of dialogue are even spoken we’re thrust into this torturous medieval hellscape.”

Medieval Videos

The first video is from the Crossrail Project, where they detail the archaeological work under Liverpool Street station, which had finds from Roman to early modern times, including the Walbrook, one of London's lost rivers.. The second features comedian Wyatt Cenac talking about his trip to Medieval Times.

