The
Medieval
Magazine

Anglo-Saxon England

Medieval Muslim Graves discovered in France

The Four Humors

King Arthur and St.George

4

SP7080
Male
> 30 years old
584-761 cal AD
mtDNA - L1c3a1a
NRY - E1b1b1b1a

1076

SP7089
Male
20-29 years old
637-765 cal AD
mtDNA - K1a4a
NRY - E1b1b1b1a

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8th-century Muslim Graves discovered in France

French Archaeologists have discovered what they believed to be the oldest known graves of Muslims buried in France. The remains of three people date back to the 8th cenury.

Their research was published last week in the journal PLOS ONE by a tam French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research (Inrap) and University of Bordeaux.

The rapid Arab-Islamic conquest during the early Middle Ages led to major political and cultural changes in the Mediterranean. Although the early medieval Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula is well documented, scientists have less evidence of the Muslim expansion north of the Pyrenees. The authors of this study aimed to determine if the skeletons in three graves from a medieval site at Nimes, France are related to the Muslim presence in France in the 8th century. Specifically, they analyzed the funerary practices at the site, analyzed the skeleton's DNA, and determined the sex and age of the skeletons.

The authors found that the burials appear to follow Islamic rites, including the position of the body and the head orientation towards Mecca. They also found genetic evidence indicating their paternal lineage may show North African ancestry. Radiocarbon dating shows that the skeletons were likely from the 7th-9th centuries. Given all of these data, the authors propose that the skeletons from the Nimes burials belonged to Berbers integrated into the Umayyad army during the Arab expansion in North Africa in the 8th century. Despite the low number of Muslim graves discovered, the authors believe that these observations provide some of the first archeological and anthropological evidence for Muslim communities in the South of France.

Dr. Yves Gleize, lead archaeologist for the project, added, "The joint archaeological, anthropological and genetic analysis of three early medieval graves at Nimes provides evidence of burials linked with Muslim occupation during the 8th c. in south of France."

In situ photographs of the Nimes burials, with a synthesis of age and sex of individuals, radiocarbon dates, maternal and paternal lineages - Photo by INRAP

In their article, the researchers offer more details about the Muslim community that existed in Nimes during this period:

Textual sources, specifically the Moissac and Uzès chronicles, offer a significant testimony to the complex and unstable historical context of the Nimes region during the early Middle Ages. They notably attest to a Muslim presence or travel in Nimes between 719 and 752 AD. The city—at that time called Niwmshû or Namûshû by Muslim authors—would have initially been taken by the "Saracens," possibly at the end of 719, but was rapidly retaken by Eudes, Duke of Aquitaine, in 721. In 724 or 725, the inhabitants of Nimes surrendered, offering little resistance to Ambissa, or Anbasa b. Suhaym al-Kalbi, the new governor of Spain [17, 39–40]. Despite the city's devastation by Charles Martel in 737, Nimes' Muslim presence may have persisted after this date. Finally, in 752, a local Goth leader named Ansemundus (or Misemundus) delivered four cities, including Nimes, to Pepin the Short, marking the start of the final conquest of Septimania by the Franks.

The scholars also note that these burials might offer some insights into Christian-Islamic relations at this time:

During the early Middle Ages, the concept of Christian cemetery (understood as the cemetery for all Christians) was built progressively. All graves of Christians were not placed in a holy ground near a church and could have been scattered. Additionally, several historians have proposed that the local populations in Narbonne (certainly in the region) could have accepted a type of protection and may have been allowed to preserve their laws and traditions under Muslim domination. If the funerary discoveries at Nimes do not offer answers to these questions, they support the complexity of the relationship between communities during this period, which cannot be summarized in a simple opposition between Christians and Muslims.

The article, "Early Medieval Muslim Graves in France: First Archaeological, Anthropological and Palaeogenomic Evidence" is available therough *PLOS One*

3-D technology used to safely reveal the diet of medieval children

Biological anthropologists have discovered a new way of examining the fragile teeth of children who lived between the 11th and 15th centuries without damaging them.

Photo of medieval milk teeth from cemetary in Canterbury - Photo courtesy Univesrity of Kent

By using 3D microscopic imaging, researchers from the universities of Kent and Indianapolis have been able to safely reconstruct the diet of children who would were buried at St Gregory's Priory and Cemetery in Canterbury between the 11th and 16th centuries.

The 3D technology -- known as dental microwear texture analysis -- involved measuring microscopic changes in the surface topography of the teeth. This is the first time that this technology has been applied to children's teeth.

By using this technology the researchers were able to learn more about how diet varied among children from poor and wealthy families in medieval Canterbury. Dietary reconstructions from ancient teeth are often destructive, but this technology offers a new way to access this information without damaging fragile teeth.

Among their findings, the study reports:

Results indicate that mixed-feeding in Canterbury could commence by the end of a child's first year. After weaning, and until the age of eight, there was no simple trajectory in the physical properties of the foods that were consumed in the weeks before death. Diet contained abrasives for all age groups. Texture surfaces indicated that, on average, the four to six year olds consumed a diet that included tough foods whilst the eldest children consumed the hardest diet.

The article also notes that a significant change in diet occured for children ages 4 to 6:

A change in diet between age four to six could relate in part to a period in which childhood routines started to change. Greater mobility allowed children to accompany adults outside of their home and into the work place, paradoxically leading to more time spent in adult company. More time in adult company may have given more access to adult dietary staples, such as a meat or vegetable pottage. A greater component of meat in the diet of the Canterbury children might explain the change in microwear, especially if this was a permanent supplement to early childhood foods.

Dr Patrick Mahoney of the University of Kent is a leading expert on dental development of modern human children, and led this study. He expects that applications of this technique will pioneer a new era in anthropological studies, opening up the dietary secrets of ancient children, and our fossil ancestors.

The article, "Deciduous enamel 3D microwear texture analysis as an indicator of childhood diet in medieval Canterbury, England," appears in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*, Vol.66:2 (2016)

The Silk Roads: Questioning the Eurocentric view of history - lecture by Peter Frankopan

The Four Humors

By Sandra Alvarez

Imagine a dating profile that went a little something like this:

"Hi there, I'm an extrovert: outgoing, social, fairly optimistic, courageous and carefree. In terms of looks, I'm a little on the melancholic side. My birthday is in spring and I fall under the zodiac sign of Aries. Looking for someone, ambitious, driven, fiery and choleric to complement my sanguine tendencies. If this sounds like you, send me a message!"

Not likely? Medieval Tinder may have looked a little something like that. Swipe right for choleric, swipe left for melancholic? That was obviously a joke but in the Middle Ages, under the medical theory of Humorism, my temperament would fall under the sanguine category, and my looks would be melancholic (i.e., I'm pale and thin). So what precisely does all that mean? Where did Humorism start and why was it so influential in the Middle Ages?

Drawing of the head of Christ, surrounded by four male figures, identified by captions as personifications of the Four Humours: Melancholic man, with a large purse at his waist, Sanguine man, with a small purse in his hand, Phlegmatic man, in mittens, with a purse at his waist and a staff, and Choleric man, without attributes; each with an inscribed scroll. Photo from British Library Egerton 2572 f. 51v

The medical model of the Four Humors was used for over 2,000 years. It only fell out of favour in the mid-nineteenth century and even then, doctors found it difficult to let go of some of its theories. Today, we are still left with the vestiges of this belief system. How many times have you seen a recipe that recommended using pepper and "warming spices" for a health boost in the winter? Or how about recipes that recommend "cooling foods", like leafy greens and citrus fruit in the summer? Or what about sipping a "dry" red wine? These are throwbacks to bygone days when certain foods corresponded with certain humours, and parts of the body. When you had an imbalance, you changed what you ate and how you carried yourself to re-balance the humors and feel well again.

Hippocratic Humorism

"The Father of Western Medicine", Hipporates (460 - 370 BC), has been credited with being the first physician to actively start using the theory in medical practice. He moved from the divine explanation of diseases to a focus on the human body.

The humors were originally part of the earliest Ancient Greek creation myths. The belief was that the body was built out of, and corresponded to, these cosmic forces and seasons: fire, air, earth, and water, and winter, spring, summer, and fall. Disease was an imbalance of these four humors. This medical diagnosis extended into personality types with the belief that the body fluids affected behaviour:

Sanguine: Optimistic and Social
Choleric: Short tempered and irritable
Melancholic: Analytical and quiet
Phlegmatic: relaxed and peaceful

Each patient had their own, unique combination of humoral composition based on body type, age, gender, birth sign and personality. Depending on the time of year, you ate, dressed and conducted yourself accordingly to ensure that your humors remained balanced. Any deviation from this would inevitably lead to disease.

What were some common beliefs and pieces of advice? Women were believed to be phlegmatic but men were more choleric so if you were male, bathing was more harmful for you than for women because you were dousing your hot, dry, masculine aspects.

Want to lose some weight? According to Hippocrates,

Fat people who want to reduce should take their exercise on an empty stomach and sit down to their food out of breath. They should before eating drink some undiluted wine, not too cold...They should only take one meal a day, go without baths, sleep on hard beds and walk about with as little clothing as possible.

Not exactly something you would find advocated in an issue of Men's Health, but as far as medical history goes, this was considered the standard, go-to advice for weight loss.

A hot, arid summer? Better take care not to eat choleric foods. You were more likely to suffer from a bout of dysentery, fever or diarrhoea, because it was a hot and dry season. Best to stick to cold, wet fare at mealtimes.

Galen and Medieval Medicine

Although the active practice of Humorism began under Hippocrates, the writings of Greek physician Galen (120-216 AD) cemented the theory in medical usage for centuries to come.

If you were sick in the Middle Ages, certain herbs and foods would be suggested to you based your humoral composition to counteract the excessive production of a particular humor. For instance, if you had a fever, which was hot and dry (choleric), you

Choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic temperaments - drawing by Charles Le Brun (1619–1690)

would be given a remedy and foods that were considered cold and wet (phlegmatic).

The Importance of the Four Humors

In early monastic communities, Classical knowledge was being studied, copied and preserved. Monks took their medical knowledge from Galen, and Hippocrates. As a result, Latin translations of the original Greek text, as well as from Arabic and Hebrew, quickly spread across Europe.

In the Middle Ages, there was a strong correlation between being a doctor of the soul and not just of the body. Monastic teaching expounded the idea of spiritual care of the sick being the primary concern. Secular physicians were uncommon, because people believed that the soul was more valuable than the corporeal body. In fact, in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council strictly forbade physicians from prescribing any medicine

that would endanger the soul of the sick. Doctors were servants of God first, medical professionals second. Humoral theory touched on not just the physical, but the person's mental and spiritual condition as well.

Medical knowledge exploded in the eleventh century in the the burgeoning universities like Salerno, Montpellier, Padua, and Paris. Galen's work on the humors, anatomy and medicine, was taught to every future physician in the Middle Ages. If you were going to heal someone, you were going to use this theory.

His teachings were entrenched in medieval culture, however, problems arose in the the thirteenth century when human bodies were regularly dissected. It was clear that something was amiss, but instead of discarding Galen's theories, medieval physicians tried to fit a square peg into a

round hole and make them work.

Post-Medieval

The Elizabethans continued to regulate themselves according to the Four Humors and the astrological position of the planets. By this time, people believed the humours gave off vapours that made their way into the brain, affecting health and personality.

The Four Humors were well known and made their way into entertainment, the same way we make pop culture references in movies, books and theatre now. Both Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Ben Jonson (1572-1637) inserted the humors into their works. Shakespeare inserted them in the *Taming of the Shrew*, and characters like Hamlet, who were deemed quite "melancholic". Ben Jonson propelled the "comedy of humors" into a popular genre with his 1598 plays, *Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*.

In the Georgian period, the ghastly medical practice of blood letting, inducing vomiting, and cupping (applying hot cups to the skin of an ill person) continued, based on the belief that one had to purge the body of excessive fluids to rebalance the humors in order to regain health.

To sum it up, historian Noga Arikha lamented,

Humoral theory functioned well as a general explanatory framework, but diagnosis was not always clear, prognosis not always hopeful, and treatment rarely effective for full recovery.

In spite of this dismal result, when Galen's methods were challenged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, medical students continued to employ his theories on humors for another two and a half centuries. The proverbial 'final nail in the coffin' for Humorism didn't come until 1858 when German pathologist Rudolf Virchow published his book, *Cellular Pathology*. It completely dashed any credibility that remained in the Four Humors.

Traces of the belief can still be found in some of our modern perceptions of food, and natural remedies like homeopathy and alternative medicines, but most of these practices are viewed with scepticism if not derision by the medical community.

Further Reading:

Noga Arikha, ***Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours*** (Harper Collins, 2007)

Sylvia Morris, **Sadness and the four humours in Shakespeare**, *The Shakespeare Blog,*(2014)

Sherwin B. Nuland, **Bad Medicine**, *The New York Times,* July, 8, 2007

Vanishing Plants, Animals, and Places: Britain's Transformation from Roman to Medieval

Most historians of Anglo-Saxon England acknowledge that the country experienced stunning change during the fourth and fifth centuries, as Roman rule ceased to exist over the territory. However, research has usually focused on the political situation. By examining the material culture of the early Anglo-Saxon era, one can gain new insights into just how disruptive this period was.

One of the highlights of last week's Medieval Academy of America's Annual Meeting was the Fellow's Plenary lecture given by Robin Fleming. Her talk, "Vanishing Plants, Animals, and Places: Britain's Transformation from Roman to Medieval" focused on the flora and fauna that was introduced to England by the Romans, and what remained after they left.

There is a wealth of evidence about this topic, including archaeological finds and written sources. Sometimes scattered among riddles, leechbooks or burnt plant remains, Fleming has been able to piece together a fascinating account of the plants and animals that came to Britain around the first century AD, and how it changed the island.

Plants and Animals in Roman Britain

Fleming notes that over fifty plants were introduced to Britain after the Roman Conquest, including apples, cabbage, cherries, leeks, dill, pears and turnips. These foods would quickly become embraced in the local households, and evidence shows that even peasants were cultivating new plants, such as plum and cherry trees, and coriander.

Moreover, while cereal farming was practiced prior to the Romans, the new conquerors were able to greatly expand the production and infrastructure of these farms, to the point that wheat was being exported to other parts of the empire.

The Romans also brought with them new animals, including ones like mules that would help them with agricultural work. But many other creatures were imported to Britain to be added was walking ornaments of the gardens at Roman villas or in the parks to be hunted for sport. These included peacocks, doves, rabbits and fallow deer.

Robin Fleming speaking at the Medieval Academy of America Annual Meeting in Boston

Fleming finds that one of the most important animal introductions by the Romans were chickens. While fowl could be found prior to the first century AD, these birds were viewed as an exotic curiosity. After the conquest, chickens became widespread throughout England, used for food, cockfighting and serving as an important symbol for Roman religious practices.

Other arrivals during the period of Roman Britain were not deliberate. Black rats, cockroaches and species of beetle all reached the island and found opportunities to spread by eating up their share of wheat and other Roman farm goods.

Plants and Animals after Roman Britain

Fleming's talk next dealt with the transition to the Middle Ages, a period which saw many plants and animals disappear. In fact, the collapse of this flora and fauna would be far greater than in any other part of the former Roman Empire. As Roman farms and villas emptied, peacocks, fallow deer, and mules would all go extinct. Moreover dozens of plant species also ceased to be cultivated, although some, such as black walnut, mustard and opium poppy seeds, continued to be grown.

One of the most drastic changes to Britain after the end of Roman rule was how the remaining inhabitants switched from growing their own food to foraging for it. The agricultural infrastructure - barns, mills and granaries - which had taken centuries to develop, would crumble away. Fleming explains that these changes would have affected all peoples in Anglo-Saxon England, as new rhythms for daily life would overwrite old practices, changing not only what people ate, but how they worked with the land.

Some Roman introductions did persist into the Anglo-Saxon period. Fruit trees, including apple, plum, pear and cherry, would continue to be grown and harvested. Chickens, meanwhile, would remain a staple of the medieval farm. However, it would take centuries for many species of plants and animals to return to Britain. Fleming explains that monks and merchants coming from continental Europe would be the first ones to bring seeds and gardening practices back to Anglo-Saxon England, and by ninth and tenth centuries we would see carrots, beets, donkey and even rats flourishing once again.

Robin Fleming is a professor of history at Boston College, and a 2013 MacArthur Fellow. Well known for her work on Anglo-Saxon England, her 2011 book Britain After Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400-1070, is considered one of the leading studies of that period. Click here to view her web page at Boston College.

From Medieval kings to modern politics: the origins of England's North-South divide

By Fiona Edmonds

The medieval world has a powerful hold over our modern imaginations. We continually revisit this murky period of history in fictional frolics such as *Game of Thrones*, and stirring series including *The Last Kingdom*. Echoes of the so-called "dark ages" even carry as far as today's politics – particularly when it comes to **discussions about devolution**.

Indeed, as Westminster **begins to relinquish political powers** to England's newly-formed city regions, **some have claimed** that these territories should be defined by historical precedent, rather than administrative practicalities.

But how close are we to our medieval roots, and are our connections with the past really strong enough to influence modern-day decisions? To find out, we need to take a closer look at what's left of the Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Viking kingdoms of yore.

Ancient Elmet

Perhaps the most obvious links between past and present can be found simply by looking at the names of places on a map. Take, for example, the Leeds city region – one of the first regions to be **granted new powers** over transport and skills development.

This region encompasses the villages, towns and cities between Harrogate in the north, Barnsley in the south, Bradford in the west and York in the east, with Leeds at its heart. But it's not the first time Leeds has been the centre of a regional power base; it was also at the core of the early medieval kingdom of Elmet.

This shadowy kingdom was under the control of Celtic rulers, who spoke a language akin to
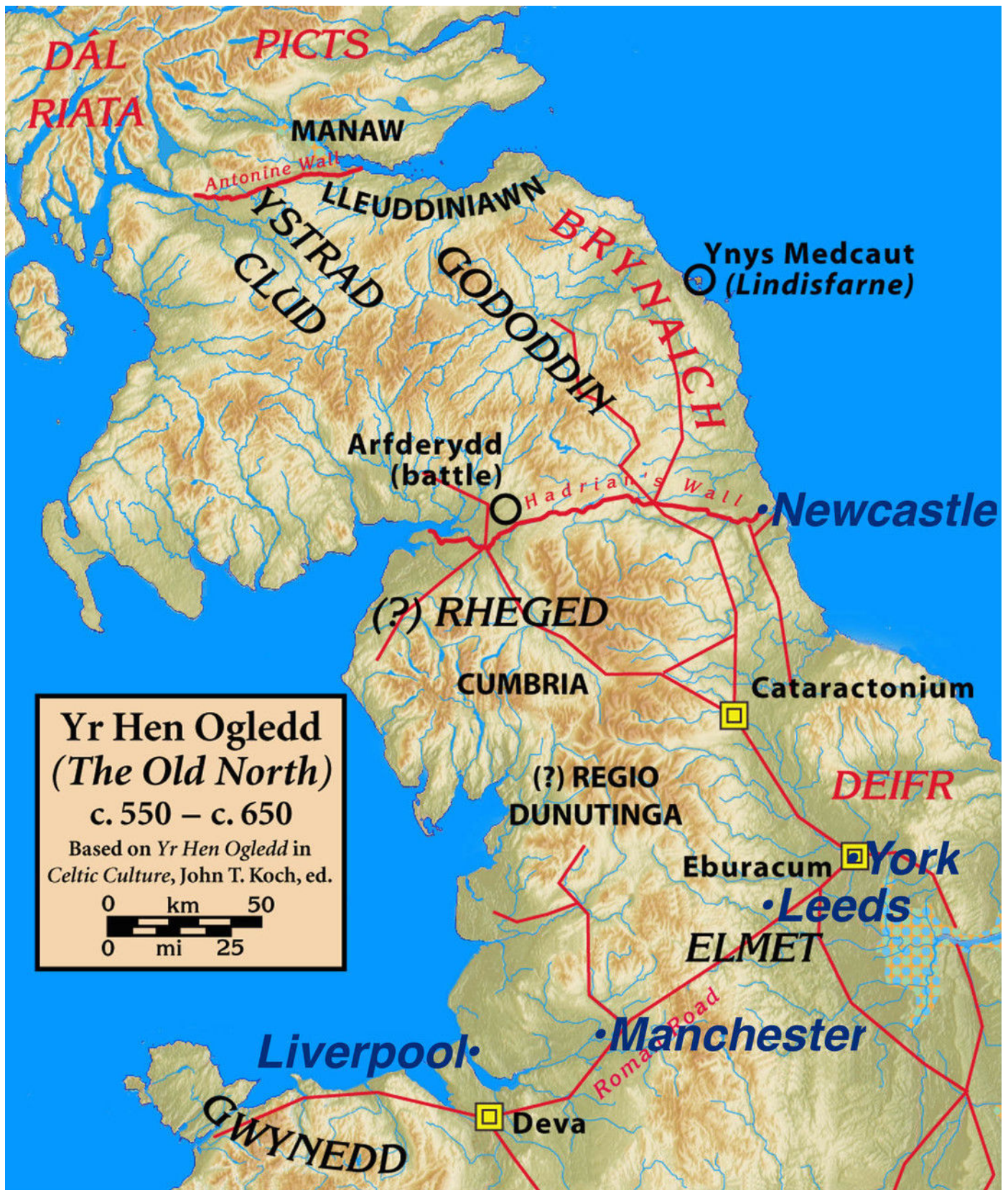
A map of the Old North, based on information from Celtic Culture by John Koch
Image by Notuncurious /Wikimedia commons

Welsh. It was later conquered by Edwin, an Anglo-Saxon king, in the 7th century and became part of his empire. Today, the kingdom is recalled in place names, and the parliamentary constituency of Elmet and Rothwell.

Yet despite these geographical similarities,

this connection is tenuous – the modern Leeds city region also encompasses parts of North Yorkshire that would not have been in Elmet. And it's unlikely that administrators had the medieval kingdom in mind when

they were drawing the boundaries.

Pursuing the past

To find a more convincing connection between modern politics and medieval monarchs, we need to go beyond mere borders and explore cultural, political and genetic links. For instance, the advocates of Yorkshire devolution **trace their heritage** back to medieval times – and even earlier. There's certainly some evidence to support their longstanding connection with the region.

The **People of the British Isles project** analysed the DNA of more than 2,000 people whose grandparents came from the same rural areas. The resulting genetic groups have been compared with **7th-century kingdoms**, indicating some local stability in population over many centuries. What's more, these ancestral links hold cultural and political force: a **recent study** showed how much "Yorkshireness" is still a key element of the identity of those living in the county.

We can trace Yorkshire's political identity back to the days of Edwin, a highly successful Anglo-Saxon king. Edwin belonged to the ruling dynasty of the Deirans, whose power base originally lay in eastern Yorkshire. Edwin expanded into the west of the county and overshadowed his northern Northumbrian neighbours, the Bernicians. He also **established looser control** over other parts of Britain. Not merely a warrior, Edwin was baptised in York and venerated as a saint. After his death, the Deirans lacked a strong champion. They were dominated by their northern neighbours and absorbed into a greater Northumbrian kingdom.

The original Northern Powerhouse

Bordered to the south by the River Humber, the Kingdom of Northumbria encompassed northern England and some parts of southern Scotland. Dating from the 7th century, it is said to be the first concrete instance of the North-South divide: the early medieval writer Bede described **separate spheres of Northumbrian and southern English politics**.

This northern Anglo-Saxon kingdom fragmented during the turbulence of the Viking Age. The core area was gradually incorporated into England, while the northern districts became part of Scotland. Nevertheless, Northumbrian identity evolved into a northern separatism that recurred in later times. This in turn generated a sense of northern cultural difference that is familiar today; "pies and prejudice", **in Stuart Maconie's words**.

But while large kingdoms were liable to disintegrate in turbulent times, local and regional networks have tended to remain relatively stable. They formed the building blocks of larger political units and some, like Yorkshire, went on to become modern-day counties.

A key question for modern politics is how the new devolution deals will complement these deeply-rooted identities. The case of Yorkshire highlights the tension between the new city regions, the old counties and an ancient northern identity. Medieval allegiances could be multi-layered, and encompass local, regional and national loyalties. The same balance is at stake in the **modern devolution agenda**.

Fiona Edmonds is Senior Lecturer in Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, University of Cambridge

Osthryth
Queen of the Mercians

By Susan Abernethy

Osthryth was one of the few women mentioned by the Venerable Bede in his "Ecclesiastical History of the English People". She was born into a time of great strife. There was much tension and bad blood between the ruling houses of the various kingdoms in England before unification, especially between Mercia and Northumbria. It was also the era of the Christianization of the realm and there was conflict between Christians and pagans. She was married to a Mercian king, possibly in the hope of making an alliance.

We don't know when Osthryth was born but she came from royalty. She was a younger daughter of King Oswiu of Northumbria and his queen Eanflaed. She had two elder brothers Ecgfrith and Aelfwine and a sister Aelflaed. Oswiu was the brother of the revered saint King Oswald of Northumbria, whom Bede much admires in his "History". Oswald had been converted to Christianity.

King Oswald had come into conflict with the powerful pagan King Penda of Mercia. In 642, they clashed at the Battle of Maserfield where Oswald was killed and his body dismembered. Bede tells us that Oswald ended his life praying for the souls of his soldiers when he realized he was about to die. Upon his death, his brother Oswiu became king of the Bernicians as a vassal of King Penda of Mercia. In 655, Oswiu defeated and killed Penda at the Battle of Winwaed. Oswiu ended up dominating much of Britain until a revolt in Mercia established Penda's son Wulfhere as their king. When Oswiu died in 670, Osthryth's brother Ecgfrith succeeded his father as king.

When Wulfhere of Mercia died in 676, he was succeeded by his younger brother Aethelred. Somewhere during this time Osthryth

The kingdoms of England and Wales in the late 7th century - image by Hel-hama / Wikimedia Commons

Susan Abernethy is the writer of The Freelance History Writer and a contributor to Saints, Sisters, and Sluts. You can follow Susan on Twitter @SusanAbernethy2

married Aethelred. Aethelred may have been surprised by his succession to the throne of Mercia. He was the third son of Penda and most likely would have devoted himself to the church since he proved to be a pious and devout man. Osthryth and Aethelred were zealous in the promotion of Christianity in Mercia. The monastic house of Bardney in Lindsey was heavily endowed by the couple.

Bede tells us a story about Osthryth and the relics of her uncle King Oswald. Osthryth's father had retrieved Oswald's remains about a year after he died in battle. Sometime after 681, Osthryth wanted to translate the revered saint's relics and place them in her favorite abbey at Bardney. The Mercian monks of Bardney were sensitive and retained an aversion to the prior attempts by the Northumbrian kings to dominate them and refused to accept the bones of the saint even though they knew he was a holy man.

The carriage with the relics was stopped at the abbey gate in the evening and covered with a tent. During the night a shining pillar of light appeared over the carriage that shone up into the sky, bright enough to be seen throughout the kingdom of Lindsey. This proved the sanctity of the slain king. The monks who had refused the bones the day before began to pray that they be deposited among them and accepted them into the abbey. The bones were washed and placed in a sacred place. The water used to wash the bones was poured into the dirt in a corner of the sanctuary. Bede tells us later Queen Osthryth met with a holy abbess named Aethelhild and gave her some of this soil. Aethelhild took the holy soil back to her abbey and used it during an exorcism of a possessed man, curing him of his demons.

Despite the alliance of Osthryth and Aethelred, the two kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia were in perpetual war against each other. Aethelred continued the feud by warring against Osthryth's brother Ecgfrith, who was defeated at the battle of the Trent in 679. Osthryth's brother Aelfwine was killed in this battle. Bede tells us Aelfwine was beloved in both kingdoms and there was so much grief over his death it nearly resulted in a blood feud between the Mercian and Northumbrian royal families. Peace was only reached with the intervention and mediation of Archbishop Theodore and appropriate compensation was paid.

Sometime before 697, it seems Osthryth had retired to her favorite monastery at Bardney and become a nun and Aethelred had married another woman. In a most unfortunate event, Osthryth was murdered by Mercian noblemen that same year. The reason for the murder is not divulged in the chronicles. The most likely explanation is a blood feud related to her involvement in the killing of her sister's husband King Peada of southern Mercia in 646. Osthryth was buried at Bardney. In 704, Aethelred abdicated this throne to his nephew Coenred and retired to Bardney where he was shorn as a monk, became an abbot and died in 716. It is unclear whether Aethelred's son named Ceolred was born to Osthryth or his second unnamed wife. Ceolred succeeded his cousin Coenred when he died in 709.

Further Reading:

Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, edited by Judith McClure and Roger Collins

The Kings & Queens of Anglo-Saxon England, by Timothy Venning,

British Kings and Queens, by Mike Ashley

Who gave King Arthur "a crippling blow"?

One of the key figures associated with the Middle Ages in England has been King Arthur, the legendary ruler who was made popular in medieval romances and chronicles. But Henrietta Leyser argues that the Arthurian legend declined sharply in the later Middle Ages, replaced by a new hero emerged for the English people – St.George the Dragonslayer

.Leyser, Emeritus Fellow at the University of Oxford, spoke at the University of Toronto in 2012 when she served as a Distinguished Visiting Scholar. Her paper "Why Arthur is Never Enough: Identity Myths and Crises in the English Middle Ages", examines the role of Arthur during the High and Later Middle Ages, from the accounts by Geoffrey of Monmouth to Henry VIII, who reportedly hated the idea of King Arthur. In it she asks, "Why did the legend of Arthur tarnish?"

Leyser notes that with the Norman Conquest, a new form of kingship was imposed on the English people. William I, for example, made far-reaching changes to solidify his regime-change, but at the same time showed less interest in England than in his own native Normandy. Lesyer says that for William, "England was a source of revenue, no more, no less."

Although subsequent monarchs were somewhat better on establishing positive relations with their English subjects, the murder of Thomas Becket in 1170 quickly led to the growth of his saintly cult and restarted pro-English views that had largely laid underground for the previous decades. Leyser makes a point of noting that it is "hard to find any English king who inspired affection," and while countries like France

Detail of a miniature of the death of Arthur - from British Libary Royal 14 E V f. 439v

produced hagiographies for some of their rulers, this did not exist in England.

Leyser argues that it was also during this period that as the story of King Arthur became popularized by writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, he began to be seen as the ideal king, who would return and right all the wrongs imposed on the English people – and that these wrongs often were committed by the present-day kings. For Leyser, nationalist sentiment emerged in opposition to the crown, with King Arthur one of the main representatives of these views.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that many English monarchs were lukewarm to depicting themselves as a new Arthur, and it was during the reign of Edward III that another

English hero was given more prominence – St.George, a soldier from late antiquity who became the focus of several hagiographic legends. King Edward did much boost the figure of St.George, as well as that of the Virgin Mary. He tied the fortunes of the Plantagenet family to these two saints, and used their cults to promote his own rule.

Leyser concludes by noting that by the late Middle Ages it was St.George who became the leading symbol of the English nation, giving "a crippling blow on Arthur, from which he never recovered."

Infertility in the Middle Ages

By Danièle Cybulskie

For medieval people, success meant succession. Heredity was at the centre of law and order, from the king down through the ranks of society. As a result, the moment children reached marriageable age – and sometimes even before that – everyone's focus was on their fertility.

While begetting legitimate heirs was of paramount importance, infertility was not a good enough reason to get an annulment under church law. Couples who were having trouble having children – especially male children – would have to do their best to solve the problem, or find another reason to annul or otherwise end their marriages (I'm looking at you, Henry VIII).

Contrary to modern opinion, if a couple was infertile, it was not always believed to be the woman's fault. However, because of cultural rules which prevented women from having children with anyone but their spouses (they may have had premarital sex on the sly, but they certainly were not permitted to have children that way and retain their honour), it wasn't possible to tell if a woman was fertile before she was married. By the time a man married, on the other hand, he might have already had the chance to prove his fertility by fathering illegitimate children. For this reason, it was easier to point fingers at the woman (still looking at you, Henry).

So, what to do if you couldn't get pregnant? The first, simplest, and most private solution was prayer. Naturally, prayer for fertility was common, and women frequently petitioned St. Anne, patron saint of the infertile (Geaman, p.4). If the couple felt as if their prayers were not being heard, they could also go on a pilgrimage, together or separately, to a holy site associated with fertility, such as St. Thomas Cantelupe's shrine (Gilchrist, p.134) or one of the many sites associated with the Virgin Mary or St. Anne. Pilgrims could take home blessed badges and souvenirs from these journeys to help them. Secular amulets and badges were also a popular way to put a focus on fertility (Gilchrist, p.101), and featured animals and wildmen known for their lusty ways.

In conjunction with their prayers, couples had the option of seeking medical treatment. The twelfth-century medical collection *The*

Portrait of a Lady, by Sandro Botticelli, circa 1475

Trotula suggests ensuring that both of the couples' weight is correct first, a wise idea since both malnutrition and obesity do have a strong **effect on fertility**. Sweating out the fat is suggested for both women and men with baths or hot sand, not through exercise (pp.91-92). Once that is settled, the author offers a simple test to diagnose whether the man or the woman is the one who is infertile: mix the man's urine with wheat bran in one pot and the woman's urine with bran in another pot. After nine or ten days, whoever's urine is smelly and full of worms is the problem (See? Simple. pp.76-77). If it is the man who is the problem, *The Trotula* provides suggestions to help aid desire, as well as listing "substances which augment and generate seed, such as onions, parsnip, and similar things" (p.87). If it is the woman who is infertile, more intervention is required.

Like many other medieval thinkers, *The Trotula*'s author is convinced that troubles with conception are based on hot/cold and wet/dry conditions. To figure out the temperament of a woman's womb, the woman is instructed to soak a small cloth attached to a string with "pennyroyal or laurel or another hot oil" (p.89) – that is, oil that is considered "hot", not burning oil – and insert it into the vagina, tying the string around her leg, and going to sleep. If in the morning, the cloth has come out, the woman's body is too hot; if it has not, the woman's body is too cold, the theory being that things that are too similar repel one another (p.89). Once her natural state is established, the author recommends fumigating the woman with herbs of the opposite "temperature": one who is hot should use "marsh mallows, violets, and roses in water" (p.89); one who is cold should use "clove, spikenard, calamite storax, and nutmeg" (p.89). In her article "**Anne of Bohemia and Her Struggle to Conceive**", Kristen L. Geaman suggests that the amount of these and other herbs found in receipts for Anne of Bohemia (Richard II's queen) strongly implies that remedies such as the ones found in *The Trotula* were put into practice, even by queens. This makes sense, given that a queen would have more invested in her ability to beget heirs than pretty much anyone else in the kingdom.

Sadly, unlike other medieval medical treatments that **actually did work**, these herbal infertility treatments were unsuccessful for Anne, and for pretty much everyone else. Medieval people considered infertility to be permanent, although this did not stop them from doing all they could to reverse it.

There is a whole lot more to say on medieval fertility, including more helpful recipes, so if you're interested, start with Kristen L. Geaman's "Anne of Bohemia and Her Struggle to Conceive" and Monica Green's hugely informative edition of **The Trotula** – a worthwhile read for everyone.

You can follow Danièle Cybulskie on Twitter **@5MinMedievalist**

London: A Travel Guide Through Time

By Matthew Green

Penguin Books, 2015
ISBN: 9780718179762

Reviewed by Sandra Alvarez

Bear baiting, jousts, plague, Victorian porn, bombs and coffeehouses? What do these things have in common? They're pivotal pieces of London's history. Dr. Matthew Green, historian, **consummate tour guide**, and Londoner, has neatly compiled a time traveller's guide that brings over six hundred years of London's history to life in the pages of his book, *London: A Travel Guide Through Time.*

The book is a comprehensive, clever, and enjoyable ride through London's colourful history; definitely not your tired, staid, run-of-the mill travel guide. Part guidebook, part history text, and part spectacular fiction, the writing is evocative and witty. The book hops back and forth through several of the most important periods in London's storied past: Medieval, Shakespearean/Stuart, Georgian, Victorian, and post-War, all narrated by a light-hearted, omnipresent tour guide, giving us a first hand account of daily life from the eyes of London's inhabitants. Green is a superb storyteller. He is able to bring the spirit of each age alive and truly transport the reader back in time. You can easily picture yourself leaving the chaotic confines of bustling modern London, touching a post, and suddenly and landing beside a plague pit in 1665.
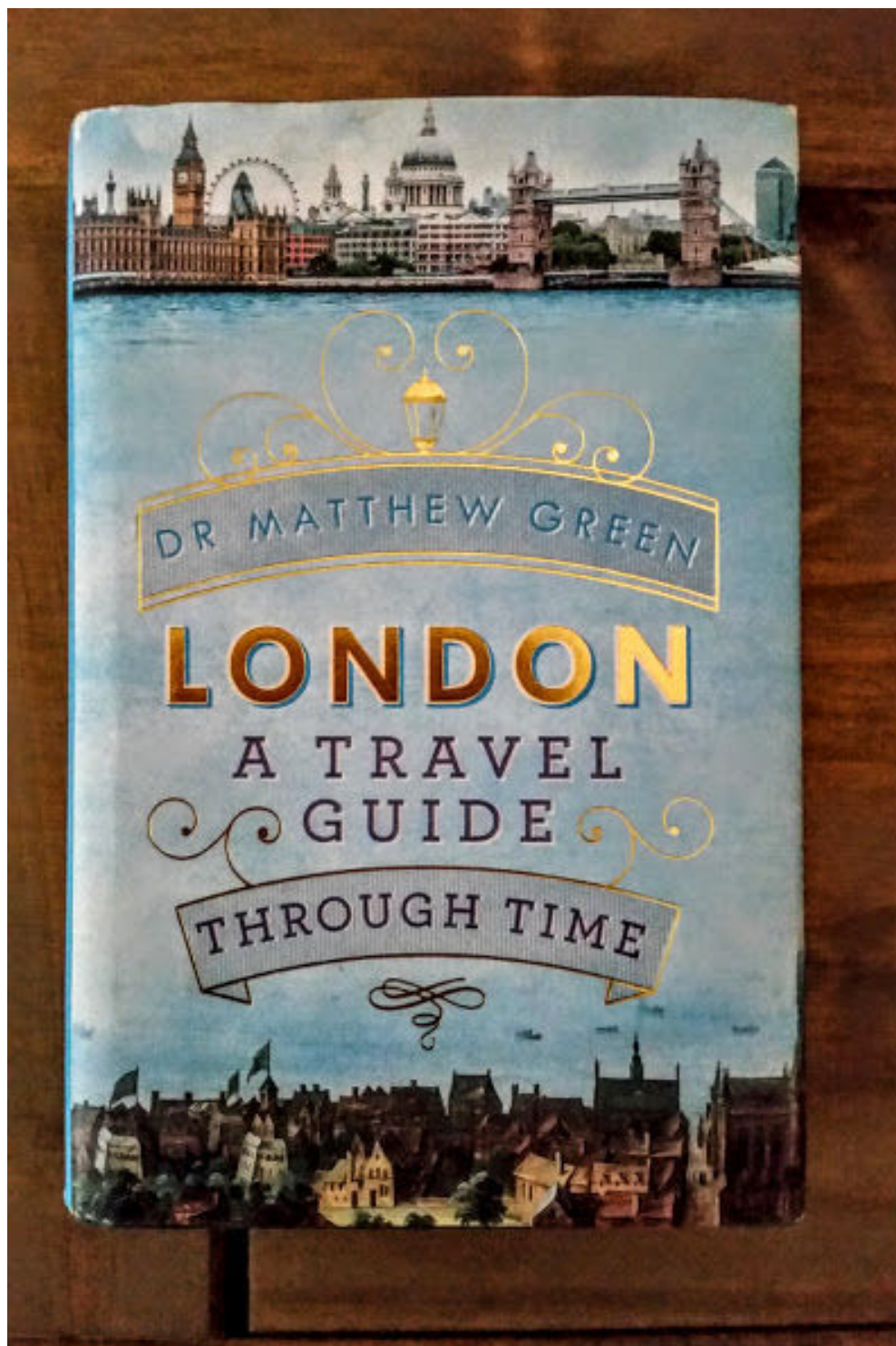
Almost immediately, the city feels still. In front of you is a garish five-storey orange-and-beige new build...At thigh-level, a gleaming horizontal pole spews from a shabby looking shed to bar your way... Put your hands on the cold bar. Now close your eyes. The wind is blowing in your face. You hear a shovel slicing the earth. Torches hiss. People sob gently... You open your eyes. In front of you, where the car park was, is a vast, wide hole, gouged into open fields...The air is laden with the stink of death. You take a few steps forwards and peer into the pit. It is a mass grave.

(pp.161-162, 1665: A Walk Through Plague Struck London)

One of the things I liked about the book was the fact that it was not set in chronological order, Green jumps back and forth through time. You don't know what period you will land in next, and it really does't matter; it makes it far more interesting not going century by century, and more like a time travelling trip than a history textbook.

Favourite periods? I of course loved the medieval chapter, that goes without saying. Anchorites, curfews, criminals seeking sanctuary in churches, and seedy brothels in Cheapside. However, I also loved Stuart London with it's plague, fire, and chocolate drinking, and Georgian London because I'm a coffee lover and fascinated by this history of how the drink came to be so popular. It's difficult to pick a favourite because each chapter is equally good.

London: A Travel Guide Through Time makes urban history fun, learning memorable, and filled me with a new found respect for the city I now call home. If you're an ex-pat, like me, London holds so many wondrous things that you don't realize are there; you hurry along and bypass them every day without thinking twice. This book made me stop and take notice of the little things around me in the city that I didn't see before. Green pulls fascinating tidbits out of the shadows and shows readers a side to London that's more than the just Big Ben and Buckingham Palace of so many typical tours.

Green also challenges readers to rethink their perception of history, but in reverse. Knowing what we learned of the past, how does it shape how we see ourselves and the London of today?
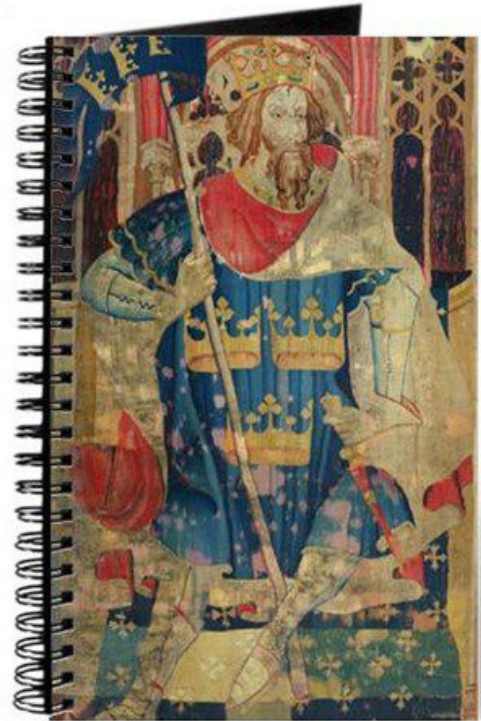
> *Is it something of a commonplace to accuse historians of allowing present-day experiences and concerns to shape their perceptions of the past. But in your case, it's the other way around: your time in the past may well affect how you perceive the present-day city...Lament the dreary anonymity of Starbucks compared with the conviviality and companionship of an eighteenth-century coffeehouse...Savour London's nightlife even as the memory of the strict medieval curfew hangs over you...Buy yourself a hawk. Start a jelly house. Think of reality television as modern day Bedlam...* (p.448)

It's the small, intimate details of the city he knows so well that make this such an enchanting read. Green is able to connect our present with the past in meaningful and captivating ways. It was such an engaging book, that I was loathe to put down at night.

Whether you are new to London, a born-and-bred Londoner looking to to rekindle your connection with your city, or a visitor planning to enjoy a trip here, this book is for you. It gave me a new appreciation of this wondrous city, and I'm sure it will do the same for you. Happy Time Travels!

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