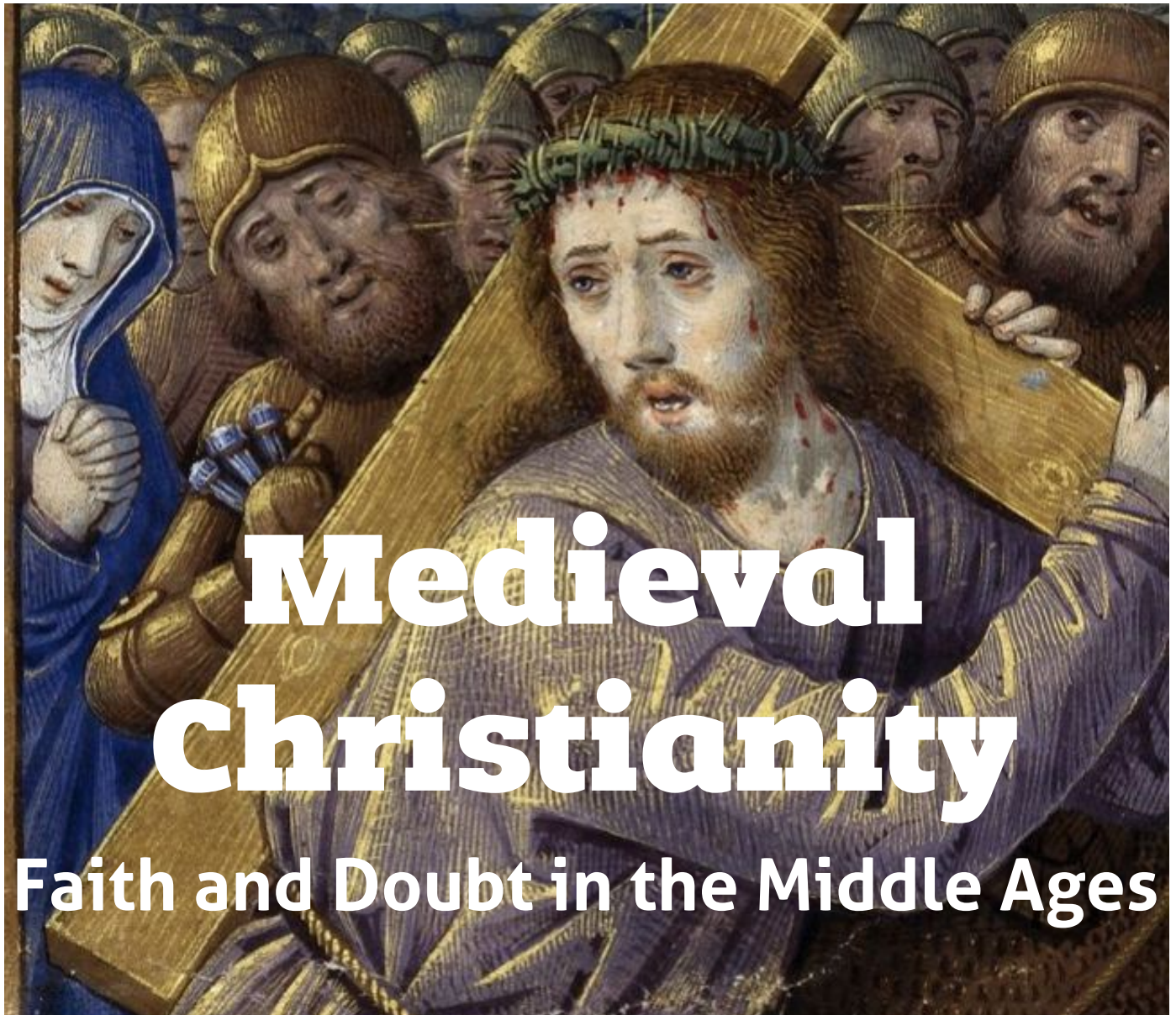


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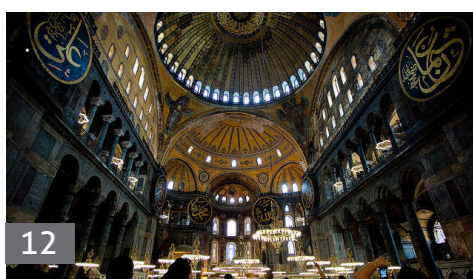
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House of the Dead: The Rothwell Charnel Chapel

Visiting the remains of 1500 skeletons under a church in Northamptonshire.



How Hagia Sophia was Built

The story of how the famous Byzantine church was built, according to a 10th century account.



Did Any Medieval Christians Doubt their Faith?

Blasphemy and disbelief uncovered by the Spanish Inquisition.



Edinburgh Castle

Our series on ten castles that changed medieval Britain continues with this Scottish fortress.

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Cover Photo: British Library - Harley
2877 f. 44v Christ carrying the
cross

Free online course on the Battle of Agincourt begins in



One of the leading experts on the famous Battle of Agincourt will be part of a free online course that begins on October 19th.

The University of Southampton is teaming up with FutureLearn to create Agincourt 1415: Myth and Reality, a special two-week course that will explore the battle, which is marking its 600th anniversary on October 25th. The course will be led by Professor Anne Curry, who is the foremost expert on the battle.

FutureLearn explains about the course:

With Anne, you will learn about the preparations for the battle and its context within the Hundred Years' War between England and France. You will consider the legitimacy of Henry V's claim to the French throne and whether his actions in going to battle were justified.

Using original archive documents, you will also learn more about the soldiers who met on the field of battle. Who was in the English army and what was it like to be a medieval soldier? Which places in England have significance for the battle? Where was the

army recruited from and could YOUR ancestor have taken part in the battle?

You will then learn about what happened during the battle itself, and examine how myths about the battle have built up over subsequent years. Dan Spencer, one of Anne's PhD researchers, will examine the kinds of guns and other weaponry which could be found on the medieval battlefield. He will explore how and why the longbow was used at Agincourt with such devastating effect.

Finally, we will visit the battlefield itself, to examine what remains at Agincourt today. You will learn about the modern site of the battle and how scientific historical research can transform our understanding of an event which took place 600 years ago. The course will coincide with the anniversary of the battle and will feature contributions from a range of experts on Agincourt.

To sign up for this free course, please visit FutureLearn.

13th century insult discovered etched into the walls of Nidaros Cathedral

What's being called "the world's oldest gay graffiti" has been discovered scratched into the walls of Nidaros Cathedral in the Norwegian city of Trondheim.



Graffiti at Nidaros Cathedral - Photo ThorNews / Twitter

Earlier this month **Dagbladet News** reported the discovery by local historian Terje Bratberg, who found the Latin inscription LAURENSIUS CELVI ANUS PETRI along the southern wall of the medieval church. Translated into English, it means "Lars is Peter's butt."

Bratberg believes that the inscription was made around the year 1290, during a dispute between the local clergy at the cathedral and Jorund, who was the Archbishop of Nidaros from 1288 to 1309. The archbishop had sent one of his followers, a man named Lars Kalvssøn to Nidaros, to deliver a message

excommunicating the local clergy. The locals responded by attacking Lars, stripping him naked, whipping him and throwing snowballs at him until he was rescued by soldiers loyal to the archbishop.

The Peter mentioned in the inscription might refer to Peter of Husabø, a Norwegian noble and supporter of the archbishop.

Bratberg adds that "the message is clear, but whether it is a reference to a love affair between two women—or it was meant to publicly ridicule them. I choose to believe that it's about love."

House of the Dead: The Rothwell Charnel Chapel

By Sandra Alvarez

Death, and rituals surrounding the dead have frightened and fascinated people for centuries. How did medieval people remember their dead? What did they believe happened when a person died? How did their commemoration differ from our modern conception of grief and remembrance? The Rothwell Charnel Chapel and Ossuary Project seeks to answer these questions, in addition to offering the public a glimpse of one of only two surviving "in situ" charnel houses in England.





Skeletal Remains kept at the Rothwell Charnel Chapel - photos by Sandra Alvarez

Tucked away about an hour's train ride outside London, is the quiet town of Rothwell, in Kettering, Northamptonshire. People have lived in Rothwell since the Bronze Age, and the name 'Rothwell' comes from the Danish *Rodewell*, meaning, '*place of the red well*'. It has a long history and proud residents. Located in this former medieval market town is Holy Trinity Church, a Grade I listed building that dates to the early 12th century. Most of the building you see standing today dates to the 13th century and houses an interesting collection of medieval objects; several well preserved 14th century misericords, two beautiful 13th century grave coverings that were discovered in a

restoration effort in 1981, and most famously, a charnel house.

A charnel house, also known as an ossuary, and by the informal term, "bone house", is a place where the bones of the deceased are kept; but they were not solely storage houses or, like Paris's Catacombs, for overflowing cemeteries. Charnel houses were an active part of medieval religious life and helped people remember their dead. Remembrance of the dead was a vital feature of medieval religious belief. For this reason, charnel chapels were attached to a religious house; either a monastery, Cathedral, church or hospital and located within the confines of a



Holy Trinity Church in Rothwell, in Kettering, Northamptonshire

of a cemetery. They often had windows so that people could see into them, and also see what was inside when they were visiting below. Charnel houses were often prominently situated in churches close to the main entrance and made easily accessible to the lay public and visiting pilgrims.

In England, they were primarily built between the 13th - 16th centuries, either below the church or as a free-standing separate chapel building, with a subterranean charnel house. The increase in

charnel houses during this period can be linked to the changes in religious beliefs; in 1254, Pope Innocent IV decreed that Purgatory was an actual place, heightening the need to assist people in spending a shorter amount of time there. Prayer was believed to be a good means of bringing people out of Purgatory quickly. Charnel houses offered spaces where people could pray for the deceased and assist them on their journey, while at the same time benefiting their own souls.

The Visit: Rothwell's Charnel Chapel

I queued for about 15 minutes with other curious locals to see how Rothwell's dead have been housed for the past 765 years. Having been to Paris this past February, and having visited the Catacombs, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. After a flight of narrow steps, I entered a cool, dimly lit, tiny room. This was a far cry from the sprawling 2km stretch of bones in Paris, nonetheless, the size didn't diminish its effect. Skulls neatly aligned the walls and taking up much of the centre of the room were 2 large wooden boxes that held the bones of 1,500 souls. These boxes were built in 1910, but in the Middle Ages, the centre would have been an open space allowing for people to interact and move freely about the room.

I'm a bit of an odd man out in that I find these spaces fascinating. I wasn't sad or afraid being there; many people feel an overwhelming sense of sadness, dread, or rising panic in cemeteries and crypts, on the contrary, I'm riveted. As I peered closely at a skull, I thought: Who were you? What did you look like? How did you spend your days, and how did you end up here?

The Story of the Medieval Dead

Archeologist Jennifer Crangle has devoted extensive time and effort into uncovering the story behind England's charnel houses. Having always been interested in funerary practices, she felt this area of funerary archaeology had been severely neglected "I've always been interested in the archaeology of religion, even when I was a kid, and I always wondered where certain practises originated and how they evolved. So it was kind of inevitable that I would spend my career in this discipline".

Crangle got her start studying Neanderthals and hominid burials, "I have always been interested in funerary archaeology, even

before I started focusing on the medieval period. I was initially mainly interested in studying prehistory, and did my undergraduate dissertation (UCC, Ireland) and first MA dissertation (Reading University) on Neanderthals and the origins of hominids burying their dead, and other funerary activities. Then when studying my MSc in osteology (Bournemouth University) I became interested again in the medieval period and their funerary practises."

Crangle first worked on St. Leonard's Church in Hythe (the other "in situ" charnel house in the whole of the UK) which rekindled her interest in medieval funerary practices. She then moved to Sheffield to further immerse herself in researching everything medieval people did with their dead. What was once a chapter in her thesis, has now become an entire dissertation, conservation project and labour of love.

What Did Medieval People Believe About Death?

There has been a long standing opinion that ossuaries were not part of medieval burial practices. Crangle debunked this as a post-Reformation concept; in fact, her research uncovered the remnants of another 60 charnel houses in England, firmly quashing the idea that charnel houses were not used in the Middle Ages. They disappeared during the Dissolution, and for some unknown reason, Rothwell was spared and its charnel house remains remarkably intact. Crangle also dispelled the notion that cemeteries were evil places; medieval people didn't think that way. Locals and pilgrims visited cemeteries and places like Rothwell on a regular basis. Ossuaries were revered and great care was taken in the way people interacted with their deceased loved ones. There was a community feeling in the care of the dead. A charnel house like Rothwell's was a huge comfort to medieval people.



Moving to the Charnel Chapel: The Process Charnel House?

To prepare their loved ones for the eventual translation to the charnel house, the body was interred for one year. In the Middle Ages, there was a strong superstition that 'flesh burials' should not be tampered with or disturbed. Pope Boniface VIII decreed in 1299 that 'one should not usurp the body'. Medieval people believed that blood contaminated consecrated ground and that while the flesh remained on a body, that the soul lingered within it and retained a sort of 'sentience'. After one year, when the body was completely devoid of its flesh, an anniversary Mass was given which often could be more elaborate than the initial funeral. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to indicate if there was a special means of translating the bones once they were destined for the charnel house. Moving them was an expensive endeavour so not everyone could afford to move their loved ones into an ossuary.

Rothwell's Rumour Mill: Who Is Buried in the

The Rothwell Charnel Chapel was built in 1250 but there are potentially bones in it that predate this period. It's difficult to tell precisely who is buried there; one of the constraints in being able to answer that question is cost: It costs £300 (\$460USD) per sample for radio carbon dating; with 1,500 people in this crypt, it quickly becomes extortionate.

There have been several rumors swirling about Rothwell's charnel inhabitants. One rumour suggests that they come from a nearby battleground, the decisive battle of the First English Civil War, the Battle of Naseby (June 14, 1645), but there were no injury markings on the remains to confirm that story. Another problem with this tale are the logistics: The battle occurred 8 miles (12km) away from the church. People who died in battle, stayed on the battlefield. The army would not have the time or resources to transport the dead such a great distance to be placed in a charnel



transport the dead such a great distance to be placed in a charnel house.

There is also a wild story is floating around that the remains belonged to long slaughtered Vikings. Crangle stamped out those rumours quickly saying that archeological evidence can prove the crypt inhabitants were most certainly English, not Scandinavian.

Lastly, there is a rumour that these were victims of the Black Death. Plague victims were buried in consecrated ground. Some may have been Plague victims, but the evidence doesn't indicate that these were Plague pit remains. Crangle suggested that Rothwell's charnel occupants were potentially locals who died of normal causes, like old age and regular diseases, not from battles, Viking raids, or deadly plagues.

The Future of Rothwell

Crangle plans to delve further into research at Rothwell, as well as exploring the 60 other

chapels she's discovered throughout the UK, and several other international sites, "The Rothwell Project will hopefully continue for many years, but we are looking at the international ossuaries/charnel houses/curation of the dead in the same manner to expand our research area."

The Rothwell Charnel Chapel and Ossuary Project, which kicked off in 2012, is a vast undertaking between the University of Sheffield and Rothwell Holy Trinity Church. Crangle and her research team hope to uncover the age, sex, pathology and ancestry of the charnel's inhabitants, as well as prevent further damage to the bones. They would also like to preserve the site in line with what it was intended for when it was built in the Middle Ages, as a place of pilgrimage, reflection and education for the community. Lastly, they would like to invite the local community and the public to visit the charnel chapel, increasing awareness of the site, and understanding its purpose and significance in funerary archaeology.

How Hagia Sophia was Built

Hagia Sophia is one of the greatest construction works of the Middle Ages – it was built during the reign of Justinian the Great back in the sixth-century. One of the most fascinating accounts of how it was completed comes from the *Patria*, a tenth-century collection of stories and legends about Constantinople.

The *Patria* is an anonymous account that kind of reads like a travel guide to the capital of Byzantium. It contains stories about the churches, buildings and other monuments in Constantinople. Albrecht Berger, who recently completed a translation of this work, commented that it “presents a more or less complete and coherent picture of the city as it was in the middle Byzantine period. Despite its notorious historical inexactness and occasional sully anecdotes, and the fact that it was composed as a piece of light popular fiction rather than as a handbook about the city as it was in the late tenth century, the *Patria* is still the most complete source about the monuments of the city that has come down to us.”

The fourth and final book of the *Patria* contains an account of how Hagia Sophia was built. While historians should be wary about trusting if these stories are true, it does offer an entertaining look at what, centuries later, the Byzantines believed to be how the construction of the church took place.

This building was the third church to be built at this location. The second church, which was only about a hundred years old, was a victim of the Nika Revolt that took place in January of 532, and was burned to the ground in the riots. A few weeks later, Emperor Justinian decided to rebuild an even bigger church. As the *Patria* states, “God inspired him to build a church such as had never been built since Adam’s time.”



Interior of Hagia Sophia - Photo by Esther Lee / Flickr

The Byzantine government soon began making plans for the new building, with Justinian sending out orders to all the corners of his empire:

wrote to all his generals, satraps, judges and the tax officials of the themes that they all should search for columns, revetments, parapets, slabs, chancel barriers and doors and all the other materials which are need to build the church. All those who had received his order sent materials, from pagan temples and from old baths and houses, to the emperor Justinian by rafts, from all themes of the east and west, north and south, and from all islands.

In order to make a larger church, they had to buy the nearby properties. In one case a widow named Anna would not sell her houses until the Emperor came to see her in person.

Anna then revealed she would give up the properties if she could be buried in the church, which was granted. Another house was owned by man named Antiochos, but he refused to sell it. One of the emperor's officials then had the man thrown in prison just before the horse races were to start at the Hippodrome. Antiochos was a great lover of the races, and on the day they were to begin, his defiance ended and he shouted from his jail cell: "Let me see the Hippodrome games, I will do the will of the emperor." He was brought to Justinian and made the sale before taking his seat at the games.

The Patria also tells of how the sale by a eunuch named Chariton Chenopoulos:

When he wanted to sell his houses, he asked the emperor not only to give him double the price for his abode, but also to let him

let him be honored and venerated by the four charioteers when the Hippodrome games are being held. The emperor gave these instructions, but made him a perpetual object of ridicule, for he ordered that his statue should be set up in perpetuity, on the day when the Hippodrome games were performed, in the middle of the starting boxes, and this backside should be mockingly revered by the charioteers before mounting their chariots. This has lasted to this day, and he is called the ruler of underworld.

As the land was being bought up, construction work began:

There were a hundred master craftsmen, and each of them had a hundred men, so that all together there were ten thousand. Fifty masters with their crews were building the right-hand side, and the other fifty were likewise building the left-hand side, so that the work would proceed quickly, in competition and haste.

One story involves the fourteen-year old son of Ignatios, the chief builder, who was left behind to watch over the construction workers' tools while the men went out to eat breakfast.

When the boys sat down, a eunuch appeared to him clad in a shining robe, and with a beautiful face, as if he had been sent from the palace, and said to the boy, "Why do the workers not complete the work of God quickly, but have abandoned it and gone away to eat?" The boy said, "My lord, they will be back soon." When he said again, "Go and talk to them, for I am anxious for the work to be finished quickly," and the boy told him that he would not leave lest all the tools disappear, the eunuch said, "Go quickly and summon them to come quickly, and I swear to you thus, my child: by the Holy Wisdom, the Word of God, which is now being built, I will not leave here—for I have been assigned to this place

by the Word of God to work and to keep watch -, until you return." When the boy heard this, he ran off, leaving the angel of the Lord to keep watch over the building site for the gallery. When the boy came down, he found his father, the master builder, together with the others and explained everything. And his father took him to the emperor's breakfast, for the emperor was eating there in the chapel of Saint John the Forerunner at the clock house. The emperor heard the boy's words and summoned all the eunuchs, and showed the boy each of them, saying, "Isn't it this one?" When the boy declared that none of them looked like the eunuch he had seen in the church, the emperor understood that he was an angel of the Lord, and this his word and oath were true. When the boy said that the eunuch was dressed in white and his cheeks sent out fire and his face was completely transformed, the emperor praised God greatly and said, "God is pleased with this work," and "I was in great anxiety as to what name I should give the church," and since then the church received the name 'Holy Wisdom [Hagia Sophia]', which is understood to be the Word of God. And having considered the matter, the emperor said, "The boy is not to return to the construction site, so that the angel may be forever on guard, as he has sworn. For if the boy returns and is found in the building, then the angel of the Lord will leave."

The boy was made rich and sent into exile to Cycladic islands, and never returned to the church. The Patria also has other stories involving angels bringing money to help pay for the construction, and even asking the master builder to make small changes to his design.

The emperor was also heavily involved in the construction of Hagia Sophia, spending a vast amount of money. For example, Justinian had gold, silver, pearls and precious stones mixed into the materials that made the High Altar,

stones mixed into the materials that made the High Altar, so that when someone looked on it, "it appears sometimes as gold, in other places as silver, elsewhere gleaming with sapphire – radiating and, in a world, sending out seventy-two colors according to the nature of the stones, pearls and all the metals."

The text notes the many things he provided for the church, ranging from three hundred golden lamps weighing forty pounds each, to giving it twenty-four Gospel books. Justinian even wanted to make the whole floor out of pure silver, but his advisors convinced him that if he did, the poor would steal it.

The *Patria* adds:

He also made twelve waterspouts and stone lions around the fountain house spouting water for the ablutions of the common people. On the right-hand side of the women's section on the right he made a pool in which the water was one span deep, and a walkway, so that the priests could walk over the pool. Facing the pool he set up a cistern of rainwater, and he carved twelve lions, twelve leopards, twelve deer, eagles and hares, calves and crows, twelve each. Out of their throats water was spouted by means of a device for the ablution of the priests alone. He called this place 'the Little Lion', and constructed the changing room there, a beautiful chamber covered with gold, so that, whenever he went to the church, he could rest there.

It took over five years to finish building Hagia Sophia (the *Patria* incorrectly states it took sixteen years to be completed). The opening day ceremonies included an imperial procession from the palace to the church, with the emperor arriving by a chariot drawn by four horses. Justinian made an offering of 1000 oxen, 6000 sheep, 600 deer, 1000 boars, 10,000 chickens and another 10,000

roosters. He even gave away 30,000 bushels of grain to the poor, which took three hours to distribute.

After entering Hagia Sophia, he stretched out his hands and said, "Glory to be God, who deemed me worthy to accomplish such a work. I have defeated you, Solomon!" Afterwards one of his officials poured hundreds of coins onto the floor. The festivities continued for another fifteen days.

However, there was still one problem for Justinian:

Since the aforementioned master of the Great Church, Ignatios, was loved by everybody because of the wonderful works he created, the emperor feared that he might be acclaimed and proclaimed as emperor by the two circus factions. He did not want to kill him, as many had advised him to do, and when he was despondent, they suggested to him again that when the column of the Augustian had been built by him, Justinian should leave him there (on top of the column) while they removed the scaffolding, so that he would die from hunger, and this he did.

When Ignatios was on top of the column, placing the a statue of the emperor on horseback in place, he realized that everyone had abandoned him and left him on top. But he did have with a piece of thin rope and a knife, and on that first night he cut up his clothes, including his undershirt, pants, and belts, into thin strips. He tied them together with the rope and lowered it down to test how far it would go. Since it was night, only his wife was at the bottom of the column, and he called out to her: "I have been left here to die, but you should go and secretly buy a thick rope as long as the column, rub it with liquid pitch, and come again in the middle of the night."

The following night she returned with the thick rope, which she bound to his rope and

he pulled it up. He then affixed the rope to the leg on the horse's statue and used it to descend safely to the ground. The liquid pitch was used so that the rope would be sticky for him to grab, and then once he got down, he set the rope on fire so that burned away entirely.

The night Ignatios fled Constantinople with his family, and went to Adrianople, where he lived disguised as a monk for three years. Meanwhile, everyone in capital believed that the master builder had died on top of the column. Eventually, Ignatios returned to Constantinople to confront Justinian:

Once, when the emperor went by on a procession to the Holy Apostles, he met him there, and asked for forgiveness, so that he would not be killed. When the emperor

recognized him, he was astonished with all his senate. The emperor feigned ignorance of what had happened to Ignatios, gave him many gifts, and dismissed him in peace, saying, "Look, whom God wants to live, a thousand people will not kill." And from that time he lived in great peace.

You can read more about the building of Hagia Sophia and other places in Byzantine capital in ***The Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria***, translated by Albrecht Berger, which is part of the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, and published by Harvard University Press in 2013. **Click here to visit the Publisher's website to learn more.**



Construction of Hagia Sophia as depicted in codex *Manasses Chronicle* (14th century)

The population of priests, monks and nuns in medieval England

How many men and women in medieval England had religious careers serving as priests, monks or nuns? The question was actually examined over seventy years ago, with some surprising results.

In his article, 'The Clerical Population of Medieval England', Josiah Cox Russell worked with a variety of government and ecclesiastical records that offered information about who lived in the country.

They range from the Domesday Book in the 11th century, to the records related to Dissolution of the Monasteries from the 1530s and 40s. However, Russell's best details relate to the Poll Taxes from the years 1377, 1379, and 1380-1, which he explains, "provide the only comprehensive survey of the clergy" from the Middle Ages.

The Poll Tax information reveals that in the period between 1377 to 1381, about 35,500 people had ecclesiastical careers. Breaking it down, 24,900 men were serving as secular clergy - priests and deacons. The other 10,600 people were religious clergy - such as monks, who were part of some kind of monastic institution. About 2000 of them were women serving as nuns.

According to Russell's estimates, the total population of England around this time was 2.2 million - more recent calculations of the

population during that period range from as high as 3.22 million, depending on how much one believes the population was made up of children. Based on Russell's numbers, about 1.6% of the population in the late-14th century were living as priests, monks, nuns or other religious professions. For the male population, this number was around 3%.

The article also finds, albeit on less solid evidence, that the number of people working in religious professions stayed the same, and in some cases declined slightly, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, despite the fact that England's population as a whole increased by about 50% during this period.

By way of comparison, in the year 2012 there was 28,300 ministers in the Church of England, when the country as a whole had 53.5 million people.

The article 'The Clerical Population of Medieval England', by Josiah Cox Russell appeared in the journal *Traditio*, Vol.2 (1944).

Did Any Medieval Christians Doubt their Faith?

It is a common misconception that during the Middle Ages, all people in Europe were firm believers in Christianity (or Judaism and Islam for those smaller communities). The idea that medieval Christians doubted the tenets of their faith, or could even be atheists, has until recently been dismissed.

However, the research by a few historians is uncovering that religious practices and beliefs included scepticism. One of the most important studies in this area was published in 1988: "Religious faith and doubt in late medieval Spain: Soria, circa 1450–1500," by John Edwards made use of records from the Spanish Inquisition to better understand some of the popular views on Christianity.

Edwards examined a "book of declarations", recorded by Inquisitors in and around the the Castilian town of Soira, which contains 444 statements made by individuals between the years of 1486 and 1502. They detail how 247 men and 71 women were accused of various religious offences. Edwards notes that "the accused cover a wide social range, the largest representation being of craftsmen, artisans, clerics (including both parish priests and friars), notaries, doctors and surgeons, and university graduates. There were also members of noble households, merchants and traders, and a small number of tenant farmers (labradores)." While the Inquisitors were usually looking for problems related to conversos - Jewish people who had converted

to Christianity - many of the people had come from families that had long been practicing Catholics.

Edwards explains:

There is a universal dimension to some of the accusations in these statements. They included generalized attacks on Christianity or attacks on specific aspects of the church's teaching; blasphemy, which moved easily into humour and obscenity; materialistic views about this life and scepticism about an afterlife; a belief in the validity of other religions and the possibility of achieving salvation by following them; and, finally, the use of magic.

Among the most vivid descriptions recorded by the Inquisitors are accounts of blasphemy, many which took place in taverns or during games of chance. For example, in 1494, while playing a game of bowls, Bernaldino Pajarillo angrily cried out, "I reject the whore of a God!". Six years later a surgeon, Master Bernal, urged on his slowing bowl with the cry, "Get there!



British Library - Egerton 1122 f. 1[v] Jesus and his disciples

cry, "Get there! Get there! May Jesus Christ never flourish!". Meanwhile in 1487 Rodrigo, a draper, was said to have shouted while playing pelota, "I don't believe in God, bugging St. John!". Another gambler, Lope de Vallejera, who was once a page to the countess of Denia, was said to have cried out, "I reject the fucking Jewish whore of a God!"

While shouting blasphemy in anger is one thing, the Inquisitors were also told about people who made specific statements

attacking their own Christian faith. Edwards writes:

Acleric, Diego Mexias, said in Aranda about 1485 "that there is nothing except being born and dying, and having a nice girlfriend (gentil amiga) and plenty to eat", and that there were no such things as heaven and hell. The late Pedro Gomez el Chamorro, of Coruna del Conde, expressed similar "materialistic" views in 1500, "warming himself by the fire, annoyed and fed up with

and fed up with the weather there was and the cold". His complaints about the weather led him to conclude, "I vow to God, there is no soul".

... Pedro Moreno, a chaplain, seems to have tired of the conversation of a group who were talking, in conventional terms, about the activities and attributes of the saints. It was said that, "St. Michael held the balance, and St. Bartholomew held the devils in chains and St. Peter had the keys of heaven", to which the cleric replied, "Yes, in his jock-strap", and, as the female witness solemnly recounts, "some of those who were there reproached him"

One of the most interesting comments comes from Diego de Barrionuevo, who was accused of saying in 1494, "I swear to God that this hell and paradise is nothing more than a way of frightening us, like people saying to children, 'Avati coco' ['The bogeyman will get you']"

This set records included accusations against eight men and one woman that the Christianity was not the only path to salvation. The woman for example, was a peasant farmer called Juana Perez, who said in about 1488 that "the good Jew would be saved, and the good Moor, in his law, and why else had God made them?"

In another case from the 1480s, during the Granada war, an argument broke out between a miller, Diego de San Martin, and a farmer called Gil Recio. The miller said to Gil, "Gil Recio, let the water [that is, in an irrigation channel] through to the mill. The people are dying of hunger. O, Saint Mary! What a great drought there is, because there's no rain". Gil replied, "How do you expect it to rain, when the king is going to take the Moors' home away, when they haven't done him any harm". Diego replied that the wars by the Christian against the Muslims in Granada was a good thing, but the farmer responded, "How does anyone know which of the three laws God

loves best?"

The Inquisition at Soira also found many instances where conversos were comparing their former Jewish faith with Christianity, and finding the latter wanting. For example a shoemaker named Anton Tapiazo, was said to have mused, "In the synagogue they used to sit on benches and wear their hoods, and how in the church they knelt on their knees and got up again lots of times, and it seemed as though they were playing 'bobbing up and down'."

The work by John Edwards is not the only example uncovered by historians that showed medieval Christians could show scepticism and even disbelief over the views and practices promoted by the Catholic church and its officials. After noting studies from other parts of Europe, he concludes:

Medieval evidence thus seems to support the general principle that religious doubt is an intrinsic part of faith. Therefore, even if Febvre was right to argue that "atheism", in any modern sense, was not an option in the sixteenth century or earlier, it does appear none the less that there was indeed genuine religious scepticism in late medieval and early modern Europe. The question which remains, though, is where and how such an attitude originated. The striking similarity of material from such widely differing regions and periods raises important issues concerning the interpretation of "popular" religion and its relationship to the religion of "elites".

The article, "Religious faith and doubt in late medieval Spain: Soria, circa 1450–1500," by John Edwards, appeared in the journal *Past & Present*, No. 120, which was published in 1988.

Ten Castles that Made Medieval Britain

Edinburgh Castle

By James Turner

Few indeed are those architectural legacies still remaining to us that can boast the iconic status of Edinburgh Castle, its distinctive silhouette known throughout the world, accompanied by the gently wafting of bagpipes. Far rarer still are those structures with a comparably singular influence upon the shaping of a nation. While Stirling and its Castle were the bridge that sutured Scotland's ragged halves together; the point where rolling hills and breweries turn to heather strewn mountains and distilleries, Edinburgh Castle was the nucleus around which the fledgling nation crystallised and a principal engine of its expansion.

Scotland's genesis was as hard fought as it was unlikely, a seething storm of fiercely distinct tribes and weltering wars, this boiling mess of Picts, Irish, Britons, Saxons, Norse and later Normans was forged into a country bound together by a new, shared identity. Edinburgh Castle, a place of shelter and hearthside stretching back into the mists of time was the springboard for the reinvention and consolidation of this emerging state. Its formidable natural defences and strategic importance quickly transformed the Castle into a seat of royal power and a principal node in the unfolding nervous system of the country's administration; a key influence in

both defining the new and ever evolving nation and allowing it to function and thrive, an infusion of symbolic and tangible relevance which saw the Castle targeted many times in the cyclic wars for control of the country.

Even in the face of an absentee monarchy and the country's initially meandering and grudging integration into the newly realised Britain, Edinburgh Castle, set grandly above Scotland's first city, remained one of Scotland's most potent symbols. Today, Edinburgh Castle stands ensconced within the heart of Edinburgh, amongst the highest concentration of shortbread tins and those tiny bottles of whisky per mile found anywhere in the world. Scotland like the City itself, unfolding and growing within its shadow.

Castle Rock, which would be an impressive spectacle even stripped of the eponymous Castle was home to limited Bronze Age settlement, although interestingly evidence suggests that nearby sites enjoyed far more intensive and sustained habitation and that the iconic rock was relatively insignificant to the regrettably still obscure goings on of Bronze Age society. The site would eventually become home to a more substantive Iron Age



Edinburgh Castle - Photo by Hamish Irvine / Flickr

substantive Iron Age Celtic settlement, the ever fastidious but ethnographically obsessed Roman historians claiming the site was a stronghold of the Votadini. While the site is bereft of Roman ruins, archaeologists have discovered the existence of a number of Roman artefacts; this evidence of an ongoing trade relationship with Rome and the settlement's position south of the Antonine Wall, the high-watermark of Roman expansion stretching from the Clyde to the Forth, suggests the site was under at least tacit Roman sovereignty if not actual occupation in the indistinct and ill-defined frontier province.

From the power vacuum created by the Roman withdrawal from Britain, emerged the Brittonic speaking Romano-Briton Kingdoms, one of which, Gododdin, was centred upon Edinburgh and quickly became heavily engaged in a bitter war for survival

with the multitude of land-starved settlers descending on Britain. It seems that in 638 AD, Irish invaders from the Kingdom of Dal Riata besieged the fortress but were successfully repulsed only for the great fort to be taken and the entire Kingdom destroyed later that year by the Saxons of Northumbria.

The Saxons brief ascendancy in the south of Scotland did little to stem the endemic warfare and as Northumbria's power waned, new factions struggled to the fore. In 954 Edinburgh was captured by King Indulf of Alba, which completed the integration of Lothian into the emerging proto state. The great victories of his kinsman and eventual successor, the warlike and capable Malcolm II, over the Anglo-Danish firmly established the border with England while his overlordship of the Kingdom of Strathclyde and possibly of the Norse-Gael kingdoms of the Islands established Scotland as the

Islands established Scotland as the predominant power within the region. A process his heirs would continue up to and beyond the Norman inspired cultural revolution.

Edinburgh Castle first came to prominence during the reign of Malcolm III who spent much of his time in residence there, where he began the Castle's transformation into the principal royal bastion and administrative centre. Sometime between 1140 -1150 Malcolm's son, David I, constructed a chapel within the Castle's confines, dedicated to his then canonised mother St Margaret, the granddaughter and great niece of two English Kings, Edmund Ironside and Edward the Confessor. Additionally, during this period the Castle played host to a great Council of the Kingdom's most prominent noblemen and clergy summoned by David I; a proto parliament which facilitated the numerous administrative and structural reforms by which David sought to exert power and influence throughout his Kingdom.

David's grandson and immediate successor, Malcolm IV spent much of his reign in heated negotiations with Henry II of England and his own rebellious nobles; a process from which he eventually triumphed in 1164 after Somerled, King of the Isles, was slain in battle by the forces of the Bishop of Glasgow. Malcolm was succeeded by his brother William the Lion, highly ambitious and determined to propagate his dynastic power. William saw the 1173 uprising against England's volatile but Machiavellian Henry II as an opportunity to re-establish his family's claim to the Earldoms of Northumbria and Huntingdon. Unfortunately for William, he was almost immediately captured, after rashly charging the English army more or less alone during the Battle of Alnwick in 1174 and was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Falaise, by which William ceded Edinburgh alongside several other significant Scottish castles to Henry who he was forced to acknowledge as his feudal overlord. For the

first time, Scotland's premier Castle was in English hands.

William eventually reclaimed Edinburgh after agreeing to marry Henry's illegitimate cousin, Ermengarde de Beaumont. William, his martial ambitions thwarted, spent the remainder of his long reign continuing the work of his grandfather ratifying law codes, founding burghs and modernising Scotland's infrastructure as a way of further building and disseminating royal influence. Much of this work was done from Edinburgh Castle which some time during this period came to house the repository of government charters and writs placing the Castle at the centre of Scotland's ongoing transformation.

The death of Alexander III with no clear heir caused a period of internal instability in Scotland as the nobles bickered over who would succeed him; two of the main claimants being the powerful Bruce and Balliol families. In order to avoid further bloodshed and stabilise the situation, Edward I of England was appointed to arbitrate the dispute. Given that Edward, fresh from his subjugation of Wales, was a blood stained conqueror who burned with the desire to reclaim the temporal glories of his ancestors and unite all of Britain under English rule, this might be considered something of a mistake. Edward attempted to use the dispute to exert overlordship upon this northern neighbour and after negotiations failed to deliver the desired results, he resolved to impose order, not to mention his authority, at the point of the sword.

In 1296, Edinburgh Castle was taken by the invading English after a brutally short three day siege. The English quickly set about restoring and improving the Castle's defences, after which it stood unassailable as the Scottish War for Independence raged around it. In 1314, however, with the Scots now largely unified under Robert the Bruce and the English hampered by the inept leadership of the hapless Edward II, the



Edinburgh Castle from the Foot of the Vennel, 1845, by Horatio McCulloch

and the English hampered by the inept leadership of the hapless Edward II, the military situation had undergone an almost complete reversal. The exhausted English war effort was dealt a further blow when Earl Thomas Randolph of Moray led a daring night raid on Edinburgh Castle, taking the walls through stealth and guile, the victorious raiders then raised what sections of the Castle they could to preclude the English reoccupying the site.

Despite Robert Bruce's decisive victory at Bannockburn, the whole bloody drama was to play out yet again a generation later when in 1332 those exiled lords who had, as a result of siding with the wrong claimant, lost their Scottish lands banded together and invaded a suddenly vulnerable Scotland ruled by the young David II. Their success at the Battle of Dupplin Moor fired the imagination of Edward III who resurrecting his grandfather's ambitions invaded Scotland in 1333, declaring his intent to place his ally and vassal Edward Balliol on the throne.

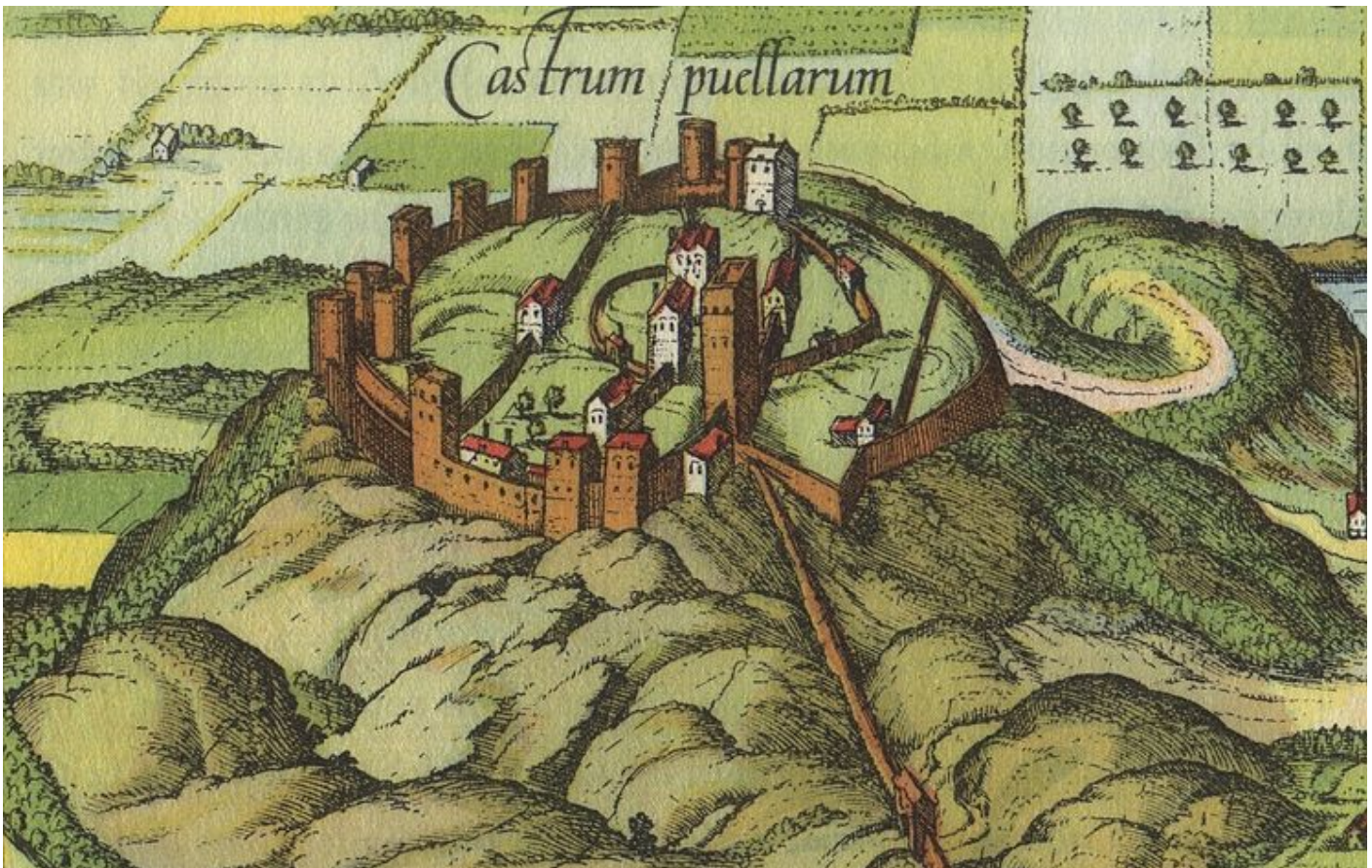
In 1335, the Castle once more fell into English hands, only for the resurgent Scots to reclaim it in 1341 in a dramatic and Looney Tunes-esque escapade featuring a number of Scottish soldiers gaining entrance to the Castle under the guise of merchants, whereupon they prevented the gates being closed. In 1346, David II leading a counter invasion, was captured at the Battle of Neville's Cross. Luckily, however, for the young King, Edward III had decided that he would much rather be King of France than make someone else King of Scotland and David, although now burdened with a hefty ransom, was released following a promise to name Edward as his successor.

Following his return to Scotland, David took up residence in Edinburgh Castle where he began construction of the imposing David Tower, further strengthening the Castle's already formidable defences. In 1400, the Castle was besieged by Henry IV but his

inability to take it effectively stymied the already inauspicious invasion and the English army was compelled to retreat. Throughout the 15th century the Castle saw sustained building work designed to modernise it, making provision for artillery as well as the construction of a new palace complex. The Castle briefly came under siege in 1440 by the Douglas family after the chancellor, Sir William Crichton, had the Earl of Douglas assassinated within its walls. Its increased militarisation and the vigorous demands of a royal court meant that the royal family avoided the Castle, preferring to take up residence within the City itself.

In the religiously fuelled clash between Mary Queen of Scots and members of her bitterly misogynistic and staunchly Protestant nobility, who rallied around her infant son James VI as a figure head, Edinburgh Castle became the last stand of Mary's forces when the castellan Sir William Kirkcaldy refused to surrender in the Lang Siege, or for those of you who don't speak Scottish, the long siege, of 1571-1573. The siege was only brought to a conclusion with the arrival of a huge artillery train from England which devastated the Castle, destroying the David Tower and compelling the defenders to finally surrender.

Religious wars were now all the rage in Europe and in the 1639 Bishops' War, the Castle was twice captured by Covenanter forces fighting to abolish the Episcopal system which the now absentee Stuart Kings sought to foster. After the Bishops' War had spiralled into the bloodbath of the War of Three Kingdoms, the Covenanter controlled Scottish Parliament eventually declared war on their former allies in the English Parliament, following the unsanctioned execution of their joint King, Charles I. Their coronation of Charles II provoked the pernicious Oliver Cromwell to march north and having narrowly dispatched the Scottish Army at the Battle of Dunbar he immediately besieged Edinburgh Castle, finally reducing it three months later.



A late-16th-century depiction of the castle, from Braun & Hogenberg's *Civitates orbis terrarum*.

it three months later. Following the deposition of the Stuarts in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Castle became entangled in perhaps the most romanticised chapter of Scotland's long, tattered but proud history, the Jacobite risings. Edinburgh Castle, was initially threatened in the first Jacobite rising of 1715 when a number of Highlanders with the help of defectors within the garrison attempted to gain entrance to the Castle. This attempt was to prove no more successful than the wider rebellion and the Jacobites were soon chased off when in a darkly comedic moment, it emerged that the rope ladders were too short. During the great uprising of 1745, Edinburgh, gripped by a great up-swell of Jacobite sentiment, opened its gates to Bonnie Prince Charlie, the grandson of the deposed James II, who triumphantly marched through the City to the adoring cheers of his subjects. The effect was ruined somewhat by the stubborn refusal of the Castle's garrison to surrender. After a half-hearted and abortive attempt to lay siege to the ancient Castle, it was decided

to simply leave the Castle behind as an irrelevance and begin the re-conquest of Britain elsewhere. Yet as the Jacobite army marched away, pipes crooning and banners fluttering in the breeze, the young Prince's inability to take the Castle revealed the logistical deficiencies and weakness of leadership which would eventually prove their undoing.

The gently muted pearly gold of Edinburgh Castle's battlements, sprouting out of the great crag of black volcanic rock remains a powerful image in the Scottish cultural lexicon. Rising imperiously above Edinburgh's Old Town on its primordial dais, the crest and sweep of the Castle cannot help but elicit awe and reverence. This, every line of ruptured rock and carved stone seems to say, is a site whose bones are soaked deeply in the mire of history. Entrance via the wide slope at the Castle's front is blocked by the imposing edifice of the Gate House, beyond which supplicants must pass through an upwardly winding concourse, hemmed in by

which applicants must pass through an upwardly winding concourse, hemmed in by the Castle's portcullis and the flexing mass of the Castle's great rock ward wall. Here at the artificially levelled plateau of the Castle, stands an architectural treasure trove and study in contrasts; the Renaissance Palace complex and Great Hall jostling with the Spartan utility of the New Barracks and gun foundries. Sadly, centuries at the heart of Scotland's often turbulent politics have taken their toll on Edinburgh Castle and nothing but vestigial foundations of the high medieval castle and, perhaps portentously given her link to the Castle's first patrons, the chapel of St Margaret remain today. Yet Edinburgh Castle has always found a way to reinvent itself down the ages, changing in rhyme to the altering tempo of Scottish politics.

Today Edinburgh Castle wears the regalia of its history proudly and the site is brimming with historic artefacts and materials. The Castle is home not only to the Regimental museums of the Royal Scots and the Royal Scots Dragoons which are well worth a look but also hosts the National War Museum and the National War Memorial, both paying tribute to the service of the lost generations of Scottish soldiery and as a potent reminder to subsequent generations. Perhaps, in light of the recent reorientation of Scottish national sentiment, some of Edinburgh Castle's most relevant treasures are the Crown Sceptre and Sword of the Scottish Crown Jewels presented to James IV by the Papacy and first used in the coronation of Mary Queen of Scots. The coronation regalia was locked away and forgotten following the Union of the Crowns, after which all of Scotland's Kings and Queens were crowned in England.

More potent a relic still of the Scottish monarchy and to many a symbol of her wounded political autonomy is the Stone of Destiny used for centuries in the coronation of the Scottish monarchy, stretching back into legend and the long years before Scotland's

political unification and the composition of a shared cultural identity. The Stone made a tempting target for Edward I who capturing it, had it removed to England and incorporated into the English coronation ceremony where it remained until 1996, when it was enshrined in Edinburgh Castle. While the great pulpit of volcanic rock upon which the Castle stands is long extinct, Edinburgh Castle and the ideals we eagerly project upon it smoulder still.

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Edinburg Castle website**

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Fireworks in Scotland date back to 1507, researchers find

Today Edinburgh Castle is synonymous with spectacular pyrotechnic displays, wowing crowds the world over – new research has found the castle played centre stage in Scotland's first recorded use of fireworks in the early 1500s.



Edinburgh Castle with fireworks in 2011 – Photo by weir thru a lens / Flickr

Historic Scotland has revealed findings from a new research project providing a unique insight into Edinburgh Castle's fireworks past, including the country's first recorded use of them in 1507.

held at the castle in the 15th and 16th centuries. The discoveries have helped to shed new light on the extent of the landmark's association with fireworks throughout the centuries

Researchers investigated records and documents detailing the castle gun house, Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer as well as detailed inventories listing the valuables

Previously experts believed that fireworks were first used in Stirling in 1566, however, new evidence suggests that it was actually around 59 years earlier and in the Scottish

capital. It is thought that 'fireballs' featured in a great tournament staged by King James IV, which took place at the base of Castle Rock, in 1507, in the area which is now the King's Stables Road.

Records also exist which detail a display that was planned for the castle to mark the coronation of James V's first wife, Queen Madeleine, in 1537, which included giant Catherine wheels. Sulphur, oil, petrol, mercury, aqua vitae, canvas, thread and other items were used to create and build the fireworks which are thought to have spun on the horizontal unlike the Catherine wheels of today, which spin on the vertical.

Three years later, in 1540, a fireworks display to celebrate the coronation of Mary of Guise – mother to Mary Queen of Scots – was commissioned by King James V. The display cost £57-6s-1d, a huge sum of money in the 16th century. According to the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer from that year, James V himself played a role in putting the display together: 'fyre werk schot devisit be the Kingis grace' – fireworks devised by the king's grace.

Commenting on the research findings, Steve Farrar, Interpretation Officer at Historic Scotland, said, "The research commissioned into the castle's history has resulted in some wonderful discoveries. We now know that Edinburgh Castle was the backdrop for Scotland's first fireworks on record – during the early 1500s; while King James V went to great expense to celebrate the coronation of both his first and second wives by commissioning pyrotechnic displays.

"Fireworks are synonymous with the castle today and as it prepares to take centre stage once again for the next display, we're provided with a great opportunity to share this colourful story with our visitors."

The research also identified a payment for canvas, brimstone, saltpetre, and lombard

paper to make 'fireballs' as part of a civic pageant in Edinburgh for Mary Queen of Scots' first marriage in 1587. It has also found that among the books Mary kept at the castle was a guide to firework making, *The Art of Fyir*. Renaissance fireworks included rockets, 'fire-spears' and fountains, and used steel and charcoal to colour the sparks orange and yellow.

Nick Finnigan, Executive Manager of Edinburgh Castle, which is operated by Historic Scotland, added, "These exciting new findings showcase the castle's long association with fireworks, which stretches back some 500 years and involves several of Scotland's most significant historical figures.

"It's very fitting that the castle was the backdrop to the earliest fireworks in Scotland on record, something which still continues five centuries on. Today Edinburgh Castle is renowned for the impressive choreographed displays that entertain and signal some of the most significant events in Scotland such as Edinburgh's Hogmanay, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo and the popular Festival closing fireworks."

Consider the Source

By Danièle Cybulskie

I love the Internet. It has made good scholarship so much easier, and greatly increased the ability for medievalists to share rare texts, research, and camaraderie. We can now access things that would have taken overseas trips to access before, and that's a beautiful thing. With great power, though, comes great responsibility (as Spiderman's uncle once said), and for Internet users, the responsibility is to take a look at where your information is coming from.

If you follow me on **Twitter**, you may have seen my reaction to an article I came across this week on an educational website (which shall remain nameless – I'm not about public shaming here). In the course of some work this week, I was innocently asked why I don't talk much about torture because it seems like one of the things we know about the Middle Ages is that people were brutally tortured and punished with some regularity. I was curious about the question, so I followed the link I was given and found a website that goes on and on about how brutal the medieval justice system was (with gory examples of limb-lopping and eyeball-gouging), and that people lived in fear of becoming the next victim of it. That's when I started to get upset.

As with anything you hear or read, if it sounds extreme, it probably is. Unless it's the Middle Ages, of course, a time in which all hell broke loose and people started slaughtering each other over the twitch of an eyebrow. I'm

kidding, but how often do we see that depicted as reality? The point is that the medieval period was not so different from our own time, when you look at the big picture of human nature. Were there harsh punishments for harsh crimes? Yes. Did people occasionally use torture in the interests of national security? Yes. As **Larissa Tracy** points out, there are recent, modern instances of torture in the interest of national security, but we'd be appalled if that meant our modern era was described in the same light as the Middle Ages. Why? Because we are convinced that we have been making steady (moral, intellectual) progress since ancient times. The more we look closely at that idea, the more complex it becomes.

Because of the Internet, there is a wealth of really great sources to go to with questions about the Middle Ages (as scholars do). We actually have quite a lot of information about medieval torture that's been done by scholars

scholars like **Larissa Tracy**, and the medieval justice system by scholars like **Daniel Lord Smail**. They will tell you that medieval people did not live in perpetual fear of mutilation. If you read that they did, read further. Find the source of the article, and keep reading. The truth is out there (as Mulder and Scully will tell you – more pop culture wisdom).

As we get into the school year, I'm hoping more and more research will be done on my favourite time period, and that students (and

teachers) will find the best of the best articles and publications by really great minds. Medievalists are out there, waiting to be discovered, and their research is fantastic. So, if you stumble across the typical "medieval people would sooner kill you than look at you" article, it's worth it to keep digging until you find the real, three-dimensional Middle Ages. Its richness and colour are worth the dig.

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

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Book Review:

Rise of the Wolf, by Steven A. McKay

Reviewed by Andrew Latham

Rise of the Wolf is the third installment of best-selling historical fiction author Steven McKay's wonderful *Forest Lord* series. Set in Barnsdale Forest in Yorkshire (rather than the more familiar Sherwood forest in Nottinghamshire), McKay's reworking of this classic tale is masterful. Rather than drawing on the folklore that gave rise to the Robin Hood stories that most of us have all grown up with (and that Hollywood has done to death – almost literally), McKay taps an alternative – and much older – literary vein: the original fifteenth century Robin Hood ballads.

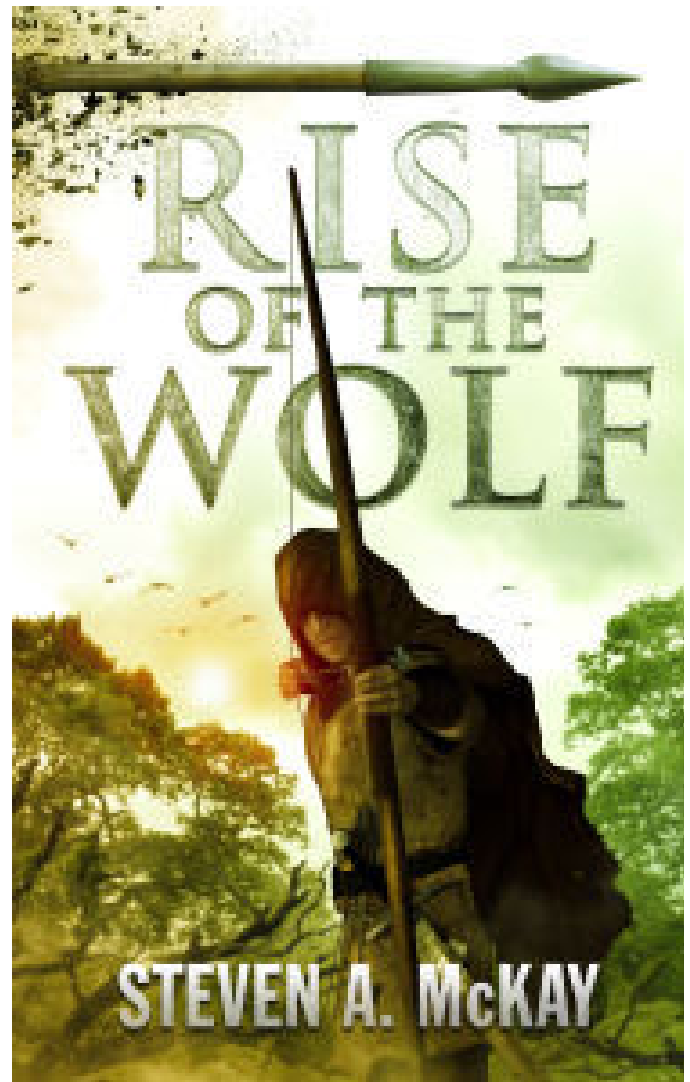
Like the recent reboot of the Star Trek, this move opens up all sorts of possibilities for developing new stories and for deepening and enriching characters we thought we knew, and once loved, but that have become shopworn and more than a little campy over time. More about this below, but McKay's Robin Hood is certainly not the Robin Hood played by Errol Flynn in the 1938 film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*; nor, mercifully, is he the Robin Hood played by Kevin Costner in *Prince of Thieves*. Rather, he is a complex, multilayered and therefore realistic character, simultaneously embodying a rough chivalry (and increasingly well-developed sense of fatherhood) and an ever-evolving capacity for brutality and violence.

Ok, you might be thinking, McKay has done something interesting and significant with this series. That's great. But what can you tell me about this particular novel? What can you tell me about the plot, setting, character development, dialogue, action, etc.? Is it a cracking read or a tedious one? Should I shell out my hard-earned dollars, pounds, euros or whatever and buy it – or should pass on this one and buy another (and there are a lot of good historical novels out there)? Well, I won't delve too deeply into the nuances and details of the plot, for that way spoilers lie. What I will say is that this is a story of the quest for revenge. Robin's old nemesis, Sir Guy of Gisbourne, is out to avenge the horrific disfigurement he suffered at Robin's hand in the previous book, and will not be satisfied until Robin is made to die as painfully as possible. Aided by the despicable turn-coat Matt Groves, Guy pursues Robin and his band of merry men with a recklessness and determination born of his lust for vengeance. The result is an action-packed, rip-roaring tale involving battles, chases, ambushes, betrayals and even an execution – all set in a narrative that charges along at a speed that will have the adrenaline pumping through your system from start to finish.

As to the characters, I can only say that McKay has done an excellent job of bringing the people who populate Robin's world to life.

Whether major characters or minor, almost everyone in the novel is given depth and humanity. This, I think, is where McKay shows real growth as an author. Not that the characters in his earlier novels are wooden or one-dimensional. They most assuredly are not. But in *Rise of the Wolf* McKay has upped his game considerably. The evolution of Robin and Sir Guy; the interior life and motivations of the great (King Edward II, for example) and small (Robin's sister Marjorie); the historical sensibilities of all the characters – all these are revealed in ways that lend colour and nuance to the story, making it both more interesting and more believable. For some readers, the most important thing in an historical novel is to get the exterior details – clothing, food, geography, weather, etc. – correct. I've always believed, though, that while these details are important if one is to transport the reader into a different historical reality, far more important is to get the details of the interior life correct. McKay has always been good at this, but in *Rise of the Wolf* we see a whole new level of maturity. This is the best Robin Hood you are ever going to encounter (until, maybe, the next installment in the series), not because of what he wears or eats, but because of what and how he thinks.

Finally, this being a work of Steven McKay, the fight scenes are unflinchingly bloody and unrelentingly adrenaline-inducing. When it comes to historical fiction, I like my fights/battles to be dramatic, realistic, necessary (in the sense of advancing the plot or revealing something about an important character) and very, very bloody. McKay has always delivered in this respect and *Rise of the Wolf* is no exception.



Bottom line: I can't recommend this novel strongly enough. You should buy it now. And if you haven't already got your hands on the previous two novels, you should buy them too. Simply put, if you're a lover of historical adventure stories in the mold of Bernard Cornwell you're going to love all three novels in the Forest Lord series. In my opinion, though, you're really, really going to love *Rise of the Wolf*.

MY RATING: 5 stars.

Andrew Latham is a professor at Macalester College and has recently written a non-fiction work: *Theorizing Medieval Geopolitics: War and World Order in the Age of the Crusades*, and a novel *The Holy Lance*. You can visit his website at www.aalatham.com

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