

The Medieval Magazine

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Cover Photo: Zodiac wheel from a 14th century manuscript - British Library MS Harley 4940 f. 31



First performance in 1,000 years: 'lost' songs from the Middle Ages are brought back to life

An ancient song repertory has been heard for the first time in 1,000 years after being 'reconstructed' by a University of Cambridge researcher and a world-class performer of medieval music.

'Songs of Consolation' was performed last month at Pembroke College Chapel, Cambridge. It is reconstructed from neumes (symbols representing musical notation in the Middle Ages) and draws heavily on an 11th century manuscript leaf that was stolen from Cambridge and presumed lost for 142 years.

Saturday's performance features music set to the poetic portions of Roman philosopher Boethius' magnum opus *The Consolation of Philosophy*. One of the most widely-read and important works of the Middle Ages, it was written during Boethius' sixth century imprisonment, before his execution for treason. Such was its importance, it was translated by many major figures, including King Alfred the Great, Chaucer and Elizabeth I.

Hundreds of Latin songs were recorded in neumes from the 9th through to the 13th century. These included passages from the classics by Horace and Virgil, late antique authors such as Boethius, and medieval texts from laments to love songs.

However, the task of performing such ancient works today is not as simple as reading and playing the music in front of you. 1,000 years ago, music was written in a way that recorded melodic outlines, but not 'notes' as today's musicians would recognise them; relying on aural traditions and the memory of musicians to keep them alive. Because these aural traditions died out in the 12th century, it has often been thought impossible to reconstruct 'lost' music from this era – precisely because the pitches are unknown.



Now, after more than two decades of painstaking work on identifying the techniques used to set particular verse forms, research undertaken by Cambridge University's Dr Sam Barrett has enabled him to reconstruct melodies from the rediscovered leaf of the 11th century 'Cambridge Songs'.

"This particular leaf – 'accidentally' removed from Cambridge University Library by a German scholar in the 1840s – is a crucial piece of the jigsaw as far as recovering the songs is concerned," said Dr Barrett.

Part detective, part musical time traveller, Barrett's scholarly groundwork has involved gathering together surviving notations from the Cambridge Songs and other manuscripts around the world and then applying them to the principles of musical setting during this era.

"After rediscovering the leaf from the Cambridge Songs, what remained was the final leap into sound," he said. "Neumes indicate melodic direction and details of vocal delivery without specifying every pitch and this poses a major problem.

"The traces of lost song repertoires survive,

but not the aural memory that once supported them. We know the contours of the melodies and many details about how they were sung, but not the precise pitches that made up the tunes."

After piecing together an estimated 80-90 per cent of what can be known about the melodies for *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Barrett enlisted the help of Benjamin Bagby of **Sequentia** – a three-piece group of experienced performers who have built up their own working memory of medieval song.

Bagby, co-founder of Sequentia, is also a director of the Lost Songs Project which is already credited with bringing back to life repertoires from *Beowulf* through to the *Carmina Burana*.

Over the last two years, Bagby and Barrett have experimented by testing scholarly theories against the practical requirements of hand and voice, exploring the possibilities offered by accompaniment on period instruments. Working step-by-step, and joined recently by another member of

Sequentia, the harpist-singer Hanna Marti, songs from The Consolation of Philosophy have now been brought back to life.

Added Barrett: "Ben tries out various possibilities and I react to them – and vice versa. When I see him working through the options that an 11th century person had, it's genuinely sensational; at times you just think 'that's it!' He brings the human side to the intellectual puzzle I was trying to solve during years of continual frustration."

While it's unclear whether Boethius ever wrote Consolation's poetry to be sung, the Roman philosopher recorded and collected ideas about music in other hugely influential works. During the Middle Ages, until the end of the 12th century, it was common for great works such as Boethius' to be set to music as a way of learning and ritualising the texts.

There have been other attempted settings of The Consolation of Philosophy across the centuries; especially during the renaissance and the 19th century when melodies were invented to sound like popular songs of the day.

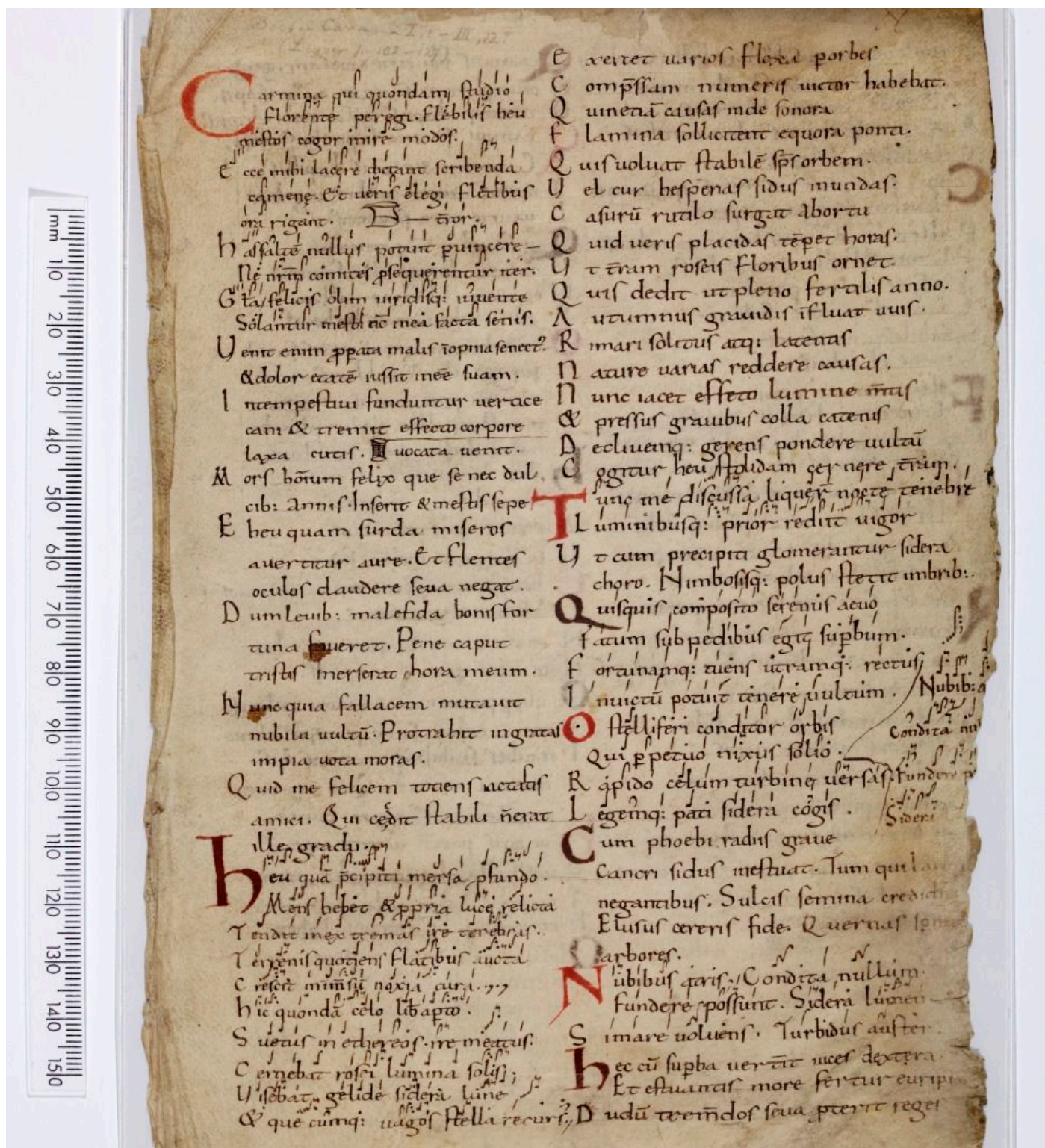
But it was the rediscovered leaf of the Cambridge Songs that allowed the crucial breakthrough in being able to finally reassemble the work as it would have been heard around 1,000 years ago.

Originating in the Rhineland in the first half of the 11th century, the Cambridge Songs makes up the final part of an anthology of Latin texts that was held in Canterbury before making its way to Cambridge University Library by the late 17th century.

In 1840, a Germanic scholar cut out an important leaf and returned home. For 142 years, Cambridge presumed it lost before a chance discovery by historian and Liverpool University academic Margaret Gibson in 1982.

During an unscheduled visit to a Frankfurt library, Gibson enquired as to whether they had any Boethius manuscripts and was told of a single leaf in their collections. Gibson immediately recognised the leaf as coming from a copy of Consolation and its likely importance for the number of neumes it contained.





Missing leaf from 'Cambridge Songs'. - Photo courtesy University of Cambridge

Gibson then got in touch with Cambridge University medievalist Christopher Page, then a PhD candidate, who realised this was the missing leaf from the Cambridge Songs and secured its return to the city nearly a century and a half after its disappearance.

"Without this extraordinary piece of luck, it would have been much, much harder to reconstruct the songs," added Barrett. "The

notations on this single leaf allow us to achieve a critical mass that may not have been possible without it.

"There have been times while I've been working on this that I have thought I'm in the 11th century, when the music has been so close it was almost touchable. And it's those moments that make the last 20 years of work so worthwhile."

New Interpretation of the Rök Runestone Inscription Changes View of Viking Age

The Rök Runestone, erected in the late 800s in the Swedish province of Östergötland, is the world's most well-known runestone. Its long inscription has seemed impossible to understand, despite the fact that it is relatively easy to read. A new interpretation of the inscription has now been presented – an interpretation that breaks completely with a century-old interpretative tradition. What has previously been understood as references to heroic feats, kings and wars in fact seems to refer to the monument itself.

'The inscription on the Rök Runestone is not as hard to understand as previously thought,' says Per Holmberg, associate professor of Scandinavian languages at the University of Gothenburg. 'The riddles on the front of the stone have to do with the daylight that we need to be able to read the runes, and on the back are riddles that probably have to do with the carving of the runes and the runic alphabet, the so called futhark.'

Previous research has treated the Rök Runestone as a unique runestone that gives accounts of long forgotten acts of heroism. This understanding has sparked speculations about how Varin, who made the inscriptions on the stone, was related to Gothic kings. In his research, Holmberg shows that the Rök Runestone can be understood as more similar to other runestones from the Viking Age. In most cases, runestone inscriptions say

something about themselves.

'Already 10 years ago, the linguist Professor Bo Ralph proposed that the old idea that the Rök Runestone says mentions the Gothic emperor Theodoric is based on a minor reading error and a major portion of nationalistic wishful thinking. What has been missing is an interpretation of the whole inscription that is unaffected by such fantasies.'

Holmberg's study is based on social semiotics, a theory about how language is a potential for realizing meaning in different types of texts and contexts.

'Without a modern text theory, it would not have been possible to explore which meanings are the most important for

**Per Holmberg and
the Rök Runestone
- photo courtesy
University of
Gothenburg**



runestones. Nor would it have been possible to test the hypothesis that the Rök Runestone expresses similar meanings as other runestones, despite the fact that its inscription is unusually long.'

One feature of the Rök Runestone that researchers have struggled with is that its inscription begins by listing in numerical order what it wants the reader to guess ('Secondly, say who...'), but then seems to skip all the way to 'twelfth, ...'. Previous research has assumed there was an oral version of the message that included the missing nine riddles. Holmberg reaches a surprising conclusion:

'If you let the inscription lead you step by

step around the stone, the twelfth actually appears as the twelfth thing the reader is supposed to consider. It's not the inscription that skips over something. It's the researchers that have taken a wrong way through the inscription, in order to make it be about heroic deeds.'

For over a century, the traditional interpretation has contributed to our understanding of the Viking Age. With the new interpretation, the Rök Runestone does not carry a message of honour and vengeance. Instead the message concerns how the technology of writing gives us an opportunity to commemorate those who have passed away.

The article, "Answers to the Rök runestone riddles. A study of meaning-making and spatiality," appears in *Futhark. International Journal of Runic Studies*, Vol. 6 (2015, publ. 2016). pp. 65–106;

From the pit to the pinnacle: Dante reappraised vertically

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has rounded off a four-year project at Cambridge University which explored the “vertical” connections across Dante’s *Comedy*.

Dante’s 14th century epic journey through the Christian afterlife, the *Divine Comedy*, has long been regarded as a literary and theological masterpiece. Over the past four years, the University of Cambridge has brought together experts on Dante from across the UK and abroad to re-examine Dante’s work in a bold new way, looking at the “vertical” connections between the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* as Dante travels from Hell, through Purgatory and finally to Heaven.

The project, which took the form of a series of workshops and public lectures hosted by Trinity College, marks the first time that a “vertical” reading has been systematically applied to Dante’s entire 14,233-line work as a whole. Scholars from around the world came to Cambridge to explore how the same-numbered cantos from all three canticles relate to each other, and what new light these connections can shed on Dante’s artistic and conceptual modes throughout the poem.

The final lecture of the series was presented by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Professor Lord Rowan Williams, and examined the final cantos of each section and their themes of “Fire, Ice and Holy Water”. Professor Williams’ lecture, along with all others in the series, is available to view online via the **University of Cambridge Streaming Media Service**.

The cycle of 33 major public lectures by literary scholars, philosophers, theologians and thinkers began in 2012. Over four years, it has offered a radical new approach to Dante’s great work and to the venerable *Lectura Dantis* tradition by generating innovative readings of the *Comedy* as well as broadly influential debate on Dante’s position in our culture today. The series, called *Cambridge Vertical Readings in Dante’s Comedy*, was organised by Dr George Corbett and Dr Heather Webb as an initiative of the Department of Italian at Cambridge University, in collaboration with the Leeds University Centre for Dante Studies and the



Dante's Divine Comedy shown in a fresco by Michelino

University of Notre Dame. Dr Heather Webb, lecturer in Italian at the University of Cambridge, said: "Looking at Dante through a vertical reading is a way of starting over and exploring the poem afresh. If we read, for example, *Inferno III*, *Purgatorio III*, and *Paradiso III*, throwing out all our usual ideas and just looking at those three cantos, something new always comes up. This series has examined how we read Dante, what we bring to each reading, and also how Dante himself might have wanted us to read his poem".

Cambridge Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy is also available in book form, published via Open Book Publishers, an Open Access publisher that makes books freely available to read online, as well as in inexpensive e-book and paper editions. Vertical Readings will be a three-volume collection. Volume one is **currently available**, with volumes two and three coming soon.

The collection offers an unprecedented repertoire of vertical readings for the entire Divine Comedy, which not only articulates unexamined connections between the three canticles but also unlocks new ways to enter into the core themes of the poem. It is hoped that the three volumes together will provide an indispensable resource for students of Dante.

Dr Webb said: "Open Book Publishers have made it so that anyone can go online and read the whole collection, which is really exciting for everyone involved in the project. We want students and enthusiasts at every level to be able to access this new approach to looking at Dante and for us to share the results that everyone who has worked on these readings have brought together over the past four years."

**This article is courtesy the
University of Cambridge**

Why Cats were Hated in Medieval Europe

Cats in medieval Europe mostly had a bad reputation – they were associated with witches and heretics, and it was believed that the devil could transform himself into a black cat. In her article, “Heretical Cats: Animal Symbolism in Religious Discourse,” Irina Metzler looks at how this view of felines emerged.

Cats filled one very important role for humans in the Middle Ages – they caught mice, which would have otherwise been a serious nuisance for people and their food. However, medieval writers even saw this activity in negative tones, often comparing the way cats caught mice with how the devil could catch souls. For example, William Caxton wrote “the devyl playeth ofte with the synnar, lyke as the catte doth with the mous.”

By the twelfth-century this association with the devil became even more ingrained. Around 1180, Walter Map explained in one of his works that during satanic rituals “the Devil descends as a black cat before his devotees. The worshippers put out the light and draw near to the place where they saw their master. They feel after him and when they have found him they kiss him under the tail.”

Heretical religious groups, such as the Cathars and Waldensians, were accused by Catholic churchmen of associating and even

worshipping cats. When the Templars were put on trial in the early fourteenth-century, one of the accusations against them was allowing cats to be part of the services and even praying to the cats. Witches too, were said to be able to shape-shift into cats, which led to Pope Innocent VIII declaring in 1484 that “the cat was the devil’s favourite animal and idol of all witches.”

Metzler believes that the independent nature of cats was the source of this anxiety from humans. Medieval people generally believed that animals were created by God to serve and be ruled by humans, but the cat, even when domesticated, cannot be trained to be loyal and obedient like a dog. Edward, Duke of York, writing in the early fifteenth-century, summed up what many medieval people must have thought: “their falseness and malice are well known. But one thing I dare well say that if any beast has the devil’s spirit in him without doubt it is the cat, both the wild and the tame.”



Cats in the Northumberland Bestiary fol. 33

Metzler writes:

Medieval people may have wanted to restrict cats to the function of animated mousetraps, for the very reason that the cat "stands at the threshold between the familiar and the wild." "Cats were intruders into human society. They could not be owned. They entered the house by stealth, like mice, and were suffered because they kept the insufferable mice in check." This causes a kind of conceptual tension. While the cat possesses the characteristics of a good hunter it is useful, "but as long as it does it remains incompletely domesticated." Heretics, too, in a transferred sense, are not completely domesticated, since by challenging orthodox thought and roaming freely hither and thither in their interpretation of religious beliefs they resemble the bestiary definition of wildness. As symbolic animals, them, cats may be the heretical animal par excellence.

are many accounts of cats being kept as pets, including by nuns. Moreover, medieval Muslims were very fond of cats. A few accounts from early Islam suggest that the Prophet Muhammad and other figures liked cats and treated them well. Perhaps the cleanliness of cats was highly appealing to Muslims. In medieval Middle Eastern cities you could even find charities that took care of streets cats. One European pilgrim who traveled to the Middle East even noted that among the differences between Muslims and Christians was that "They like cats, while we like dogs."

Metzler's article, "Heretical Cats: Animal Symbolism in Religious Discourse," appears in *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* Vol. 59 (2009). Irina Metzler teaches at Swansea University. You can find her **personal website** [here](#).

Not all medieval Europeans hated cats. There

Echoes of the distant past in England's modern battles to be mayor

By John Godwin

The fight between Zac Goldsmith and Sadiq Khan to be mayor of London following Boris Johnson's eight-year reign has become increasingly ill-tempered. Johnson himself took over from Ken Livingston, who became the city's first modern elected mayor in 2000. But the history of the role in British cities stretches much further back than that.

By the year 1200, larger towns throughout England were forming themselves into corporations run by a number of leading citizens, who then chose a representative leader. Most of the towns in the early 13th century who appointed their own mayor did so without royal intervention, making an important step towards representative local government. For these mayors were not merely ceremonial appointments. They had real power and stood up for the town – often against local magnates, the church, and the monarchy.

Many historians have recognised 29th September 1216 as the date on which Bristol, in south-west England got its first mayor,

Adam le Page. But he was not the first person to be labelled as the town's mayor by King John. Earlier in that same year John addressed a number of mandates to "the mayor of Bristol", and named a certain Roger Cordwainer. Yet at this stage Bristol had not even been granted the legal right to have a mayor at all. In 1236, the people of Bristol petitioned the new king, Henry III, for permission to have a mayor elected and removable by the town, but were refused. So what was going on? How could the king in 1236 reject a plea for Bristol to have its own mayor, when his predecessor John had apparently addressed a mandate to Bristol's mayor two decades previously?

It may have been connected to a lack of authority on the part of King John, who according to historian Professor Brendan Smith, deserved his “Robin Hood reputation” as a “bad king” who was weak, wicked, cowardly and grasping.

Professor Smith explains: “Having signed the Magna Carta in 1215, King John reneged on the deal, prompting the country to revolt. “Losing ground to the rebels, the King spent part of his last year in Bristol, before dying of dysentery in Lincolnshire in October 1216. It was only when the Crown passed to his infant son, Henry III, that peace was restored.”

Historic records also show that in fact Roger Cordwainer was a valued confidant of King John, who looked after the king’s money depository in Bristol and organised shipments of the king’s wine. For most of his reign John was at odds with his barons and needed friends wherever he could find them, and Roger Cordwainer was one he seemed to rely on. So in that sense, he was probably not the first mayor to be independent of the king.

In the midst of all this conflict, double dealing and bloodshed, Bristol swiftly replaced Cordwainer with Adam le Page, a man chosen by the townsfolk themselves. But 1216 wasn’t the end of the story for Bristol. In the early years, its mayors, along with those of England’s other towns were not formally recognised by the Crown. The kings were wary of devolving power to people who might challenge their authority (although in practice, they were actually willing to deal with them).

Edward the devolver

Then in 1300, Edward I formalised the situation. The man who sought to unite Britain by conquering Wales and Scotland, was an unlikely devolver of power, but he decided to grant new charters to England’s towns, apparently in the hope that they would then be loyal to him. It was an astute move on his

part, because if someone else became king, they might not recognise the rights he had already granted.

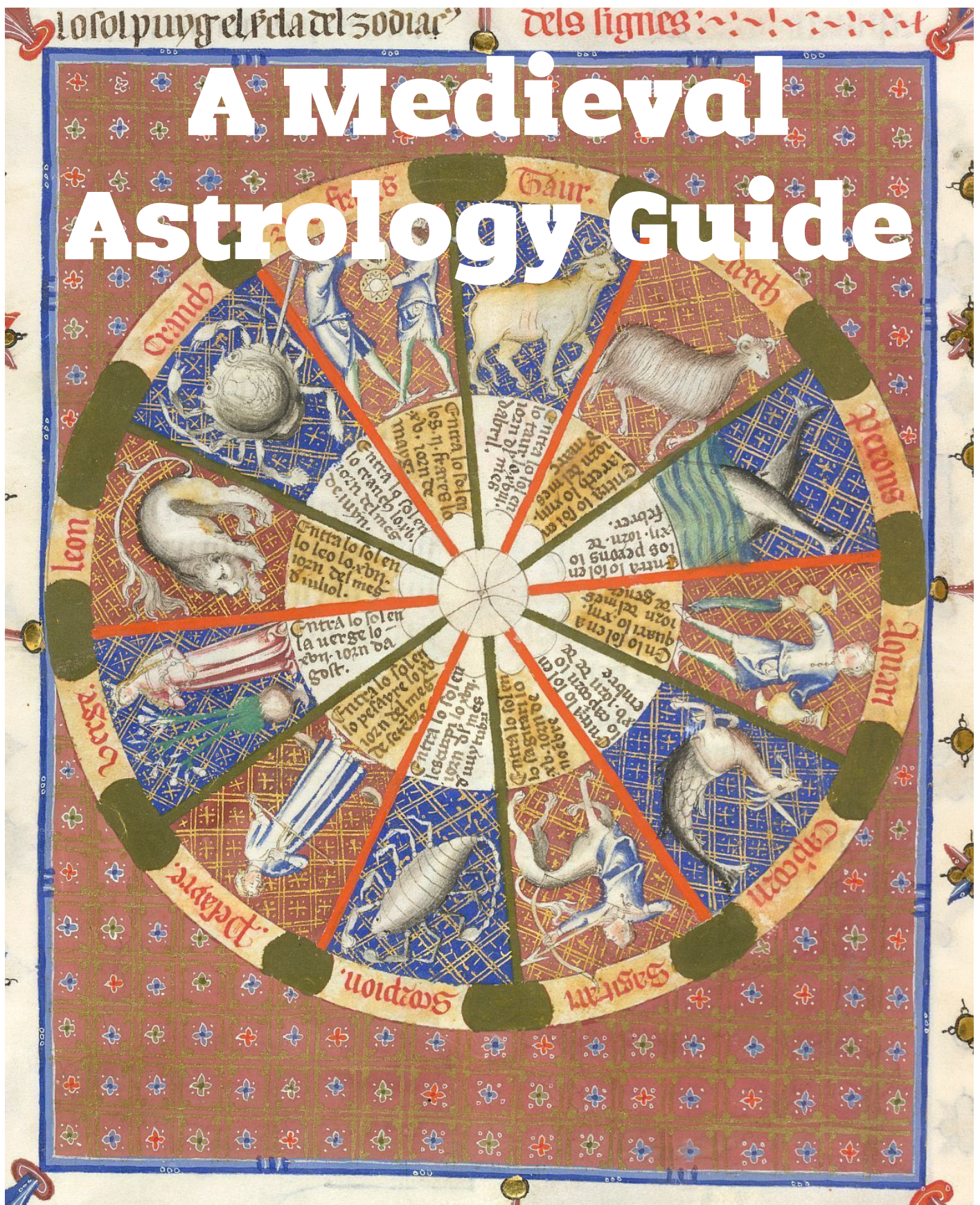
According to historian Evan Jones: “England’s medieval mayors were born in bloodshed and their powers came from desperation. But the events of the thirteenth century helped establish towns as independent corporations, governed by their citizens.

“Last year the English-speaking world celebrated the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta because the ‘great charter’ established the notion that people have rights. But changes in town governance at that time were equally important. They created the notion that leaders should be chosen by the people for the people. That made towns the cradles of democracy.”

The appointment of mayors in towns and cities around the beginning of the 13th century was a major step in the development of representative local government which has repercussions today, and what happened in Bristol in 1216 is a significant example of this. **George Ferguson** will be trying to win a second term as mayor in Bristol in May, 800 years after his original predecessor got the job. He will no doubt be hoping for a smoother process.

John Godwin is a
PhD candidate at the University
of Bristol

This article was first published
in ***The Conversation***



A Medieval Astrology Guide

Detail of a wheel-shaped diagram of the twelve signs of the zodiac, with legends describing when the sun enters each, in Matfré Ermengau of Béziers's *Breviari d'Amour*. - Image from British Library MS Yates Thompson 31 f. 48v

The ancient practice of astrology - examining the movement of planets and stars to divine information about future events - was revived in the Middle Ages. Texts from antiquity were rediscovered in the Arabic world, and then spread into Europe by the 11th century. However, medieval writers often had a complicated view on whether astrology was a real science, and even if it was something that people should do.

For example, the theologian Thomas Aquinas wrote:

if anyone take observation of the stars in order to foreknow casual or fortuitous future events, or to know with certitude future human actions, his conduct is based on a false and vain opinion; and so the operation of the demon introduces itself therein, wherefore it will be a superstitious and unlawful divination.

But he also writes:

On the other hand if one were to apply the observation of the stars in order to foreknow those future things that are caused by heavenly bodies, for instance, drought or rain and so forth, it will be neither an unlawful nor a superstitious divination.

Astrology would continue to gain popularity in the Middle Ages, with many texts being created to examine what the stars said about events. One of these was a later 15th century text created in Low Countries. The manuscript - Amsterdam University Special Collections Library MS XXIII A 8- has recently been edited and translated by Irene Meekes - van Toer

Part of this astrological includes a Solar Zodiologium - prognostications when the sun is in each of the signs of the zodiac. The writer offers advice related to daily life and health, matters that would readers would find useful in either the 15th century or the 21st.

You can read the entire text and translation in **Als die maen is inden weder: Practical Advice in a Late-Fifteenth-Century Astrological Calendar Manuscript, Amsterdam UB MS XXIII A.**

ARIES: THE RAM

Aries is a sign which belongs to the east. It is dry and hot. When the sun is in Aries it is a good time to travel to the east, to work with fire or to let blood. It's good to begin anything that will end shortly. Don't take any medicine for the head. Don't start building houses and don't move into any house. Don't take any medicinal drink. It's good to have weddings, and to make new clothes. It's good to send letters and messengers, and to go on a pilgrimage. It's bad to sow or plant.



British Library MS Harley 2506 f. 36

TAURUS: THE BULL

Taurus belongs to the south. Then is a good time to begin anything that will last a long time, such as building houses, moving into houses and getting married. It's bad to start a war: if you are the first to go onto the battlefield, you will lose. It's good to plant trees and vineyards. But it's bad to begin anything that will last only a short time. You may take medicine, but don't let blood from the arms and don't bathe. Don't start anything that has anything to do with water. You may however hold court days.



British Library MS Additional 22413 f. 138v



British Library MS Arundel 60 f. 4

GEMINI

Gemini belongs to the west. It is hot and friendly. When the sun is in this sign it is a good time to forge friendships and to unify, but do not perpetuate all these things, unless a better sign comes up. You may do battle and fight, but don't let blood from the arms. It's good, however, to move from one house to another. Don't take any medicine for the arms. It's good to go on a pilgrimage, and to hold court days with lords and monarchs. Messengers and letters you may send for they provide you with things, and anything you start that has to do with water, will succeed. But don't plant any trees, don't build houses, and don't take any medicine.

British Library MS Sloane
3983 f. 14



CANCER: THE LOBSTER

Cancer is good. When the sun is in Cancer, it is a good time for fighting and arguing. It's good to travel to the north. It's good to build all things that are associated with water, like watermills. But don't take any medicine for the heart, and don't get married. Don't build new houses, and don't do any job that has to do with fire. Don't plant any trees. You may send letters and messages. Letting blood from the arms is good.

LEO: THE LION

Leo belongs to the east. It is hot and dry. When the sun is in Leo, it is a good time to speak with lords and monarchs. One can work all things that last a short time. One can battle and fight, and hold court days. One can send messengers and letters. One can plant trees. It's good to get married, and one should take medicine for the stomach, the heart and the liver. But don't let blood from the arms, don't bathe, and don't build new houses.



British Library MS
Arundel 339 f. 81v

VIRGO: THE VIRGIN

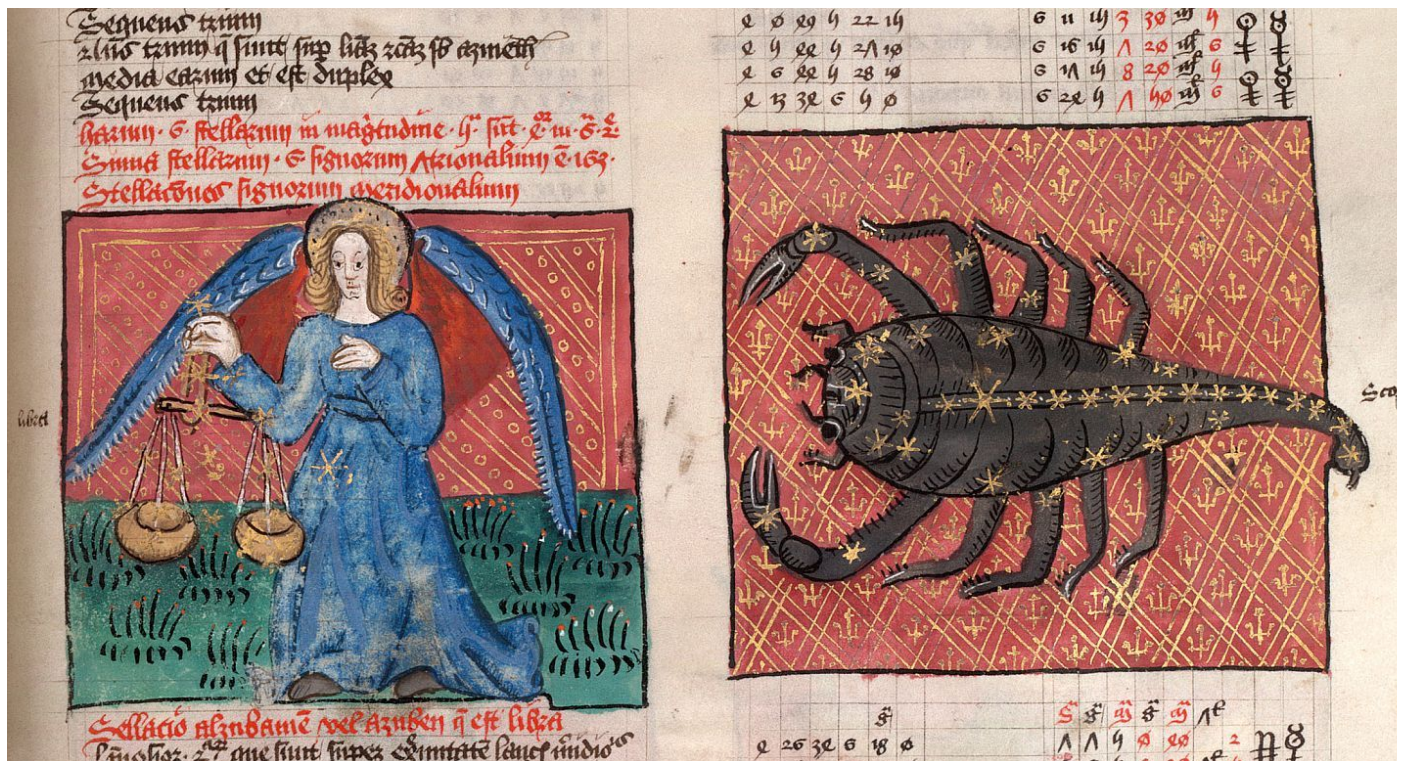
Virgo is cold and dry. Then is a good time for anything that has to do with earth, such as sowing and planting trees and vineyards. It's good to do anything one desires. It's good to have intercourse with a widow. It's also good to build houses and to move into houses. You can get married, but it's bad to have intercourse with virgins, for they will often have children that are too small. Don't do anything that requires fire, and don't fight or quarrel. Also, don't bathe, don't make any new clothes and don't let blood from the arms. It is allowed, however, to hold court days.



British Library MS Arundel 339 f. 82

LIBRA: THE SCALES

Libra. When the sun is in this sign, it is a good time to travel to the east on trade business. It's a good time to let blood, for it will make you healthy. One can start all things that last a short time. One can move into houses, but this is not the best sign to do so. Don't take any medicine for the eyes, and beware of anything that requires earth. One should not hold court days, nor fight. Don't sow, plant, or build anything out of wood, for none of this will do you any good.



British Library MS Arundel 66 f. 41

SCORPIO: THE SCORPION

In Scorpio one will find more wickedness than good. One can only do battle and fight, and one can take medicine. But don't hold any court days, don't move into houses, don't let blood don't sow corn, don't plant any trees, and don't bathe. Don't buy or sell any gold or silver, nor horses. Don't make any new clothes, nor wear any, and don't start any pilgrimage over water or on land. Flee this sign whenever you can!



British Library MS
Harley 647 f. 6

SAGITTARIUS: THE ARCHER

Sagittarius. In this sign one will find much good. One can make friendship among enemies. It's good to get married, but don't have intercourse too often or the woman won't have any children. One can let blood from the arms, travel eastward on business, bathe, and do anything that has do with fire. It's good to begin battling and fighting, but don't take any medicine. And don't do anything that has anything to do with earth. Buying land and horses is good.

CAPRICORN: THE HORNED BUCK

Capricorn brings out the fruit from the earth. When the sun is in Capricorn, it's a good time to sow, plant and travel northward on trade and business. It's a good time to do all things that will last a short time. But don't go into the south. And don't have intercourse. Letting blood is good. Don't take any medicine for the legs. Don't bathe. Beware of all things to do with fire. Don't quarrel, nor hold court days. Don't buy any horses or land et cetera.



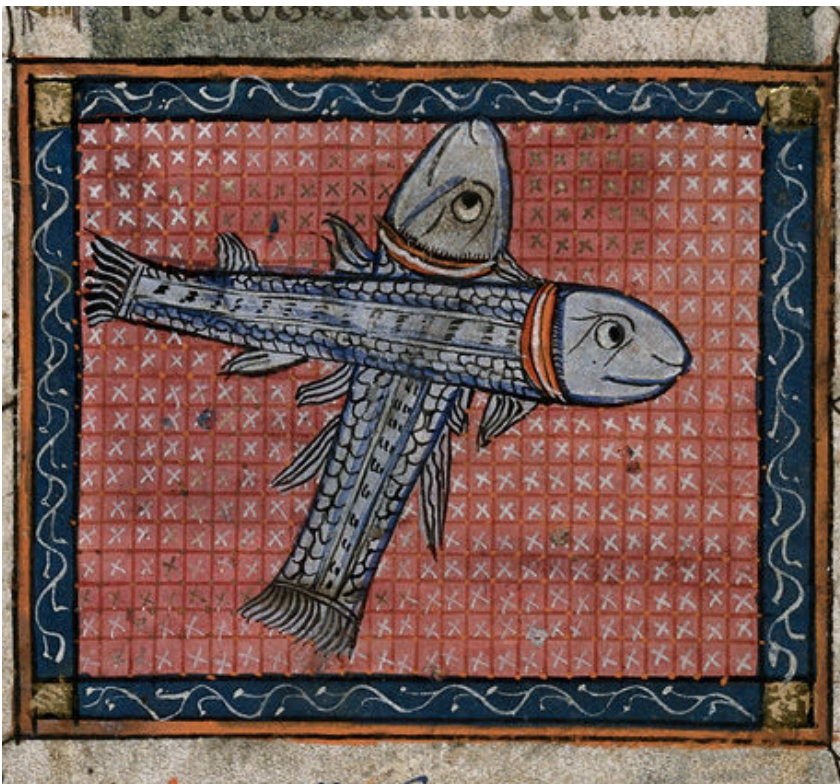
British Library MS Lansdowne 383 f. 8v

AQUARIUS

Aquarius belongs to the southwest. When the sun is in Aquarius, one can build houses, sow, plant, and move into houses. Then one can let blood, and do anything that will last a short time. Quarreling, battling and holding court days is good nor bad. One should not travel a long way. One can buy and sell any cattle or other animals with four feet. One can send letters and messengers. It's good to have weddings. But it is bad to practice skills, for they will not provide a livelihood.



British Library MS Sloane 3983 f. 26v



British Library MS Harley 4940 f. 30v

PISCIS: THE FISH

Piscis belongs to the north, and is good for a lot of things. One can build new houses, and move into them. One can sow, plant, and have intercourse. One can do all things that have to do with water, such as building dikes and building watermills to take and to give away. But one should not take medicine for one's feet, and one should not do anything that has to do with fire. One can battle and fight, and hold court days, buy or sell land, horses and other things. And it is good nor bad to let blood from the arms.

Robin Hood and Deadpool: Dark Humour and Heroes

By Danièle Cybulskie

Medieval legends have had loads of reboots over the centuries. They were getting reboots before reboots were cool. Two of the most popular heroes, of course, are King Arthur and Robin Hood, both of whom have been the stars of several movies within the past twenty years. But, perhaps in Robin Hood's case more than Arthur's, some vital element has been missing lately. Sure, it's interesting to have an outlaw hero at the centre of a story, but just robbing the rich to give to the poor is not what has kept Robin's legend alive all these years. What has made Robin Hood both endearing and enduring is his fascinating blend of merry humour and deadly skill which was directed not at society broadly, but at the corrupt and ungodly. In fact, he actually reminds me a lot of Deadpool. (Just bear with me, hardcore Hoodies.)



Robin Hood - image by Doll Galthie / Flickr

In the early ballads, Robin was not terribly altruistic. He did rob the rich and unworthy, but he didn't just give it all away: his band of men used it for their own purposes. The thing is, though, Robin Hood did it with style. For example, he'd rob a rich knight and then invite him to a feast funded (of course) by the spoils he'd just taken. He followed a Christian moral code to a point, but wanted an adventure every day, and he was not afraid to kill people. He was a complete and unpredictable law unto himself, and he and his men were "merry" because they lived in freedom outside the law and restrictions of ordinary people. At first, Robin wasn't concerned with ransoming the king (in fact no one can quite pin down which king is being referred to in the early stories), or unifying any sort of nation, or fighting in the crusades, or regaining lost nobility. His story evolved to make him tamer and more gentrified so that audiences could comfortably root for someone who merrily and routinely broke the law. Slowly, this thief of the greenwood drifted further and further from his medieval origins.

Medieval and Early Modern people loved Robin because his early stories are exactly

the kind of story they loved to hear and share, and the kind that we love, too. We love to root for a hero who pushes the limits with wisecracking wit and somehow manages to come out on top despite what look like unbeatable odds. We don't necessarily need that hero to be squeaky clean to be compelling. In fact, if he fails from time to time, he's all the more interesting. Robin is often humbled, bruised, and battered when his ego gets the best of him, but he still manages to keep his sense of humour about it. It's no coincidence that Robin is a fox – not a wolf – in the Disney cartoon. He does his best to outwit and outmaneuver instead of to rally the troops. He is smart, funny, and completely deadly, which (as Robin's longevity and *Deadpool's* box office success bear out) is a pretty compelling combination.

Strangely, over the course of the last hundred years, Robin has been pushed into center stage as a leader of men in increasingly large numbers and with bolder purposes (*Magna Carta*, anyone?), I'm guessing because Hollywood has gone with the feeling that audiences would like to see a big, dramatic hero righting big, dramatic wrongs. That format certainly worked for epics like



Braveheart and *Gladiator*, and even much of the new spate of superhero movies, but tortured revolutionary hasn't traditionally been Robin Hood's role. Likewise, Robin's men have become increasingly less merry in favour of darker stories that (we think) better illustrate the miserable conditions of medieval life. But medieval people could easily point to Robin Hood stories as proof

that humour and darkness are not mutually exclusive, something that *Deadpool* bears out, as well.

I'm not saying that Deadpool and Robin Hood would tell the same jokes (although medieval people did like potty humour), fight the same battles, or even want to share a drink together. Deadpool has a personal vendetta that drives



that drives him while the medieval Robin Hood has enemies in a more general sense. Deadpool is a mercenary, Robin is a thief. Deadpool also has a ridiculously high body count which it would be tricky for Robin (or really anyone) to rival.

What I am saying, though, is that perhaps the big success of *Deadpool* means that it's time for a Robin Hood reboot that both embraces the darkness that his legend both had at the onset and has collected over time while still holding on to the merry nature that made his legend what it is. Maybe instead of a grim and traumatized Robin Hood who clutches the *Magna Carta*, it's time for a Robin Hood whose complicated nature shows through his trickery and fine balance of self-interest and greater good. Maybe it's the right time for a Robin Hood origin story that goes all the way back to Robin Hood's actual origins.

To learn more about Robin's roots and his evolution over the centuries, as well as to read some of his earliest stories yourself, I highly recommend the wonderful TEAMS collection *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*.

Danièle Cybulskie is a weekly columnist for Medievalists.net. You can follow her on Twitter @5minmedievalist



Arthur the Mayful Man

By Christopher Berard

Here are some excerpts that establish King Arthur as the ultimate Mayful man:

Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* (c. 1200–1210), trans. Cyril Edwards (Oxford, 2004), 118–119:

Arthur, the Mayful man -- all that was ever told of him happened at Whitsun, or in May's flower-time. What sweet air is ascribed to him!

Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Diu Crône* (c. 1220–1240), trans. J. W. Thomas as *The Crown: A Tale of Sir Gawain and King Arthur's Court* (Lincoln, NE, 1989), 6:

The book says that he [Arthur] was born in May, and we are to understand by this that, free of worldly guilt, he was as blameless as the season in which he was born, a time when grass springs up, flowers bloom, and joyless, troubled hearts awake to desire and are given happiness. May is a symbol of the kindness that Arthur showed on all occasions, for it brings us more joy than other months and takes away the distress of the hard winter: it renews and adorns everything on the heath that is withered.

Arthur's life is like May because he knew how to give in such a manner as to make many happy. Clotho endowed him with this talent so that he would have greater earthly renown than anyone else, and Lachesis was also very kind in this respect, for she spun a long thread for him. Yet I must lament that Atropos did not overlook it, thus causing the world to suffer irreparable loss. Fortuna now sits alone on the wheel without an heir; and Luna, who brought him good luck and protected him from evil, bewails his passing. Philosophers say that children born while the sun is in Gemini are always mild-tempered, noble, happy, wealthy, faithful, kind, and friendly; Arthur therefore deserved his good luck.

So git mir aber die miter mir
Ich wene du sigest ein künigin
*Das künig wende mit dem knappen
das der künigst wende*



Parzival and King Arthur are facing each other in this 15th century image - Cod. Pal. germ. 339 from Heidelberg University Library

The "London Collection" of the Laws of England, (c. 1216), trans. Christopher Berard:

For it is established that all people of every race ought to convene in that place once every year, namely on the first of May to pledge themselves collectively by an unbroken faith and sacrament to be united as one as sworn brothers in order to defend the realm against foreigners and against enemies, together with their lord the king, and with him to protect all his lands and honors in all fidelity and [to pledge] that they wished to be faithful to him as their lord king both when inside and outside the whole realm of Britain.

All princes and counts ought to do this, [namely] to swear simultaneously in the presence of the bishops of the realm in folkmoot; and similarly all the nobles of the realm and the knights and the freemen of the whole and entire realm of Britain are to swear fealty to the king in a plenary folkmoot, as has been said, in the presence of the bishops of the realm.

Arthur, who once was the most famous king of the Britons, established this law and in this way he bound together and united the entire realm of Britain forever; the aforesaid Arthur, by the authority of his law, expelled from the realm Saracens and [other] enemies.

Christopher Berard recently completed his doctorate in Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. He has taught English Literature at the University of Toronto and at Trent University. He is currently preparing a book manuscript on the history and politics of Arthurian imitation in Plantagenet England. Articles by Chris on the myth of King Arthur's survival and on Edward III's Arthurian self-fashioning are forthcoming in this year's issues of *Arthuriana* and *Arthurian Literature*.

Places to See

Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs

New Exhibition at The Met

One of the most productive periods in the history of the region from Iran to Anatolia corresponds to the rule of the Seljuqs and their immediate successors, from 1038 to 1307. The Seljuqs were a Turkic dynasty of Central Asian nomadic origin that established a vast, but relatively short-lived, empire in West Asia (present-day Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey). Under Seljuq rule, the exchange and synthesis of diverse traditions—including Turkmen, Perso-Arabo-Islamic, Byzantine, Armenian, Crusader, and other Christian cultures—accompanied economic prosperity, advances in science and technology, and a great flowering of culture within the realm. Now open at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the landmark international loan exhibition *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs* features spectacular works of art created in the 11th through 13th century from Turkmenistan to the Mediterranean.

Approximately 270 objects—including ceramics, glass, stucco, works on paper, woodwork, textiles, and metalwork—from American, European, and Middle Eastern public and private collections are shown. Many of the institutions have never lent works from their collections before. Among the highlights are a dozen important loans from Turkmenistan—the exhibition marks the first time that Turkmenistan as an

independent country has permitted an extended loan of a group of historical objects to a museum in the United States.

Under the Great Seljuqs of Iran, the middle class prospered, spurring arts patronage, technological advancements, and a market for luxury goods. In contrast, in Anatolia,



Syria, and the Jazira (northwestern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey)—which were controlled by the Seljuq successor dynasties (Rum Seljuqs, Artuqids, and Zangids)—art was produced under royal patronage, and Islamic iconography was introduced to a predominantly Christian area.

Furthermore, a number of artists had immigrated to the region from Iran in response to the Mongol conquest in 1220. Because patrons, consumers, and artists came from diverse cultural, religious, and artistic backgrounds, distinctive arts were produced and flourished in the western parts of the Seljuq realm.

Exhibition Overview

Arranged thematically, the exhibition opens with a display of artifacts that name the Seljuq sultans and members of the ruling elite. In Central Asia and Iran, inscriptions appeared on coins and architecture. Stucco reliefs representing royal guards, amirs, and courtiers serve to evoke the courts of the Great Seljuq rulers whose names did not appear on objects. In Anatolia, Syria, and the

Jazira, names of Seljuq successor rulers and images appeared on a range of objects. Here, the famous 12th-century cloisonné dish bearing the name of Rukn al-Dawla Dawud, a leader of the Artuqids, is featured.

In the second section, the courtly environment and activities associated with the sultans and their courtiers appear on stucco reliefs, ceramics, metalwork, and other media. While depictions of the Seljuq elite on these works were not intended as actual portraits, the distinctive Central Asian facial type was a standard of beauty under Seljuq rule. The earliest extant manuscript of the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings)—the Persian national epic—created in Anatolia in 1217 is a highlight of this section. Additionally, the remarkable Blacas ewer, with its myriad details of life connected to the court, is prominently exhibited.

The three centuries under Seljuq rule were also a period of inventions; and the many advances in science, medicine, and technology were reflected in the manuscripts, scientific instruments, and medical implements of the time. Pages from the early 13th-century illustrated

manuscript *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* feature some of the fanciful inventions of the Muslim polymath and creative genius Ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari, whose inventions ranged from clocks and water wheels to automata (robots). Also noteworthy is an early Islamic astrolabe. (Among the many things that could be determined by means of this complex navigational instrument was the direction of Mecca, and hence the direction of prayer.) Also on view is an intricate pharmacy box with separate compartments for musk, camphor, and other ingredients typical of the medieval pharmacopoeia.

Seljuq art abounds with depictions of real, mythological, and hybrid animals on objects large and small. Animal combat was a favorite theme in Iranian art. The double-headed eagle was adopted as the standard of the Seljuq successor states in Anatolia and the Jazira. Harpies (composite creatures having the body of a bird and the face of a human) and sphinxes (beasts with the body of a lion, face of a human, and occasionally the wings of a bird) appear frequently. The exquisite Vaso Vescovali—a lidded bowl engraved and inlaid with silver and decorated with complex astrological imagery—features eight personifications of planets on the lid along with the 12 signs of the zodiac and their associated planets on the base, within a profusion of other ornamentation.

The Seljuqs actively promoted Sunni Islam throughout their territory, building madrasas and mosques, and sponsoring the production of Qur'ans and other religious texts. A number of rare and beautifully ornamented examples of the book arts from the time of the Seljuqs are on view. In Syria, the Jazira, and Anatolia—where the majority of the local population, including some of the ruling elite, was Christian—artifacts bearing Christian iconography continued to be made. And a ritual vessel from Georgia, with a Hebrew inscription, attests to the presence of Jewish populations as well. The same artists often

served various religious communities. Hence, the styles and artistic traditions of one group merged with those of another.

The sixth and final section of the exhibition focuses on the funerary arts. A variety of tomb markers, cenotaphs, funerary furniture, and patterned textiles discovered in Seljuq tombs are shown. In a proper Muslim burial, the deceased is wrapped in two or three sheets of plain white cloth; the presence of expensive textiles in a funerary context indicates that popular customs and official practice differed significantly.



Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs runs from April 27, 2016 to July 24, 2016. For more information, please visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website at

**[www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/
listings/2016/court-and-cosmos](http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/court-and-cosmos)**

The Red Woman: the history behind Game of Thrones' mysterious mystic

By Marta Cobb

Every *Game of Thrones* season premiere needs its shock reveal – and season six is no different. As the name of the episode – **The Red Woman** – hints, this one pertains to red priestess Melisandre, to whom, it turns out, there's much more than meets the eye (don't worry, no spoilers ensue). Even in a series known for its complex characters and even more complicated morality, Melisandre and her motives remain surprisingly opaque. And it looks as if her story's only just getting started.

Admired by some, loathed by others, and feared by many, she was the driving force behind Stannis Baratheon's claim to the throne of Westeros. She had prophesied that he was Azor Ahai, the champion of the Lord of Light reborn, and, as such, Westeros' best hope against the coming darkness. Inspired by her prophecies and her mysterious powers, Stannis gave up his faith in the seven gods of Westeros and made her one of his most important advisers.

Although monotheism is probably more familiar to viewers than the polytheistic beliefs held by most of the characters on *Game of Thrones*, it was hard not to be troubled by Melisandre's religious message.

On one hand her prophecies of the coming of a saviour, a hero from the Lord of Light who will defeat the forces of darkness, will sound familiar to those raised in the Christian tradition. But on the other, her god requires blood sacrifice from his followers, which suggests more sinister rituals. Like Melisandre herself, the motives of her god, R'hllor, remain murky.

These sacrifices were not only condoned but encouraged by Melisandre, who urged Stannis to burn his daughter Shireen in order to ensure his victory. In our history, wars have been fought in the name of God and heretics have been burned for incorrect beliefs. But child sacrifice is usually associated with



Carice van Houten as Melisandre. Photo: Helen Sloan/HBO

religious deviants or covens of witches. And indeed, in spite of Melisandre's own confidence her visions, Stannis's death at the end of season five suggests that she has either been deceived or misinterpreted the messages sent by her god. Recent revelations suggest that Melisandre may be more of a witch than a prophet.

Medieval mystics

The line between divinely inspired prophet and devilishly influenced witch has always been blurred, especially where women were concerned. The later Middle Ages in particular experienced a flowering of women's mystical experiences. Although not

allowed to become priests, women in this period were increasingly drawn to visions and prophecy and some, like Melisandre, became enormously influential as a result. Bridget of Sweden, for example, successfully campaigned for the papacy to return from Avignon to Rome, and after her death, the account of her revelations circulated widely. The military victories of Joan of Arc made possible the coronation of Charles VII of France and helped bring about the end of the Hundred Years War.

But if God had messages for the faithful believer, so did the devil and his legion of demonic followers. The difficulty was in telling the difference. Sometimes demons impersonated angels or other holy figures to lead the vulnerable astray. Early theologian John Cassian provides a cautionary example of a monk who, after 50 years of pious living in the desert, is deceived by a demon disguised as an angel and throws himself down a well thinking that he is following a divine commandment. When even the pious are not safe from demonic attack, determining whether inspiration is from God or the devil becomes critical.

Theological writings of the period reveal that women, who were often viewed as physically, intellectually and morally deficient, were considered especially vulnerable to these influences – whether divine or demonic. So a woman claiming to receive special communications from God needed to be especially careful.

Gods and devils

Before sending Joan of Arc to lift the siege at Orleans, Charles VII ordered that she receive a background check and theological examination. The commission assigned to the task endorsed Joan's piety, but this didn't protect her from being accused of sorcery and heresy and then burned at the stake once she was captured by her enemies. And English mystic Margery Kempe was also

accused of heresy and frequently needed to explain to clerical authorities the nature of her religious experiences in order to receive their approval.

Having approval was essential for success: with it, a female visionary could have her experiences recorded for posterity and perhaps even become a saint. Without it the best she could hope for was to die unknown (better, at least, than death or imprisonment for heresy).

Melisandre may not need the backing of religious authorities, but she needed Stannis as much as he needed her. Without him to fulfil her prophecies, her faith is shaken. Moreover, even if her message is coming directly from her god, it can be difficult to know how to interpret it. Medieval visionary writings often describe the problems of this next hurdle. The recluse Julian of Norwich contemplated aspects of her visions for 20 years. Even then, she concludes the expanded version of her revelations by stating that, although her work has begun, it has not yet been completed. Completion and full understanding will only be possible in the next life.

Only time can tell if Melisandre's visions are false, or if she has misunderstood the intentions of her god. But, with her most powerful supporter gone, difficult times lie ahead. Whether she will be accused of sorcery and heresy like Joan, rise to prominence like Bridget, or retreat to seclusion like Julian, remains to be seen.

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Medieval Medicine: Its Mysteries and Science

By Toni Mount

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Reviewed by Sandra Alvarez

Modern medicine has enabled us to combat illnesses that would've killed us fifty years ago but are now viewed as a mere annoyance. It has enabled us to turn deadly diseases into chronically manageable ones with the right combination of diet, medication, or therapies. We are very fortunate, imagine living hundreds of years ago when there were no tetanus shots, no antibiotics, and the common cold could kill you. These were common problems to people dependant on medieval medicine. In her book, *Medieval Medicine: Its Mysteries and Science*, author, teacher and historic interpreter, **Toni Mount**, looks at the history, and development of medicine from the Middle Ages to Early Modern period.

Pre-nineteenth century medicine relied on centuries old beliefs that had hardly changed from ancient times. Following the medical treatises of Galen (130-210 AD) and Hippocrates (460-370 BC), mixed with a

strong dose of Christian belief, physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries used the same system of treatment for close to 2,000 years. But why? Many people know that Medieval and Tudor medicine stemmed from ancient texts but why not later ones? Mount answers this intriguing question: because of the original sin of Eve eating the apple from the tree in the Garden of Eden, consecutive generations after Adam and Eve were less intelligent and lost more knowledge with each passing generation. Therefore, medieval writers believed looking to the past for medical knowledge was the key because Classical writers were closer to Adam and Eve and therefore retained more knowledge.

Mount begins her book with a history of how medieval medicine developed. The earliest doctors were monks with no formal schooling in universities but who may have attended medical school taught in Greek based on Galen and Hippocrates' teaching.

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MEDIEVAL MEDICINE



ITS MYSTERIES
AND SCIENCE



TONI MOUNT

What's interesting about early medicine is that there was a distinct separation between physicians, barber surgeons and apothecaries. How did this come to pass? In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that while monks and priests could employ medical theories and treat patients, they could not practice as surgeons because they were forbidden from drawing blood, thus leaving this practice to laymen and women. This included human dissection, which was forbidden for centuries, leaving early physicians reliant animal dissection to figure out what was going on inside the human body. This led to a host of problems since animals, like pigs, (which were commonly

used as examples) were not biologically the same as humans.

Medical universities sprouted in the twelfth and eleventh centuries but were still Church run so they were more focused on theory than practical knowledge. Up until the seventeenth century, men still had to take some form of minor Holy Orders to be admitted into a university. The Medieval belief on illness was that it was due to sin, so to cure an ill person was to risk God's wrath for interfering in his divine punishment. Many physicians were religious men and

tried to cure the soul, versus treating the actual illness. Prayer and miracles were accepted by medical community in the Middle Ages as legitimate forms of healing. It was unquestioned, and believed that sometimes, prayer and miracles from relics and pilgrimages were the patient's best chance of recovery. Another medieval school of thought was that God had given physicians the means to cure the sick and to not use his gifts was going against God's intentions.

So how did you prevent yourself from becoming ill? Naturally, by not committing sin! Activities like pilgrimage were believed to be a form of prevention (and cure) for illness. The more arduous the journey, the more credit your soul got in heaven. Badges gained from pilgrimage were later kept for use as charms to ward off evil and illness. If you were too sick to go yourself, you could send a proxy representative in your stead and still reap the benefits of pilgrimage. If you died, all was not lost, your soul still received posthumous benefits from the journey. It was an incredible system they had going in this period.

You could also pray the the local saint, or a patron saint associated with a specific trade or purpose, or on a saint's feast day that fell closest to your birthday to stave off illness, or seek a cure for one. Medieval medical practice, when entwined with religion, was a complicated mine field.

Another interesting point Mount touched on in her book was that the Black Death, which decimated Europe in the fourteenth century. She noted that the term wasn't coined until the nineteenth century by Elizabeth Penrose (1780-1837). She then moved on to discuss why the Black Death remains a contentious topic amongst scholars. There are various theories as to what kind of disease the Black Death was, with some scholars arguing it may have been a hemorrhagic fever or an early Ebola strain, and not Bubonic plague. Mount also touched on the deadly 'sweating

sickness' that rapidly killed its victims, sometimes in a matter of hours. She posits that it may have been an early version of the deadly 1993 Hanta virus.

I loved this book for the fact that it touched on some truly strange, and humorous medical practices during the Medieval and Tudor period that sounded more like a Dungeons & Dragons spell than a real cure. Mount cites several of these strange remedies in the book, like this one to cure whooping cough:

Take a caterpillar, wrap it in a small bag of muslin, and hang the bag around the neck of the affected child. The caterpillar will die and the child will be cured. Or pour a bowl of milk and get a ferret to lap from the bowl. After the child drinks the rest of the milk, she will recover.

She compiled all sorts of utterly bizarre cures for illness. Some were grim, and some made me laugh. Here is a remedy for menstrual cramps:

A remedy for women who suffered from dysmenorrhoea (painful periods) required taking a cat, cutting off its head, removing its innards and laying the still warm body of the feline on the painful belly (from the Fifteenth-century Leechbook, recipe 238, p. 89).

Think that is gruesome? If you had gout, it was even worse:

To cure gout. Boil a red-haired dog alive in oil until it falls apart. Then add worms, hog's marrow and herbs. Apply the mixture to the affected parts. Or take a frog when neither sun nor moon is shining. Cut off its hind legs and wrap them in deer skin. Apply the right to the right and the left to the left foot of the gouty person and without doubt he will be healed.

Did women really smear dead cats on their bellies thinking it would cure cramps? Did people really boil dogs alive to get rid of

gout? It sounds pretty revolting, and a lot of work, yet it's also interesting to see what people believed would help them get well hundreds of years ago.

Mount finished the book by showing the slow decline in the belief in Galenic and Hippocratic teaching. Medicine eventually moved away from charms, bizarre recipes, bleeding, astrology, and the Four Humors theory, and inched its way towards modern medical practice and science based study. The role of the church in medicine, women practitioners, regulation, malpractice suits, charlatans and fraudsters, and the stories behind key physicians in medical history are all covered here. Mount tackles so much material in a truly enjoyable way without getting bogged down by dry details. It's a fascinating account, peppered with many wonderful cases and stories that range from gag inducing, eyebrow raising, to hysterically funny. It's an easy and enjoyable read. If you're remotely curious about the history of medicine after the ancients, *Medieval Medicine* is a great place to start.

Learn more about ***Medieval Medicine. Its Mysteries and Science***, from Amberley Publishing, at:

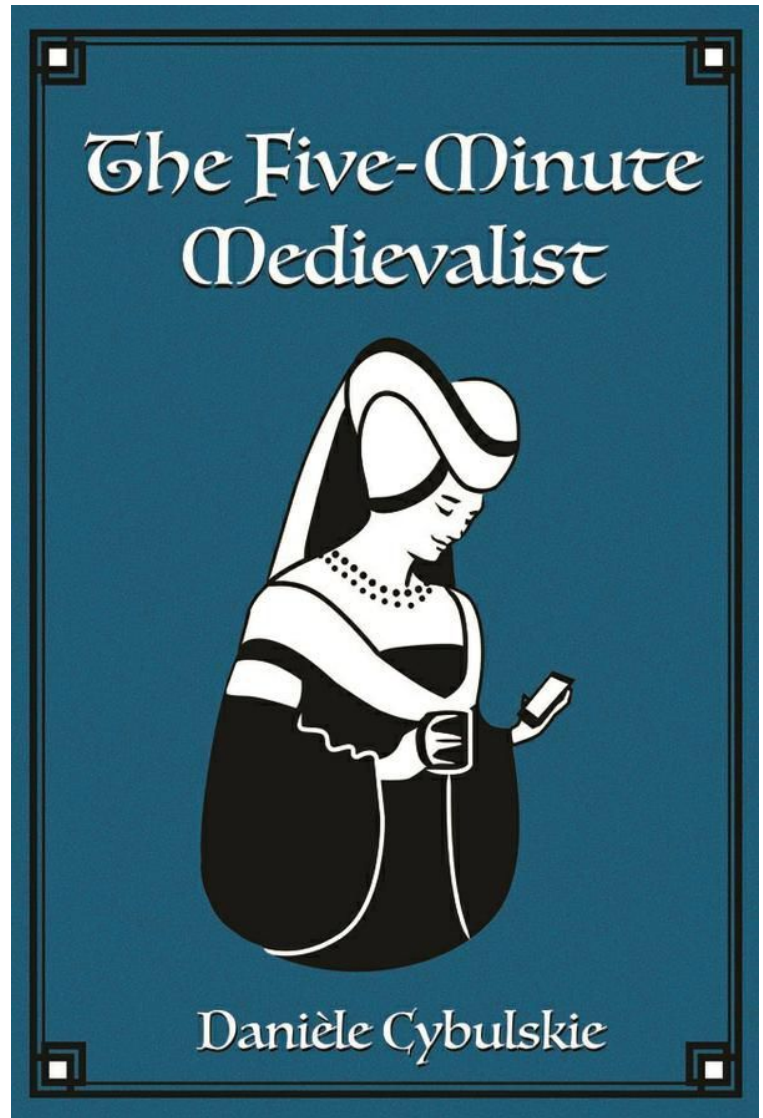
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The Five-Minute Medievalist

By Danièle Cybulskie

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