

The Medieval Magazine

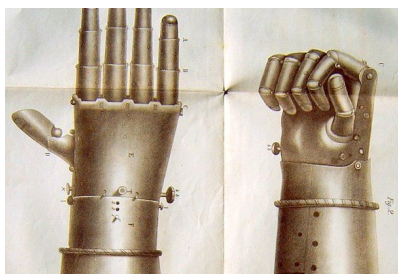
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The Medieval World of George R.R. Martin



The Knight With an Iron Hand



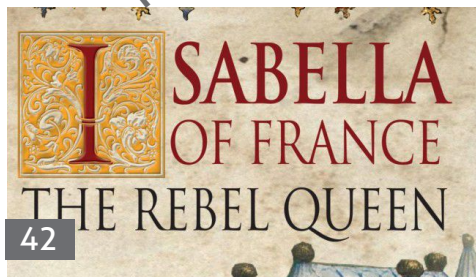
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Isabella of France, The Rebel Queen



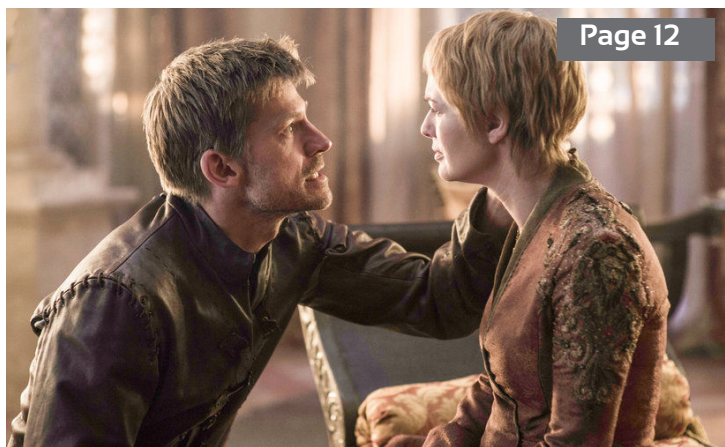
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Incest in Game of Thrones | Crowdfunding Tullaun Castle



Crowdfunding for Tullaun Castle

See how the owners of this Irish castle are seeking to raise money for its restoration.



Incest in Game of Thrones

Nancy Bilyeau examines the historical inspirations for incestuous relationships in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.



A Hard Day's Knight

Daniele Cybulskie compares knighthood between medieval Europe and Westeros.



Cruel Tyrant: The Reign of Frederick II

Sandra Alvarez takes a look at the 'scientific' experiments carried out by the Holy Roman Emperor

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THE MEDIEVAL MAGAZINE

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Cover Photo: The covers from the five books that so far make up George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*.



Brief encounters: watching medieval archaeology emerge from the heart of Perth

A significant assemblage of medieval pottery, metal, bone, antler, leather and wooden artefacts recovered from rich midden deposits, floor surfaces, occupation deposits, structural timbers, pits and hearths sheds new light upon life in the heart of the medieval burgh of Perth in Scotland.

Between August 1985 and April 1986, an extended archaeological watching brief was undertaken by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust during the redevelopment of St John's Square Shopping Centre in the middle of Perth. The results of the fieldwork and post excavation analyses, funded by Historic Scotland, have now been published for the first time thanks to funding from that organisation's successor - Historic Environment Scotland.

The watching brief at St John's Square was undertaken by members of an archaeological team excavating a site in nearby Canal Street. Limiting investigation to a watching brief, mainly on piling operations, was unavoidable at the time. St John's Square was an extreme example of one of the most common types of archaeological projects – the watching brief – undertaken across the UK at the time. This particular watching brief predated the

introduction of National Planning Policies, which now control the impact of development upon archaeology.

The design of the shopping centre at St John's Square required massively robust foundations, so the watching brief comprised the monitoring and recording of 389 foundation pile holes and the cleaning and recording of 186 trenches and manholes excavated by the developer's construction contractor. The health and safety aspects of working close to machinery were considerable and no trenches were excavated by the archaeologists themselves

"Timbers, surfaces/floors and hearths/burning were observed near the High Street, with a lesser concentration behind South Street near the SW corner of the site," said Catherine Smith, who compiled the publication report. "These are the areas



Undertaking a watching brief at St John's Square - Photo © ARO.

where archaeological features would be expected, situated on or close to the medieval street frontages.”

The absence of such features from the central part of the site reflects the shallow depth of most of the trenches there, and the presence of organic/midden deposits and garden soil there does not mean that structures were not present. A possible ‘foreland’, in front of one structure, was noted on the High Street frontage, and at least two paths, one with a wooden kerb, and a possible early alignment of Meal Vennel were noted extending southwards from High Street. Four paths were recorded behind the South Street frontage, including a possible early version of Meal Vennel itself. Thirteen pits were identified, including two which may have been wood-lined, one which may have been charcoal-lined, and one with clay. The nature of the watching briefs precluded any more detailed interpretation of the site and so limited the identification of features to those that can be paralleled elsewhere in Perth. In

particular, it was not possible to radiocarbon date any of the features found on the site, although the three successive timber buildings on the High Street frontage could be thirteenth century in date by association with the artefacts recovered.

The medieval pottery recovered during the watching briefs included some examples of vessels in both the local Redware and imported Yorkshire Type wares.

“It is very striking that there are no examples of the twelfth century imported fabrics which were recovered from excavations on the opposite northern High Street frontage of this part of Perth” said Derek Hall, who analysed the pottery. “The Yorkshire Type wares imply that no deposits any earlier than the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries were recovered from the watching briefs. The imported Low Countries Redwares and the Rhenish Stoneware, as well as the Yorkshire Types wares, indicate the importance of sea-borne trade across the North Sea and up the



Google Earth view of the current centre of Perth with St John's Square highlighted

east coast of the British Isles in the medieval period. These quality wares were imported into Perth and may well have influenced the development and production of the Redware industry in Scotland.”

Despite the difficulties of archaeological recording during the watching briefs, the recovered artefact assemblage provides valuable evidence for activities taking place in the core of the medieval burgh. This was because there were excellent conditions for organic preservation within the middens and pitfills encountered, which led to the survival of a more diverse range of material and medieval artefact types than would otherwise be expected, including a medieval knife and fork still with their wooden handles, wooden pegs and pins, moss rope, antler offcuts and 68 fragments of leather shoes.

“During the medieval period, forks were used to assist in carving meat and in eating small delicacies,” said Adrian Cox who led the analyses of artefacts. “The use of forks as components of table cutlery did not begin until the second half of the seventeenth century. The overall form of the fork appears consistent with a use in picking up small food items, while the knife was also probably used

at the table for the cutting and presentation of meat.”

Evidence for the preparation of textiles was recovered in the form of an iron heckle tooth and a ceramic spindle whorl. The assemblage of leather, however, was dominated by shoe parts rather than manufacturing debris, and so appears to be diagnostic of discarded leather items rather than workshop activity. The concentration of antler offcuts, however, does indicate the existence of a workshop in the near vicinity and provides important evidence for the manufacture of antler artefacts within the medieval burgh.

“Nowhere else in the burgh has such a concentration of antler offcuts been found,” said Catherine Smith, who examined the faunal remains, “it is apparent that a workshop, perhaps producing combs, must have been located there.”

The antler deposits here are matched only by an assemblage recovered from Linlithgow High Street (ARO 16), incidentally a town famed for its leather work.

"The craft workshops were probably located close together in the backlands, with the raw materials of the various trades readily available," added Catherine. "Traditionally, similar trades were clustered together in the medieval burghs, and it is notable that South Street continued to be home to many of Perth's cobblers until the early modern period, the street being known variously as 'Shoegate' or 'Shaegate' up until the eighteenth century."

As the remains of three successive timber buildings were recorded on the High Street frontage in the same trench as a recovered sawn antler piece, it is likely that one of these buildings was the workshop of a craftsman working with antler.

At the time of the watching briefs, planning and construction legislation and guidelines in Scotland were quite different to the present situation. If this development were to happen today rather than in 1985, the way the archaeological work was undertaken would be very different. However, despite the very difficult working conditions of the archaeologists, it is remarkable how much information was retrieved. Unlike the Perth High Street excavations of ten years earlier, which were an open area excavation, where the outlines of buildings could be traced with certainty, boundaries and paths followed and pits dug in their entirety, the archaeologists on the St John's Square site were only allowed small insights into the past of the burgh. Even then, those glimpses have provided evidence of activities in areas behind High Street and South Street, and added to the corpus of information on the development of the burgh and the lives people led.

The implications of the results of the archaeological work at St Johns Square indicate that there is great potential for further research when the opportunities arise in medieval burghs, such as Perth. The watching briefs at St John's Square

demonstrate that research questions can only be best answered on a much bigger scale than a restricted pile hole or narrow trench, but information was gained for all that, and information that otherwise would have been lost for ever.

The full results of this research, ARO21: Brief encounters: watching medieval archaeology emerge from St John's Square, Perth by Catherine Smith, and funded by Historic Environment Scotland, has just been published and is now freely available to download from the ARO website - Archaeology Reports Online - at <http://archaeologyreportsonline.com/publications.html>



The image shows the cover of a report titled 'ARO21: Brief encounters: watching the medieval archaeology emerge from St John's Square, Perth'. The cover has a teal background. At the top, the 'ArchaeologyReportsOnline' logo is displayed in a stylized font with a red 'A' and 'O'. Below the logo is a large, dark, irregular shape that resembles a map outline of Scotland, with a photograph of an archaeological excavation site inside it. The photograph shows a worker in an orange jacket and yellow helmet standing in a trench. Text on the cover includes the title, the author 'Compiled by Catherine Smith*', and a list of contributors: 'By David Perry and Russel Coleman with contributions by Derek Hall, Adrian Cox, Catherine Smith, Clare Thomas and Lesley Lind, with illustrations by David Munro and the late Frank W Moran'. At the bottom, there is a box for 'Historic Environment Scotland' and its Gaelic name 'Àrainneachd Eachdraidheil Alba'. The footer contains contact information for Archaeology Reports Online, including the address '52 Elderpark Workspace, 100 Elderpark Street, Glasgow, G51 3TR', phone number '0141 495 8800', email 'info@guard-archaeology.co.uk', and website 'www.archaeologyreportsonline.com'.

ArchaeologyReportsOnline

ARO21: Brief encounters: watching the medieval archaeology emerge from St John's Square, Perth

Compiled by Catherine Smith*

By David Perry and Russel Coleman with contributions by Derek Hall, Adrian Cox, Catherine Smith, Clare Thomas and Lesley Lind, with illustrations by David Munro and the late Frank W Moran

Historic Environment Scotland
Àrainneachd Eachdraidheil Alba

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The King Richard III Skull Portraits

Dramatic new artwork of King Richard III inspired by the discovery by University of Leicester archaeologists have went on display at an exhibition in London. Contemporary artist Alexander de Cadenet unveiled the first in a new series of striking skull portraits featuring King Richard III at Andipa Gallery - taking place now until 25 April 2016.

The portraits have been produced using University of Leicester X-ray scans of the last Plantagenet king following his discovery by archaeologists beneath a car park in Leicester in 2012. The images have been produced under University of Leicester licence.

A British artist working in various media, De Cadenet is most known for his skull portraits that are set within the tradition of Vanitas - still life artwork which includes various symbolic objects designed to remind the viewer of their mortality and of the worthlessness of worldly goods and pleasures.

De Cadenet said: "The skulls began in 1996 using medical X-rays as a way to show who the subject was 'inside' as opposed to how they appear on the surface. The portraits challenge the traditional facility of art to keep the life/identity of a subject alive in the minds of future generations - as they present a forensic X-ray record of the subject's remains as opposed to a recognisable

likeness of their face.

"For me, Richard III is one of the ultimate skull portraits and I feel honoured to be able to present him using this concept as he is a part of our country's history. I am extremely grateful to the University of Leicester for allowing me access to the X-ray scans, without which this creation would not be possible.

"Furthermore his remains have been discussed and analysed in such scientific detail, I felt he was an extremely appropriate subject to present as his skull is likely the most recognisable and iconic in the world today.

"The idea of a monarch from the middle ages with unimaginable power and signifier of status - and here presented as a skull - he is a most significant momento mori embodying

the 'vanities' concept and a potent opportunity to question the meaning and ephemeral nature of our lives. Of course Richard III is also a character richly presented in British culture - not just by Shakespeare but also as part of contemporary culture due to the recent discovery of his remains and his reinterment."

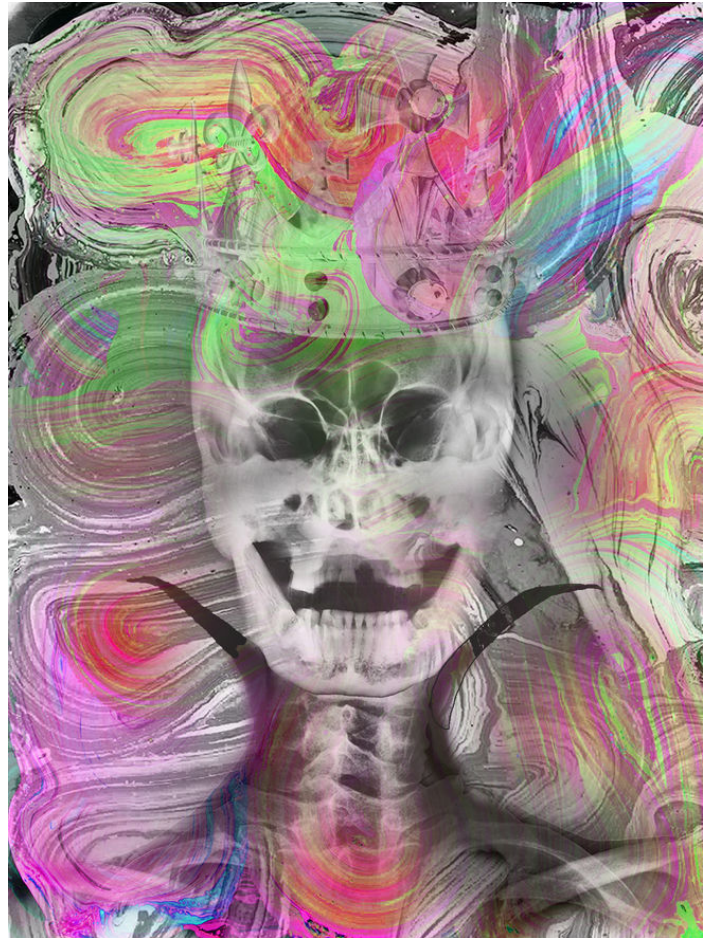
Aside from Shakespeare, Richard III has also been represented in other contemporary art forms. A facial reconstruction was commissioned by the Richard III Society and more recently a large photo-mosaic portrait was unveiled on the first anniversary of his reinterment. Both can be found on display at the King Richard III Visitor Centre in Leicester.

Dave Hall, Registrar and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Leicester, said: "Alexander's bold and inventive interpretations of King Richard III break the mould of traditional portraiture by using University of Leicester X-ray scans with personalised elements relating to his character including a crown.

"The discovery by the University has been represented in many different forms including college plays and graphic illustrations. We are pleased that it has had such a profound effect, not just on the scientific and historic communities, but in the arts as well."

De Cadenet added: "The discovery of Richard III is one of the most fascinating and historically significant discoveries of our time. For the University of Leicester to also have been able to prove the remains were his from the genetic information still present in the bones was a scientific triumph of extraordinary magnitude.

"The discovery has contributed in an unprecedented way to the ongoing legacy and story of this subject from history – and that is exactly what I would like my skull portraits to do."



The King (Richard III). Credit: Alexander de Cadenet/University of Leicester

For more information visit: <http://andipa.com/exhibitions/alexander-de-cadenet/retrospective-book-launch-x-king-richard-iii-skull-portrait>

Crowdfunding Campaign for Tullaun Castle



In 2007 Sonja and Kevin Bergin purchased Tullaun Castle in North Tipperary, Ireland. The Gaelic four-storey tower house that is believed to have been built in the mid 1500s. Since then, the couple have been working at restoring the site and bring back to its former glory. They have now launched a new fundraising campaign that has already raised over \$10,000 to help with work on the interior, including repairing its spiral staircase.



We interviewed Sonja to learn how it has been like to own and restore this castle. She explains:

We bought Tullaun in mid 2007 and shortly after the Irish economy nose-dived and our house, which we'd planned to sell to fund the restoration, dropped drastically in value. We decided we'd just have to tread water til things improved. This took longer than anticipated. We had really harsh weather in December 2010 and after that and this caused significant damage to some other Kennedy ruins nearby so we decided we couldn't wait any longer in case the same happened to Tullaun. It's been a rollercoaster ride to put it mildly but it's wonderful seeing it all finally starting to come together. So I think I can safely say we didn't manage to restore Tullaun as quickly as we had initially planned but it's great to see it starting to come to life again.

We also asked about the trade-offs involved in restoring a castle so that is historically accurate, as well as making sure that it can be liveable for a modern family:

We are determined that Tullaun castle will still feel like a 500 year old building so there are certain modern luxuries that we might have to do without. Heating such big spaces will be tricky and we can't have things like triple-glazing to reduce heat loss. We don't want modern appliances ruining the 16th century ambience so fridges, dishwasher etc might have to be in a separate area (but we do that already where we live so we're used to it). There will have to be some compromises between function and the aesthetics but I hope it will work.

You can support the Tullaun Castle crowdfunding campaign by visiting:

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/let-s-help-this-irish-castle-earn-its-keep--2#/>

Incest in Game of Thrones

By Nancy Bilyeau

"The man looked over at the woman. 'The things I do for love,' he said with loathing. He gave Bran a shove. Screaming, Bran went backward out the window into open air."

It was one of the most shocking moments of the first season of the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, if not the seasons that followed. The child was Bran Stark, caught peeping through a castle window when he heard voices during one of his climbs up the outer walls. The "man" was Jaime Lannister, and the woman his twin sister, Cersei Lannister, married to the king of the Seven Kingdoms, Robert Baratheon. What Bran saw was brother and sister making love, and for that, Jamie tried to silence the boy through murder.

There is no denying that *Game of Thrones* is submerged in incest. Whether it's a dynastic predilection, a forbidden love affair or a source of horrific abuse, incestuous couplings serve as both world-building foundation and crucial plot devices in the books and the series. While *Game of Thrones* is a fantasy, filled with dragons and "White Walkers" and "the Long Winter," it draws some of its overarching plots from the medieval period—and the ancient one. Where do the precedents for rampant incest come from? Let's examine the clues.

George R.R. Martin created a complex and ornately imagined world of seven kingdoms in his series. At the start of the first book, Cersei Lannister is married to Robert Baratheon, but his rule was established through a coup. Robert overthrew the "mad

king," Aerys II Targaryen, the last of three centuries' worth of rulers of that family. Martin clearly establishes that House Targaryen is built on brother-sister royal unions. He wrote, "For centuries the Targaryens had married brother to sister, since Aegon the Conqueror had taken his sister to bride. The line must be kept pure, Viserys had told her a thousand times; theirs was the kingsblood, the golden blood of Old Valyria, the blood of the dragon." In the television series, this is rarely referred to, although there is no indication that the show runners have changed the family history. Daenerys Targaryen, the product of generations of incest, is a major character of the show, and a sympathetic point of view for the audience, and it's possible the script writers do not want to weaken the fans' liking for Daenerys.

Martin most likely modeled the brother-sister Targaryen unions on the Ancient Egyptian royal families that practiced incestuous marriages. The famous Queen Cleopatra was the daughter of a Ptolemy XII and his sister or half-sister. At Ptolemy's death in 51 BC, 18-year-old Cleopatra ascended, married to her 10-year-old brother (whom she of course had killed). Such marriages were not a peculiarity of the House of Ptolemy. King Tutankhamen, who took the throne in 1332 BC, was the son of a



**Nikolaj Coster-Waldau as Jaime Lannister and Lena Headey as Cersei Lannister.
Photo: Helen Sloan/HBO**

brother-sister marriage. Egypt was then a world power, and the young Tutankhamen worshipped as a god during his short life.

Scientific analyses recently confirmed that “King Tut” was the offspring of siblings. Moreover, he suffered a bone disease connected to inbreeding and was physically frail, walking with a cane. The undeniable genetic problems in incestuous families are not addressed by Martin in *Game of Thrones*, but, interestingly, mental instability often shows up in children of incest in the books. And no character was more unstable than the “Mad King.”

Martin has never said in interviews whether he based the brother-sister love affair of Jaime and Cersei Lannister on either real characters from history or literary characters. He has confirmed that, overall, in *Game of Thrones*, the depiction of the civil war that breaks out at the death of King Robert Baratheon, leading to so many battles and

betrayals, clings “closest” to England’s Wars of the Roses in the 15th century, the struggle for the throne between the houses of York and Lancaster.

The kings, princes and lords who fought over the English throne were ruthless and duplicitous—but there was never a hint, in fact or rumor, of incestuous. Now the personal lives of these rulers were far from exemplary. Yorkist King Edward IV, incredibly promiscuous, was said to have married a beautiful commoner, Elizabeth Woodville, only after his attempt to rape her was thwarted by Elizabeth trying to kill herself. Not the stuff of chivalrous romance.

Nor was the medieval world free of incest, despite its terrible consequences in this religious society. Incest was an abomination, a mortal sin, the darkest part of lechery in the Seven Deadly Sins. It was a direct path to damnation of the soul, which men and women feared above all. Bishops

This level of medieval policing may seem extreme but it followed the lead of Roman law. In the year 295 AD incest was explicitly forbidden by Imperial edict. Before then, rules were most definitely broken—at the top. The Emperor Caligula is believed to have had sex with all three of his sisters. His uncle, who became Emperor Claudius, changed the laws to accommodate himself when he wanted to marry his niece, Agrippina (who, years later, is thought to have had sex with her son, Nero.) Both Caligula and Nero were mentally unstable. It's possible that this first-century storm of debauchery inspired George R.R. Martin, who has written several characters that, once they achieve power, become mentally unhinged and sexually uncontrollable.

There are two rumored cases of royal brother-sister incest outside of the Plantagenet Wars of the Roses that may have inspired Martin. Gossips say that Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia, children of the 15th century Pope, were lovers. The charge was first heard when the Borgia family pushed through Lucrezia's divorce from her first husband, Giovanni Sforza. It was a purely political marriage that teenage Lucrezia seems to have had no problem ending. The grounds for divorce were nonconsummation, which Sforza denied, hitting back with Borgia brother-sister incest accusations. Adding to the rumor-mill was the withdrawal of Lucrezia from public life around this time, followed by the birth of a child: Giovanni Borgia, "infans Romanus." Historians have long debated the parentage of this Borgia. The mother could have been Lucrezia. Was the father Cesare, brilliant and murderous? Or was the child fathered by Cesare (or his father) with another woman? No one knows.

Less than a century later, Queen Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, was accused of incest with her brother George, along with adultery with four men. Thomas Boleyn, the father of the queen and her brother, was an extremely ambitious man, obsessed with

titles and money. Anne and George are talented, witty and attractive. In George Boleyn's trial, evidence was produced that they acted "contrary to all human laws." Anne had allegedly "tempted her brother with her tongue in the said George's mouth and the said George's tongue in hers." Also heard was that the siblings had mocked the king's poetry and his sexual prowess. George is supposed to have repeated Anne's claim that Henry VIII "was not able to satisfy a woman and he had neither capacity nor virility." Even more seriously, the Boleyns were supposed to have plotted the king's death. The vast majority of historians do not believe that Anne and George Boleyn committed incest. It was part of Thomas Cromwell's campaign to blacken her reputation and condemn the queen, freeing Henry VIII to marry again.

With both the Borgia's and the Boleyn's, this is key: blackening their names. No one questions that Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia and Anne and George Boleyn were fond of each other. But incest? These were two families that vaulted to power, with members who were ambitious and attractive. They had many enemies. Even a ruler who was feared and revered could face defamation. Charlemagne's reputation is dogged by the rumors that he had sex with one of his sisters and had feelings other than fatherly for his daughters. When the powerful family in question is more of a parvenu, the sexual-misconduct rumors ran wild indeed.

Let's take a closer look at the Lannister pair. There are echoes of Borgia and Boleyn in Martin's creations. The Lannisters are a powerful family, envied and disliked by many others. There is a cold, strong father—Tywin Lannister—controlling a ruthless family. Cersei and Jaime are gorgeous specimens: the queen is famously beautiful and Jaime Lannister has "hair as bright as beaten gold." Cersei Lannister is ordered to marry young for political reasons. The



marriage is very unhappy. Jaime is his sister's companion and defender, and in secret, her lover. The queen's three children are fathered by Jaime, although they go to great efforts to create the impression they are Robert Baratheon's, including trying to murder innocent Bran.

Another source of inspiration for George R. R. Martin could be medieval poetry and storytelling. There is a lot to choose from. "Medieval incest stories are so numerous that it is impossible even to mention them all, let alone to discuss them all in detail," writes Elizabeth Archibald, author of *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. Many functioned as cautionary tales, to warn the faithful of sin. But it's possible the tales also served as prurient entertainment.

Two classical myths clearly influenced medieval stories: Oedipus, who unknowingly married his mother and killed his father, and Apollonius of Tyre, who uncovered King Antiochus's rape of his daughter (this story became material for Chaucer, Gower and Shakespeare). Less well known is the Greek myth of the twins Caunus and Bibylis. In Ovid, Bibylis falls in love with her brother but when

he learns of it, Caunus runs away. She follows him, heartbroken and still obsessed. She eventually goes mad and dies. Because of her constant weeping, the gods turn her into a spring.

A very interesting story can be found in Richard Wagner's opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*), based, in part, on late 13th century Icelandic prose. In one cycle, the hero Siegmund seeks shelter at the house of the warrior Hunding. He meets Sieglinde, Hunding's unhappy wife, and they are drawn to each other. In the course of their conversation, Siegmund tells her that long ago, while he was hunting with his father, his mother was killed and his twin sister abducted. She is, of course, that sister. They flee together, committing adultery and incest, cursed by some and protected by others. Siegmund is killed, despite wielding his magic sword, drawn from a tree. Sieglinde dies giving birth to their son, Siegfried, the hero of further adventures filled with battles, quests, a ring and a sword, and even dragons.

Perhaps the most famous medieval story of incest can be found in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In Sir Thomas Malory's version, published in 1485, the same year as the Battle of Bosworth that ended the Wars of the Roses, King Arthur has a child with his half-sister, Morgana. Arthur may not have realized when they had sex that she was his sister, or been somehow tricked. The son is Mordred, a traitor whose destiny is to kill Arthur.

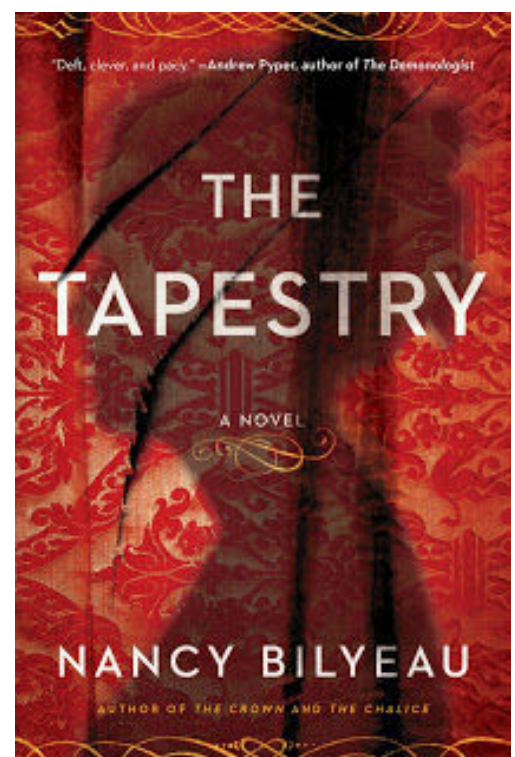
In John Boorman's enthralling 1981 film of the Arthur legend, *Excalibur*, the character of Mordred is turned from traitor into full-out murderous sociopath. "Come father, let us embrace at last," sneers Mordred on the final battlefield, as he prepares to spear Arthur. Throughout the film, German music can be heard, most of it composed by Wagner. When young Arthur pulls the sword Excalibur from the stone, we hear Siegfried's funeral music from *Götterdämmerung*, the final segment from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Intriguing choices by Boorman.

It's impossible not to wonder if George R.R. Martin was influenced by this mixture of sources when you consider Prince Joffrey, the oldest child of Cersei and Jaime Lannister who everyone is fooled into believing is the son and heir to Robert Baratheon. Joffrey is

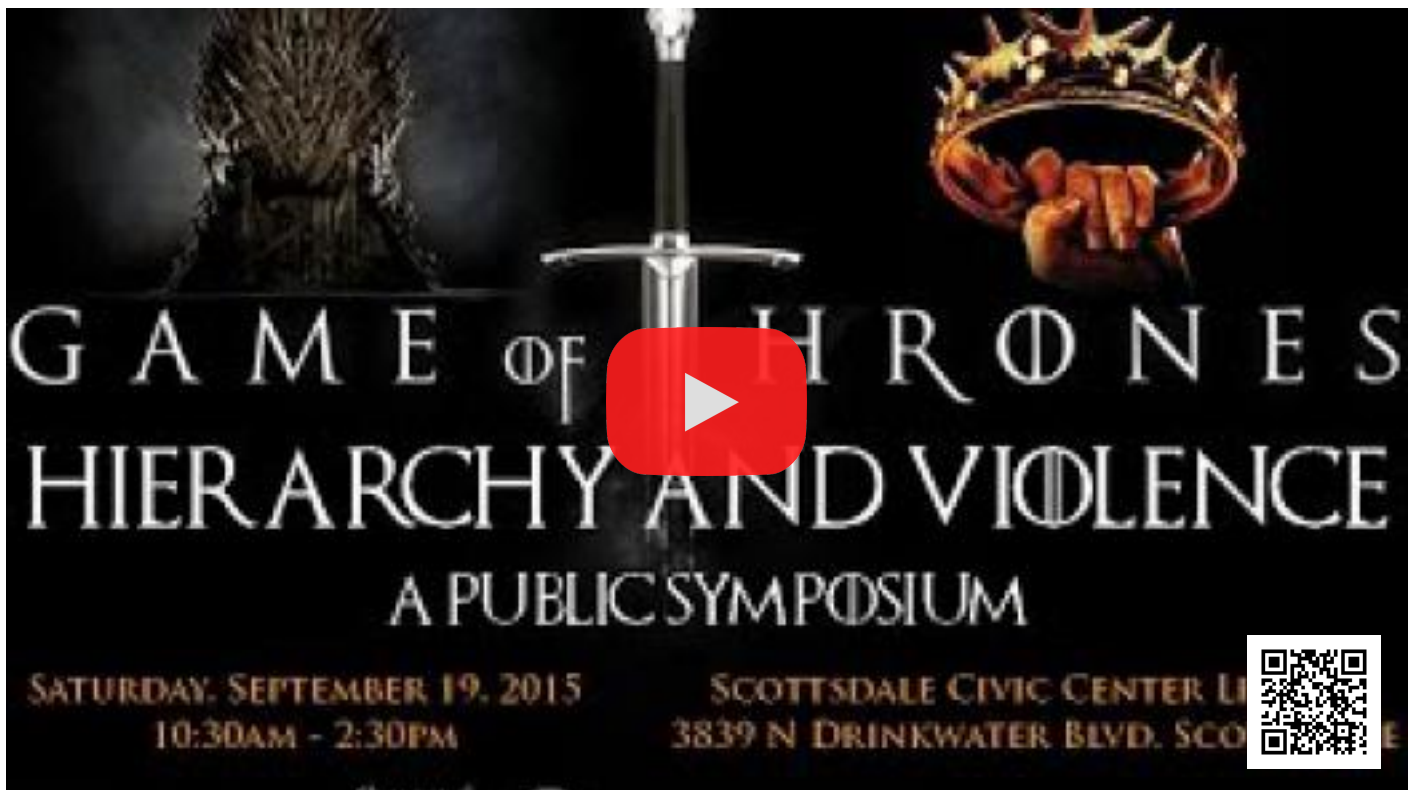
cruel and violent, "a monster," in the words of Sansa Stark, the sister of Bran Stark, once betrothed to Joffrey. The blond actor who plays Joffrey bears an eerie resemblance to the one who portrayed Mordred in *Excalibur*.

In *Game of Thrones*, Joffrey, the child of incest, is poisoned at his own wedding feast, surrounded by those who fear and loathe him. And it is his mother, Cersei, who kneels by his side, screaming and sobbing as he dies.

Nancy Bilyeau is the author of a trilogy of historical mysteries, *The Crown*, *The Chalice* and *The Tapestry*, published by Simon & Schuster. To learn more, visit <http://nancybilyeau.com/>



Game of Thrones: Hierarchy and Violence



On September 19, 2015, Scottsdale Civic Center Library held a public symposium on *Game of Thrones: Hierarchy and Violence*. Analyzing the conflicting aspects of medieval violence and hierarchy, it compares political history with the fiction of the *Game of Thrones*. The three speakers at this event were:

Kelly DeVries, Loyola University Maryland

Maria-Claudia Tomany, Saint Xavier University

William Luhr, Saint Peter's University

Winter is Coming **- an interview** **with Carolynne** **Larrington**

Winter is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones is the latest book from Dr. Carolynne Larrington, Tutorial Fellow in English at the University of Oxford. Offering a companion to George R R Martin's fantasy novels and the HBO television series based on them, she explores how these make use of the Middle Ages, including its mythology and literature. Larrington covers topics such as sigils, giants, dragons and direwolves in medieval texts; ravens, old gods and the Weirwood in Norse myth; and a gothic, exotic orient in the eastern continent, Essos.

We had a chance to interview Dr. Larrington about her book and her interest in George R.R. Martin's medieval world.

You begin your book by explaining that you are a scholar of medieval literature who watches Game of Thrones. How do you think your profession gives you insights into the series (and the novels)?

I work mainly in comparative medieval studies: I research Old Icelandic, Old and Middle English, Old French and Middle High German literary texts. Fiction, storytelling, romance, legend and saga are what interests me most, rather more than religious literature, and so I have a pretty eclectic conception of the world of medieval Europe, and of the ways in which medieval Europeans understood the peoples of the East whom they encountered. My book takes its inspiration in part from *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, inviting readers on an imaginary journey through the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Thinking about medieval texts also requires an understanding of the nuts and bolts of social history: how things worked across the thousand or so years of the period. How did economies function? What roles were available to women? What did people fear most? How was war waged? What was life for ordinary people, those who weren't part of the elite? These are all questions which Martin thinks deeply about in writing the books and Benioff and Weiss, the two showrunners have achieved an authentic-looking visualisation of the societies that Martin has imagined. In his *Rolling Stone* interview in 2014, à propos of Tolkien, Martin asks, 'Was Aragorn a good king? What was his tax policy?' Tolkien doesn't care much about these questions, because he doesn't look past the mythology of kingship, but Martin has thought hard about what makes a good king – and a good Hand of the King. I can see how that pays off in his creations of the different societies of the Known World (as fans call the series' universe); the world of the show suggests all kinds of parallels from medieval history and imaginative literature.



George R.R. Martin created his novels by borrowing a lot of elements from medieval politics, literature and mythology. Where do you think he has done well in capturing the essence of the Middle Ages?

Where Martin excels, I think, is in imagining those societies we see in most depth in the series. The court at Kings' Landing and the alternative social setup in the North, before Winterfell is destroyed, are particularly good. Martin has analysed the different kinds of problems that beset a kingdom when the throne is contested: from the starvation that's coming as a result of the ravaging of the Riverlands, to the grassroots revival of extreme religious enthusiasm in the Sparrows, to the difficulties of financing a plausible military campaign. He shows how the Lannister gold makes it possible to put an enormous army in the field very quickly, while Robb must wait for his

bannermen to respond to his call, and then he has to argue with them about tactics. These are models of warfare drawn from the early and late Middle Ages respectively; the Lannisters maintain a huge number of soldiers, while the Starks operate with something akin to the Anglo-Saxon fyrd system.

And the influence of the Iron Bank of Braavos, based on the Italian merchant banks of the high medieval period, is both subtle and extremely important. Cersei's decision to suspend debt repayments in order to rebuild the navy turns out to be extraordinarily ill-judged in the books. So too, her agreement to let the Faith rearm in order to get the Crown's debts to that institution is the ultimate cause of the 'Walk of Shame' that she had to perform at the end of the last series. The consequences for the Crown of Westerosi merchants being refused credit in the Free Cities because of that default have yet to play out, but food shortages in the capital are likely to lead to further popular unrest upon which the High Sparrow can capitalise.

Martin's good too on the rhetoric of chivalry, and the ways in which knights make use of it to bolster their sense of their own honour and social standing, rather than really dedicating themselves to the well-being of the ladies they claim to serve. It's not just history though that makes the world of Game of Thrones so vivid; there's the fundamental fear of winter, and the creatures that it awakens: the Others / White Walkers. With their glacier-blue eyes and frozen cheeks these figures seem to embody the terror of winter. They can't, it seems, be negotiated with, or defeated, except with dragon-glass daggers or Valyrian steel, and, as Jon Snow says, there's not enough of these weapons in the world.

On the other hand, as a medieval scholar, what aspects of the novels/series do you think don't match up with the reality of the Middle Ages?

The medieval includes of course the rest of the world beyond Europe, and it's in imagining Essos where the gaps begin to show. The Dothraki – who are very much like the Mongols – are mainly seen through the eyes of Dany and Jorah; it's the Westerosi characters who get to explain the easterners. In the books, the only Essos folk who get point-of-view status are Areo Hotah, the captain of Doran Martell's guard in Dorne, and (for one chapter only) Melisandre. Areo Hotah mainly thinks about the fieriness of Dornish food with its dependence on peppers, while Melisandre agonises about interpreting her visions in the flames of the Red God. It would be really interesting to hear a bit more about what the Essosi make of the Westeros way of life, but there is a strong Orientalism at work in both books and show: the people of the East are represented as inscrutable, sexualised and untrustworthy.

The other problem for me is the Unsullied. By blending traditions about the unrelenting boyhood training of the Spartans with traditions of eunuchs in Byzantium and China (among other places) and the Mamluk army who were originally slaves, Martin has created a vivid back-story for the Unsullied's effectiveness and total obedience. But in practice, if these boys had been castrated at the age of five, they

would all have high-pitched voices and have developed very little muscle – making for a useless army. Those historical eunuchs, such as the Byzantine generals Narses or Peter Phokas, who were involved in military campaigns were almost always strategists rather than warriors. Military success depending on feeding and supplying the army as much as marching in lockstep, and logistics were absolutely crucial. That said, one account of Peter Phokas in single combat against a Russian champion seems very much to be echoed in Daario Naharis's feat outside the walls of Meereen.

How useful do you think the books and series have been for medieval studies and as a way to get people interested in the Middle Ages?

My feeling is that the books and show have begun to do for medieval studies what Tolkien did for Northern mythology and legends with *The Lord of the Rings*. The show's and books' fans have begun to wonder about the real medieval period and to ask questions like, 'how far are the Iron-Born like the Vikings?', or 'how important was slavery in the Middle Ages?' or even 'does Norse myth help to explain the Three-Eyed Raven and his connection with the trees of the godswoods?' Women's agency in the medieval period has been a particular talking point; there's been a lot of fan-discussion about how endemic sexual violence was in the period, both in the home and when raiding enemy territory. Daenerys' and Sansa's wedding nights have both raised important questions about women's self-determination and the consequences of patriarchal determination of marriage alliances. And figures like Brienne and Arya have offered different versions of the woman fighter: what does making yourself like a man do to you as an individual? My book suggests some ways of approaching the

Heroes and Villains in Game of Thrones

Lecture by Carolyne Larrington, given at the University of Oxford



medieval period through its history and literature to find out more. Whether you're interested in Vikings or Mongols, mystical ravens or Catharism, there are all kinds of readable and accessible books, websites and podcasts to guide you.

Finally, as a fan of the series, where do you hope that it will go? Do you have an idea on how you would like it to end?

In the epilogue to my book I discuss possible endings. There I guess that the TV show will end up in accordance with the conventions of epic. I reckon on the establishment (or re-establishment) of a new dynasty on the Iron Throne, a lost heir rediscovered, a wedding and the production of children to carry on the family line. The North will grow great again, some remedy against the White Walkers be found, and order will be restored in Westeros – even if Slavers' Bay goes straight back to training new recruits to the Unsullied and the bed-slaves of Yunkai. In the books, things may well pan out differently, since the show and books are now no longer necessarily running in parallel. I suspect that Martin will have a grander, more apocalyptic vision for his conclusion. The Others will have their day of destiny, while the dragons will finally be unleashed to do their worst in a place where fire can only be positive. And then, as happens post-Ragnarok in Norse myth, a new earth will arise, but whether it will be an improvement on the old one is, as ever in mythic cycles, a doubtful proposition. But I may be entirely wrong!

Winter is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones, by Carolyne Larrington, is published by I.B. Tauris.

You can visit the publisher's website at:

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What Mongol history predicts for the next season of Game of Thrones

By Carlyne Larrington

As season six of HBO's *Game of Thrones* looms, speculation is rife. Is Jon Snow really dead? What do the clips featuring a blind Arya mean? And what are the implications of the return of the Dothraki? This last question is the one that has got me thinking the most.

The Dothraki are one of *Game of Thrones*'s more interesting cultures, but we haven't seen much of them since the first season. But then the dragon Drogon brought Daenerys back to the grasslands of the Dothraki Sea in the last episode of season five, and we last saw her viewing an approaching *khalasar* – band of male warriors – with apprehension. The Dothraki culture is, as author George RR Martin has **stated**, inspired by the Mongols, the horse-lords who swept westwards from Central Asia in the 13th century.

The dark-haired, copper-skinned riders, organised in *khalasars*, each with a *khal* at their head, are nomads. They live in yurts and eat mostly meat: duck, goat and dog are offered to the pregnant Daenerys. The Dothraki are impressive horsemen; armed with a curved sword (*arak*) and lightly armoured in leather jerkins they rely on speed, numbers and good-quality horses for lightning raids. The Dothraki Sea is ringed with ruined cities, ravaged by the horse-lords; the Free Cities willingly pay them to stay away.

There is a large market in Vaes Dothrak, the city ruled over by the widows of *khals*, lying on the caravan route across the Dothraki Sea. Merchants from east and west trade there; the Dothraki seek novelties in exchange for their plunder, but they scorn trade, except in the slaves whom they sell on to the cities of Slaver's Bay or through Volantis.

For all the Dothraki's apparent barbarism, amply evidenced by their behaviour at Daenerys's wedding, their language has a wonderfully metaphorical turn. Drogo uses **kennings** – short metaphorical phrases – to communicate unfamiliar concepts to his followers. He calls the sea "poison water", ships "wooden horses", and the Westerosi, "men in iron suits". In Vaes Dothrak, Daenerys triumphantly forces down raw horse heart, convincing everyone that the child she carries is the prophesied "stallion that mounts the world". Dothraki endearments: "Blood of my blood," "my sun and stars", "moon of my life" have a poetic ring. There's no impoverishment of imagination among these people, who live so intensely in the natural world.



Mongol soldiers by Rashid al-Din in 1305

The Mongols

So what of their real-life alternatives – how might Daenerys fare with them? We know a reasonable amount about the Mongols from Western medieval sources and from their own **Secret History of the Mongols**, composed between 1240 and 1260, which recounts the rise of Genghis Khan. Together, these documents piece together a picture of medieval Mongol life.

One of the first Westerners to visit the Mongol *orda* (court, but the origin of our word *horde*)

was **Johannes de Piano Carpini**. He set out from Kiev in 1245, sent by Pope Innocent IV to the new Great Khan, Güyüg. Johannes complains of thunderstorms and duststorms, of hail so intense that 160 men drowned when it melted, of scorching heat and savage cold. He observes how little the Mongols washed and that they lived in yurts (*gers*), heated by horse-dung fires. Friendly enough among themselves, Mongols were prone to drunken binges fuelled by fermented mare's milk (*kumiss*), and like the Dothraki they held all other nations in contempt.

Another cleric, **William Ruysbroeck** journeyed to the Mongol capital Karakorum in 1253, bringing letters from King Louis IX of France to Möngke Khan. Here he found congenial company: other Europeans working there included the nephew of an English bishop, a woman from Lorraine who cooked Ruysbroeck's Easter dinner and a French silversmith, who made ornaments for the Khan's women. Ruysbroeck reports lively and ambitious curiosity about his homeland among the men at Möngke's court, writing:

And they began to question us greatly about the kingdom of France, whether there were many sheep and cattle and horses there, and whether they had not better go there at once and take it all.

Like Jorah Mormont, these Western churchmen became knowledgeable about Mongol customs; Ruysbroeck even picked up some of their language. The Secret History, the Mongols' own chronicle, recounts the dramatic story of Genghis Khan's life and contains some strikingly beautiful poetry. Genghis's redoubtable mother is said to wield a great deal of executive authority, giving rise perhaps to the dosh khaleen, the widows who rule in Vaes Dothrak.

Multiple tough-minded wives, loyal blood-brothers and double-crossing allies all feature in the Secret History, along with incidental detail about Mongol customs. Captives would be measured against the linchpins of Mongol wagon-wheels, and those men who were too tall (and therefore reckoned dangerous) would immediately be executed while women, children and short men were enslaved. The inspiration for Daenerys's heart-eating ordeal might be in the sheep-neck served at betrothal feast; Mongols hoped that the ensuing marriage would be as tough and enduring as that intensely chewy dish.

The Mongols established the largest land-empire the world has ever seen, stretching

from the Pacific Ocean to the borders of Hungary and Poland, which might make things look good for Daenerys's prospects. But unless she, like Ruysbroeck, can enthrall them with tales of plunder to the west, I doubt whether the Dothraki will cross the Narrow Sea to help her take control of Westeros.

Yet, as the widow of a notable khal, Dothraki-speaking at that, Daenerys can surely, like Genghis's mother, wield some authority and mobilise her new khalasar to bolster her position in Meereen. By the time the rescue party appears, Daenerys will be back on top, having earned her captors' respect. At least, that's my prediction for the new season.

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A Hard Day's Knight

By Danièle Cybulskie

No one ever said that knighthood is easy. In fact, it's pretty difficult for anyone to live up to the expectations of chivalry at all. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, George R.R. Martin plays with the idea of chivalry being immensely difficult to live by, to the point that it's considered almost completely hollow by everyone in Westeros. (The exception, perhaps, is the Starks, whose familial sense of honour is pretty much never rewarded by the cynical society in which they live.) I just read a great article called "**Silk ribbon tied around a sword: Knighthood and the Chivalric Virtues in Westeros**" by Charles H. Hackney, which looks at individual traits of the chivalric code (loyalty, piety, courage, etc.) as they appear in the knights of Westeros. When it comes to ideals, the Westerosi knights definitely fall short.



Portrait of Ulrich von Liechtenstein from the Codex Manesse - MS UB Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 848, fol. 237r

Although we seem to like this “gritty”, “modern” take on what chivalry might have looked like in our own past, interestingly, this testing and failing is exactly what medieval people expected of knights in their own stories. As much as medieval storytellers may go on about their knights being the mightiest, most courteous, and most courageous, the truth is that a huge amount of medieval stories focus on the failure of knights to live up to the ideal.

Malory’s great favourite, Tristan, is spectacularly successful in combat. Pages and pages of the *Morte D’Arthur* are taken up with his victories, and his clever disguises (“Tramtrist”, anyone?). But in his most important task, Tristan falls just as spectacularly short: instead of delivering King Mark’s future queen to him, he falls in love with her and has an affair. By medieval standards (or, really, any standards) having an affair with a queen on her way to her wedding is a trainwreck of epic proportions. Tristan is the best knight ever – how could he? The very idea makes for delicious fiction. While typically, there is a love potion at least partially to blame, Tristan fails the chivalry test when it really counts.

Then, there’s Lancelot. Who could forget? Arthur’s right-hand and the one who is ever-courteous in battle, Lancelot can’t even blame a love potion for his affair with the queen. His son, Galahad, is the product of his trying to sleep with Guinevere (really Elaine in disguise) the second he gets the chance. Whenever Lancelot has the opportunity to stop the affair, he doesn’t. Lancelot’s not-super-secret affair also tests the other knights of the Round Table – if they know about it, do they speak up or keep silent? Which is the better choice? Like Tristan, it’s hard for all of Lancelot’s other chivalrous deeds to count for much in the face of this greatest failure in fealty. Lancelot and Tristan are like Jaime Lannister in this: their armour may look shiny, and they may win every battle, but they fail miserably when it comes

to their biggest test of chivalry (Malory might have liked Jaime Lannister quite a lot, come to think of it).

Gawain, too, seems to be **constantly tested**, whether it’s Malory’s story in which his lack of mercy ends with his accidentally lopping off a woman’s head, or his wedding story, in which he must agree to marry a hideous woman to save Arthur. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, we see perhaps the longest and most intimate testing of any medieval literary knight, as the poet describes the deep chivalric and religious symbolism of the pentangle which adorns his shield (Gawain also has an image of the Virgin Mary painted on the inside) before Gawain leaves Camelot to face the beheading contest. This detailed description isn’t just there to fill the page: Gawain is purposefully set up from the start against an impossible chivalric ideal, and then sent by the poet to face death or dishonor. The reader knows that no real person could actually achieve that level of perfection, especially in the face of certain death, which is exactly why the poem works: we wonder how Gawain will handle the tough choices. And he handles them messily, like a real person. Perhaps he’s a bit like Ned Stark in that way: he’s trapped by a code that doesn’t give him any safe choices. And they both face a headsman, too.

Ulrich von Liechtenstein’s story (whether true or fictional) is another one that medieval people found interesting because it was so very complicated by chivalry. Ulrich did everything a knight was supposed to in order to win over the lady he loved, from winning tournaments, to obeying her every whim, to physically suffering by having surgery (and also **severing a finger**) for her. None of it matters: he cannot get her to love him. Things just do not work out the way courtly love would suggest, and Ulrich and his lady never do get together. If I could compare Ulrich to a chivalric figure in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it would probably be Sansa Stark, someone else who has done everything right



according to the rules, but never actually gets what she is promised by chivalric ideals.

The idea of watching knights (and ladies) try to live up to ideals and fail, just as we do, isn't a modern one. It succeeds now just as it did in the Middle Ages because watching this all-too-human struggle is interesting, frustrating, tense, and emotional. There's a reason that Sir Galahad only really features in the one story where he achieves the Holy Grail: perfect characters are just not that interesting. (I'm sure George R.R. Martin would have fed Galahad to the Others within just a few pages.) Much more compelling is seeing characters who try and fail, and then get up and try again, just like the knights of

Westeros.

For a detailed look at chivalry and all your favourite Westerosi knights, do check out Charles H. Hackney's chapter in *Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*.

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



The Knight with an Iron Hand

Jaime Lannister, one of the main characters in *Game of Thrones*, would have his right hand cut off, and then replaced with an iron hand. This story, like many found in George R. R. Martin's books, is based on a real story from history - in this case the life of Gottfried "Götz" von Berlichingen, better known as Götz of the Iron Hand.

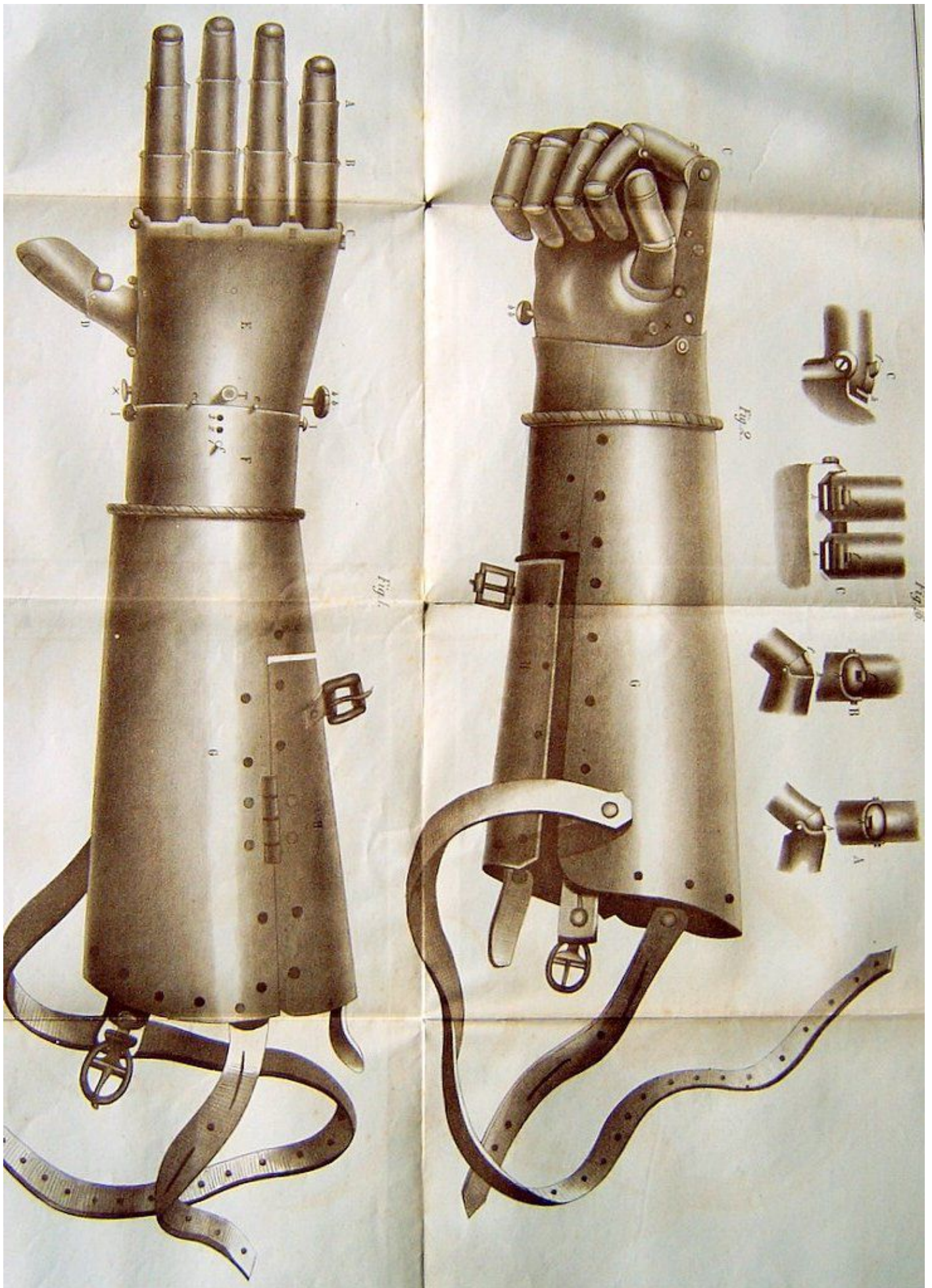
Berlichingen was born to a German noble family around the year 1480, and as a teenager would start a military career, serving as a knight and mercenary. There does not seem to have been a shortage of warfare in central Europe at this time, as Götz would serve in many campaigns for various rulers, all of which he recorded in his autobiography.

In the year 1504 he was taking part in siege at Landshut where he was fighting against forces from Nuremberg. Götz describes what happened next:

The enemy had taken up a strong position on a dyke, and I would gladly have broken a spear with one of them. But as I held myself still and watched for an occasion, suddenly the Nurembergers turned their cannon upon us; and one of them, with a field-culverin, shot in

two my swordhilt, so that the one half entered right into my arm, and three armplates therewithal; the sword-hilt lay so deep in the armplates that it could not be seen. I marvel even now that I was not thrown from my horse; the armplates were still whole; only the corners, which had been bent by the blow, stood forth a little.

The other half of the sword-hilt and the blade were bent, but not severed; and these, I believe, tore off my hand between the gauntlet and the arm-piece: my arm was shattered behind and before. When I marked no that my hand hung loose by the skin, and that my spear lay under my horse's feet, I made as though nothing had befallen me, turned my horse softly round, and, in spite of it all, came back to my own folk without let or hindrance from the enemy.



The second iron prosthetic hand worn by Götz von Berlichingen.

ust then there came up an old spearman, who would have ridden into the thick of the fray; him I called to me, and besought that he would stay at my side, since he must see how matters stood with me. So he tarried with me at my prayer, and then he fetched me the leech.

However, little could be done and the right hand was amputated, along with part of his forearm. Götz would spend nearly a year convalescing from his injury, adding "and what pain at that time I suffered, each may well imagine for himself."

Götz admits that in his depression, he wanted to die, but then came upon an idea that would change his life:

It was my prayer to God that, if I stood indeed in His divine grace, then in His own name He might bear me away to Himself, since I was spoiled now for a fighting-man. Yet then I thought to myself that there was a man-at-arms of whom I had heard my father and other old troopers tell, whose name was Kochli, and

who also had but one hand, notwithstanding which he could do his devoir against his foe in the field as well as any other man. Then I prayed to God, and considered within myself that, had even twelve hands, and His grace and help stood not by me, then were all in vain. Therefore, thought I, might I but get me some little help by means of an iron hand, then I would prove myself as doughty in the field, in spite of all, as any other maimed man.

Götz would have two mechanical prosthetic hands made, the second of which was so well designed that he could carry and use objects ranging from a shield to a feather pen. The knight would continue to serve and fight in armies for another 40 years, gaining enough wealth to acquire his own castle and have ten children. As he explains, "I have waged wars, feuds, and quarrels with but one fist - but that God Almighty, Everlasting and Merciful, had stood wondrously and most graciously by me and at my side in all my wars, feuds, and perils."

What does a medieval lit scholar see in *Game of Thrones*?

Brantley Bryant, associate professor of medieval literature at Sonoma State University, speaks with PBS in 2014 about *Game of Thrones*.



Game of Thrones and the fluid world of medieval gender

By Juanita Feros Ruys

With Games of Thrones back on our screens, the question of the gender roles it depicts and promotes continues to be hotly debated.

Some commentators **excuse** what **they see** as the blatant misogyny of the series by noting that author George RR Martin could hardly have written female characters otherwise while being true to the historical context of the "Middle Ages" (at least as it is popularly envisioned).

Others are happy to **compile lists** of powerful female figures on the series and applaud the way they "destabilise" traditional gender roles.

Yet there is not a female figure on Game of Thrones who does not have a medieval counterpart, whether an actual historical person or a character from a literary text that enthralled audiences for centuries. So let's look at these:

Strong female leaders?

Game of Thrones has Daenerys Targaryen, the only surviving child of King Aerys II Targaryen; the Middle Ages also had female rulers, some hugely successful (**Elizabeth I of**

England), others less so (**Mary Queen of Scots**, who was executed at the behest of Elizabeth, her first cousin once removed).

At one point, the power structures of Western European countries were perceived as so female-centric that it led Calvinist Scotsman **John Knox** to pen the virulent anti-feminist pamphlet **The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women** (1558).

Power-hungry incestuous sisters?

Game of Thrones gives us Cersei Lannister, the widow of King Robert Baratheon and Queen Regent of the Seven Kingdoms. The Arthurian legends gives us **Morgan Le Fay**, who sleeps with her brother King Arthur and bears from the union Mordred who will eventually be Arthur's doom.

Women who dress as knights and fight men in battle?

Arya Stark and Brienne of Tarth are two of the most popular female characters on Game of Thrones, but they have a long way to go before they can rival the enduring fame and



Gwendoline Christie as Brienne of Tarth. Photo: Helen Sloan/HBO

admiration excited by the historical Joan of Arc (1412-1431) who led French armies against the English towards the end of the **Hundred Years' War** and was executed by the English in 1431.

Records show that the Inquisitors who interrogated Joan were as much concerned with her transvestitism as with her claims to hear angelic voices and devoted a great deal of effort into convincing Joan to give up her masculine attire, a step with which she never complied.

Yet Game of Thrones never even approaches the slippery and surprising world of gender manipulation and redefinition that are a feature of medieval spirituality.

Indeed, Game of Thrones, for all its quasi-medievalism, is completely lacking in a major segment of the medieval world:

The monastic

Game of Thrones notes the existence of religion, and of religious leaders – some even female (Melisandre, a priestess of the Lord of Light) – but it does not represent the massive proportion of the medieval population that devoted their lives to religious service.

Medieval Western Christianity proved adept at multiplying gender positions, rendering them fluid, and refiguring gendered embodiment in ways that made an identification with one sex and its “properly” aligned gender difficult, if not redundant.

Although monasticism was a strictly sex-segregated undertaking, it was, paradoxically enough, also productive of some extraordinarily complex and fluid gender formulations. Nuns were exhorted by the men tasked with their pastoral care to be “virile” in their faith, and to surpass even men in the strength of their devotion.

Meanwhile, male monastics cultivated “female” virtues such as humility, aware that in the topsy-turvy economy of New Testament Christianity, based as it was on the willing sacrifice of Christ, being humble, gentle, and patient of suffering was also particularly manly.

We know from manuscript evidence (**British Library, Cotton Julius E.vii**) that nuns enjoyed stories of women who showed their devotion by undertaking male disguise and living undetected as monks for their whole lives.

The bearded female saint Wilgefortis proved popular in late medieval iconography: this young woman was martyred for her refusal to marry and her joyful acceptance from God of a full beard in order to avoid this fate.

While monastics deployed gender identities in innovative ways in regard to themselves,

even the gender of the Christian Trinitarian God came under consideration with both male and female mystics contemplating the motherliness of Christ.

Male mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) saw themselves suckling at the breast of the Virgin, and feminist critics such as Karma Lochrie have commented on the vaginal imagery of the wound in Christ’s side to which male clerics were so devoted and to which they would envision themselves pressing their mouths.

The 14th-century female mystic Agnes Blannbekin claimed to have received the foreskin of Christ in her mouth in her celebration of the Eucharist and described its taste as sweet as honey.

The world of medieval spiritual gender was powerfully fluid and productive, with performativity the key. Game of Thrones

Dr. Marcus Bull on Game of Thrones VS. Reality: Thinking Medieval

Erin Lynch interviews Marcus Bull at the 50th International Congress on Medieval Studies about the second edition of his book *Thinking Medieval*, neo-medievalism, and the relevancy of Medieval Studies today.





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

might offer some interesting, and even compelling, female role models in its medievalist worldview, but perhaps contemporary viewers would be more shocked by the gender permutations at play in the "real" Middle Ages.

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Game of Thrones: why hasn't Westeros had an industrial revolution?

By Peter Antonioni

Westeros, the primary location of Game of Thrones, has much in common with Western Europe of the middle ages. Its technology is similar, society is feudal and even the climate is roughly the same – save for the odd chilly spell.

But the key difference is Westeros has been more or less like this for some 6,000 years. When you consider the evolution of Western Europe in the time since the fall of the Roman Empire – a mere 1,500 years ago – it's worth asking how its literary sibling could have stayed so undeveloped. Why has Westeros not experienced an industrial revolution?

The first thing to point out is that economic development is not a simply continuous process, but one of fits and starts. In particular, "step changes" in the availability of general purpose technologies divide eras: once you have experienced a technological transition of this kind, it is difficult to imagine or remember the world as it was before. The great industrial revolution that began in the 18th century was one such transition.

Surging ahead

This revolution did not come about overnight. It was actually the culmination of a long period characterised by "surges" of earlier

technologies. Take for instance the stirrup. Its emergence solved the problem of how one could fight from horseback and this in turn enabled the development of the institutions of chivalry.

One surge yet to arrive in Westeros is the cannon. In Europe they were already in use by the time of Crecy in 1345, which would put them well within the technological ambit of Westerosi conflict.

Yet another is banking, which is a necessary condition for investment in building technological capacity; without banks to create money, Westeros is likely to be in a permanent state of monetary shortage with corresponding lack of investment.

The closest thing Game of Thrones has to modern banking is across the sea in Essos, where the Iron Bank of Braavos provides finance for clients across the world. The bank has a modern-day parallel: like the IMF, it has acquired a reputation for engineering regime



**John Bradley as Samwell Tarly and Hannah Murray as Gilly.
Photo: Helen Sloan/HBO**

change when it believes debts might not be repaid. As the books illustrate, financial power leads to political influence:

When princes defaulted on their debts to lesser banks, ruined bankers sold their wives and children into slavery and opened their own veins. When princes failed to repay the Iron Bank, new princes sprang up from nowhere and took their thrones.

However, the Iron Bank's main interest is in sovereign banking which doesn't necessarily stimulate the economy: in Robert Baratheon's reign such loans went largely towards useless pageants and tournaments. The Bank ignores the mundane everyday lending to business that funds activity and investment.

Perhaps a bigger part of the puzzle is why competition among the High Lords doesn't fuel armed development and in turn the development of military industrial complexes in the seven kingdoms. But

Westeros hasn't always been the war-torn region depicted in Game of Thrones: for the past few centuries the Targaryen kings and their weapons of mass destruction—dragons—kept the individual kingdoms from developing these capacities. There is an interesting non-European parallel here with China, where innovation was held back by a succession of dynasties that wished to prevent threats to the central control.

Industrial growth also requires energy. Coal, more efficient than peat or wood, provided the fuel for the industrial revolution and there is no evidence coal or other fossil fuels exist in Westeros or beyond. The ability to put great engines to work might be beyond even an industrialising Seven Kingdoms.

But beside this, Westeros has labour, plenty of land, a banking industry of sorts and presumably similar resources to 18th-century Europe. It seems most of the conditions are in place for a series of

technological surges. So why hasn't it broken out of the middle ages?

The knowledge economy

The lack of development in Westeros is ultimately explained by the way knowledge is hoarded by one group of people.

In Europe, industrialisation depended on the dissemination of ideas. The more know-how was spread widely, the more people could hear of an innovation and could copy or improve it, building an accelerating cycle of technological development.

In Westeros however, technological innovations are locked up in one institution: The Citadel, home to an order of scholars known as the Maesters (think Maester Luwin of Winterfell who guarded Bran and Rickon, or Grand Maester Pycelle of the court in King's Landing).

The Maesters sit on the only trove of scientific knowledge in Westeros. Alongside the nobility, they are among the very few able to read and write. Members are embedded within almost all of the castles and great houses of the Kingdom and they seem at this point to be using their control of information and the Raven Net communication system to cultivate their influence.

So ultimately it may take a political shake-up for the Game of Thrones universe to catch up with 18th-century Europe. Breaking up the feudal system with its attendant absurdities would help – after all, a mid-ranking Lord would be ill-advised to attract attention by developing machinery.

And just as the 16th-century Reformation broke the church's near-monopoly on education and paved the way for future technological advances, so Westeros must reform its Maesters.

Until the Maesters are taken on and education

becomes widespread, Westeros is doomed to stay in the same High Medieval rut. Good news for fans of high fantasy, bad news for the characters trapped in it. Winter is coming and it would be nice if they had central heating.

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Cruel Tyrant?

The Reign of Frederick II

By Sandra Alvarez

Fans of *Game of Thrones* had four seasons to get to know, and then hate, King Joffrey Lannister played by Jack Gleason. In reality, while Joffrey was sadistic, taunted and killed for sport, or in juvenile angry outbursts, there have been far worse real-life murderous medieval rulers that he could've been modelled after. One such notorious character was Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250).

Called the "predecessor of the Anti-Christ" by his enemies, he was accused of being shockingly irreligious during a period that was marked for its belief in God. Despite being under the guardianship of Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) after his mother died when he was four years old, Frederick II showed little interest in the Church. In fact, once he was king, he frequently locked horns with popes, and was excommunicated four times.

Frederick grew up well educated, eventually speaking six languages. He was multi talented; he composed music, wrote poetry, and even compiled the famed falconry treatise: *The Art of Hunting with Birds*. He appeared to be fascinated by science, and travelled with many animals in a menagerie. He also made several attempts to prove

Church doctrine wrong by concocting bizarre experiments on humans.

This is where things get blurry. Some modern writers have dubbed him the "medieval Mengele", after notorious Nazi doctor, Joseph Mengele, also known as "The Angel of Death". Mengele was notorious for carrying out sadistic and deadly experiments on humans in Auschwitz.

Granted, Frederick II did not experiment on as many poor souls as Mengele, but according to Salimbene de Adam, the thirteenth-century Franciscan chronicler, it appears that he engaged in similarly disturbing, and cruel tests. In one instance, Frederick II invited two men for a sumptuous dinner, then sent one to bed and the other out to hunt. He had both men promptly



Late 13th century depiction of Frederick II - MS Biblioteca Vaticana, Pal. lat 1071

disembowelled in front of his to see who was further along in digesting their meal. It turns out the man who had slept had digested his meal more quickly, but he paid the price with his life to satiate Frederick's medical curiosity.

In another strange tale, Frederick ordered mothers, nurses and carers, to feed, clothe and bathe infants, but not to speak one word to them, or offer any other mode of contact. Frederick II was interested in how language developed, in particular, if the children would begin speaking in Hebrew, Latin, Greek or Arabic without any interference. Unfortunately, this experiment was foiled because the children found other means of communicating by clapping their hands and gesturing. But perhaps the most chilling tale of Frederick II's quest for answers, was when he supposedly had a man locked into a wine cask alive, then waited for him to die to prove that the soul perished at the point of death. He watched to see if the poor man's soul escaped, or stayed with his body.

Historians have challenged these stories of Frederick's atrocities. While there may be a grain of truth to some of them, it's worth remembering that the people writing down these stories were monks, and they had the Church's agenda in mind when they crafted their biographies. Frederick's ambivalence (at best) and downright hostility (at worst) led earlier scholars to believe that he had perpetrated these horrific acts.

This idea that he was anti-Christian recently has been questioned, and led to suggestions that the ghastly stories about Frederick II were simply propaganda written by the papacy to discredit him. Even if Frederick wasn't anti-Christian, after being excommunicated that many times, he certainly wasn't an exemplary one, and it's safe to say he had little to no respect for the Church. However, the question as to whether Frederick II was a medieval Joffrey with a keen, yet evil, interest in science, remains up for debate and may never be answered.

Book Excerpt

Isabella of France: The Rebel Queen

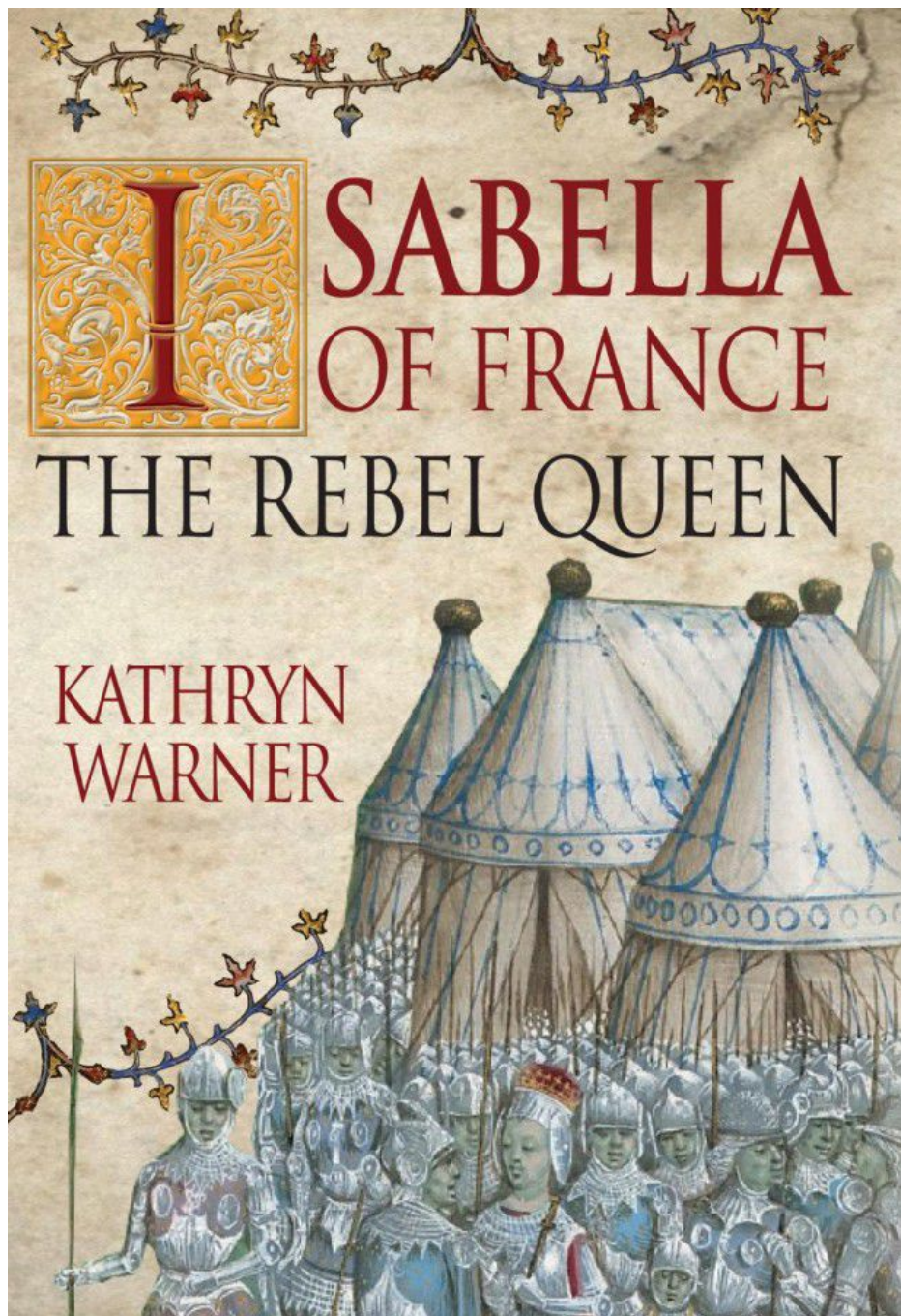
By Kathryn Warner

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Isabella of France married Edward II in January 1308, and afterwards became one of the most notorious women in English history. In 1325, she was sent to her homeland to negotiate a peace settlement between her husband and her brother Charles IV, king of France. She refused to return. Instead, she began a relationship with her husband's deadliest enemy, the English baron Roger Mortimer. With the king's son and heir, the future Edward III, under their control, the pair led an invasion of England which ultimately resulted in Edward II's forced abdication in January 1327. Isabella and Mortimer ruled England during Edward III's minority until he overthrew them in October 1330.

Arebel against her own husband and king, and regent for her son, Isabella was a powerful, capable and intelligent woman. She forced the first ever abdication of a king in England, and thus changed the course of English history. Examining Isabella's life with particular focus on her revolutionary actions in the 1320s, this book corrects the many myths surrounding her and provides a vivid account of this most fascinating and influential of women.



Read an excerpt: Introduction

London, Wednesday 24 September 1326, twentieth year of the reign of King Edward II

The hot summer of 1326, which had brought drought to England, was finally drawing to a close. Forty-two-year-old King Edward II was staying at the Tower of London with his household and the few important allies who still remained to him after almost two decades of misrule, favouritism, greed and ineptitude: Hugh Despenser the Elder, earl of Winchester; his son Hugh Despenser the Younger, lord of Glamorgan, the king's powerful chamberlain and perhaps his lover;

Eleanor de Clare, Hugh the Younger's wife, the king's beloved eldest niece and, bizarrely, also perhaps his lover; Edmund Fitzalan, earl of Arundel; and Robert Baldock, chancellor of England. Despite the huge stress he was under, Edward II found time to reimburse the keeper of his private possessions 10d for four pairs of buckskin gloves which had been made for him for the coming winter, and gave 8d to a man who had brought him a gift of fish. The king himself went out to the Tower's postern gate, where he encountered a fisherman named Richard Marbon and paid him 3s for two fine salmon.

Meanwhile, eighty miles away, a fleet of fewer than a hundred ships was landing somewhere along the River Orwell in Suffolk. No one at the time, least of all the oblivious Edward II, could have guessed that the landing of this fleet and the no more than 1,500 people who came ashore would spell his downfall; that these soporific days at the Tower were the last days of peace he would ever know; that soon he would be forced to flee from his capital, little more than a fugitive in his own kingdom; that within four months he would have lost his throne, forced to abdicate in favour of his teenage son. Even before he heard of the fleet's arrival three days later, however, Edward knew perfectly well who one of the leaders of the invasion in Suffolk was. His estranged wife and queen, Isabella of France.

Isabella of France (c. 1295–1358), who married Edward II in January 1308, is one of the most notorious women in English history. In 1325/26, sent to her homeland to negotiate a peace settlement to end the war between her husband and her brother Charles IV of France, Isabella refused to return to England. She began a relationship with her husband's deadliest enemy, the English baron Roger Mortimer, and with her son the king's heir under their control, the pair led an invasion of England which ultimately resulted in Edward II's forced abdication in January 1327. Isabella and Mortimer ruled England during the minority of her and Edward II's son Edward III, until the young king overthrew the pair in October 1330, took over the governance of his own kingdom and had Mortimer hanged at Tyburn and his mother sent away to a forced but honourable retirement. Edward II, meanwhile, had died under mysterious circumstances – at least according to traditional accounts – while in captivity at Berkeley Castle in September 1327.

Though she was mostly popular and admired by her contemporaries, her disastrous period of rule from 1327 to 1330 notwithstanding,

Isabella's posthumous reputation reached a nadir centuries after her death when she was condemned as a wicked, unnatural 'she-wolf', adulteress and murderess by writers incensed that a woman would rebel against her own spouse and have him killed in dreadful fashion, or at least stand by in silence as it happened (the infamous and often repeated 'red-hot poker' story of Edward II's demise is a myth, but widely believed from the late fourteenth century until the present day). Isabella's relationship with Roger Mortimer and her alleged sexual immorality, as well as her frequently presumed but never proved role in her husband's murder, became a stick often used to beat her with; a typical piece of Victorian moralising by Agnes Strickland declared that 'no queen of England has left such a stain on the annals of female royalty, as the consort of Edward II, Isabella of France'. Strickland's work divided the queens of England, seemingly fairly arbitrarily, into the 'good' ones such as Eleanor of Castile and Philippa of Hainault, and the 'bad' ones such as Eleanor of Provence; Isabella of France, naturally, fell into the second category. Her reputation fared poorly between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, and well into the twentieth: in the early 1590s the playwright Christopher Marlowe called her 'that unnatural queen, false Isabel', a 1757 poem by Thomas Gray was the first to apply the ridiculous 'she-wolf' nickname (which had been invented by Shakespeare for Henry VI's queen Margaret of Anjou) to her, and in 1958, exactly 600 years after her death, Isabella was still being called 'the most wicked of English queens'. The French nickname sometimes used for her, *la Louve de France* – the title of a 1950s novel about her by Maurice Druon – is simply the translation of the English word 'she-wolf' and has no historical basis whatsoever. (Although it is sometimes claimed nowadays that Edward II himself, or his favourite Hugh Despenser the Younger, called Isabella a 'she-wolf', this is not true; one fourteenth-century chronicler,

Geoffrey le Baker, called her Jezebel, a play on her name, but otherwise no unpleasant nicknames for her are recorded until a few centuries after she died.) An academic work of 1983 unkindly calls Isabella a 'whore', and a non-fiction book published as late as 2003 depicts her as incredibly beautiful and desirable but also murderous, vicious and scheming, and claims without evidence that she 'had murder in her heart' towards her husband in 1326/27, called for his execution and was 'secretly delighted' when she heard of his death.

Her contemporaries were mostly kinder. With the notable exception of Geoffrey le Baker in the 1350s, who was trying to promote Edward II as a saint and who detested Isabella, calling her an 'iron virago' as well as 'Jezebel', fourteenth-century chroniclers generally treated her well, and it is certainly not the case, as is sometimes claimed nowadays, that they called her a 'whore' or anything equally ugly and harsh because of her liaison with Roger Mortimer. Most fourteenth-century chroniclers seem uncertain whether Isabella even had an affair with Mortimer at all, and a few depict the two

merely as political allies and call Mortimer Isabella's 'chief counsellor', which may be a more accurate portrayal of their association than the romanticised accounts so prevalent in modern writing. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, writers have mostly been keen to write Isabella sympathetically and rescue her from the unfair calumnies heaped on her head for so long – an impulse to be applauded – but in doing so have tended to go too far in the opposite direction. As a result, Isabella is depicted nowadays as a tragic, long-suffering victim of marital cruelty, impoverished and deprived of her children, who is miraculously transformed in 1326/27 into a strong, empowered feminist heroine bravely fighting to end the oppression of her husband's subjects and to get her children back. This is no more accurate than the old tendency to write her as an evil she-wolf.

Learn more about *Isabella of France: The Rebel Queen* from Amberley Publishing at:

<https://www.amberley-books.com/isabella-of-france.html>

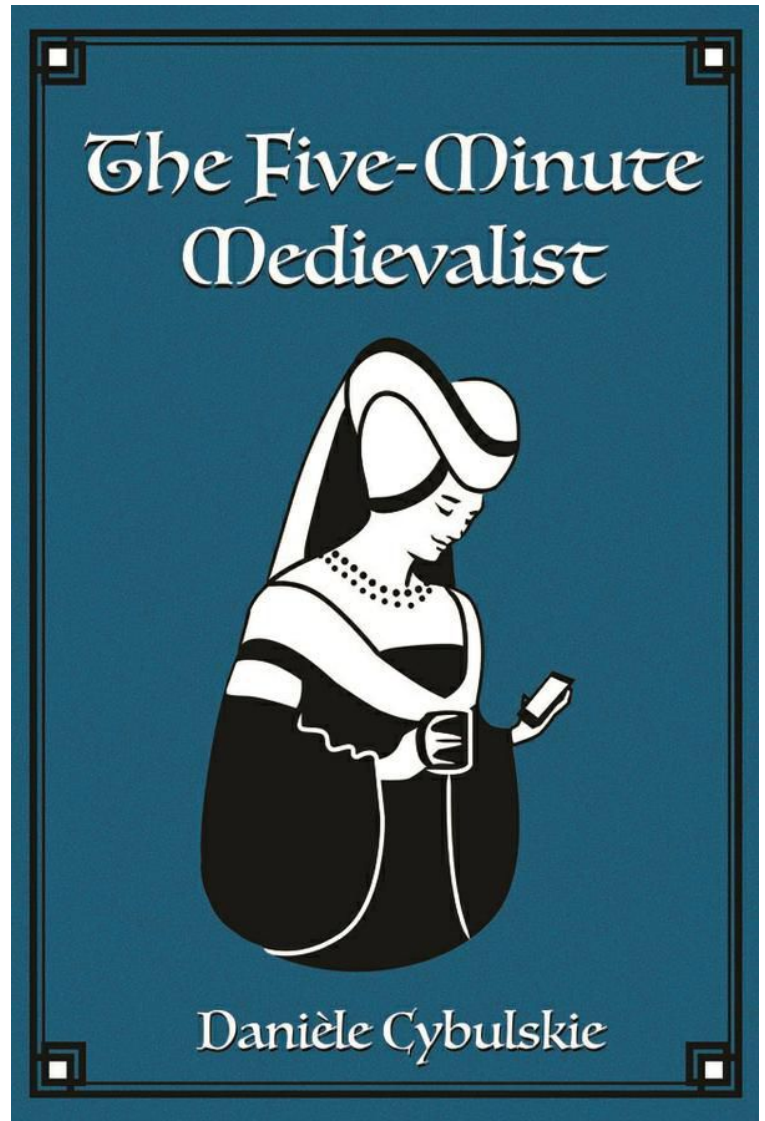
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The Five-Minute Medievalist

By Danièle Cybulskie

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