MEDIEVAL STUDIES MAGAZINE FROM MEDIEVALISTS.NET

The Medievalverse

Number 25

July 20, 2015

The Viking's Sword

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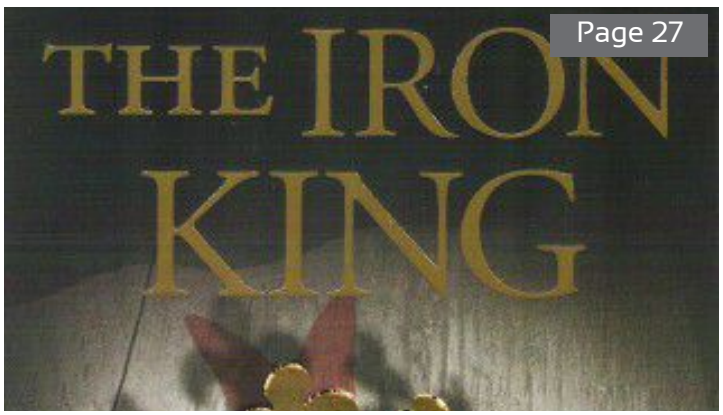
A new study on taxation in late medieval Sweden has revealed fascinating details about how much peasants had to pay to the royal government in taxes.

Ten Unusual Moments from the First Crusade

The First Crusade was one of the most written about events during the Middle Ages.

Caernarfon Castle

Perhaps more than any other castle found within the British Isles, Caernarfon embodies that most terrifying of a castles aspects; a tool for the aggressive and utter domination of territory.



Book Review: The Iron King, by Maurice Druon

Touted by George R.R. Martin as the original Game of Thrones, Druon's series has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity recently, and can be found in major bookstores.

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Cover Photo: Viking Sword - Photo: Ellen C. Holthe, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

The Last Viking and his Magical Sword?

An amazing discovery of a late Viking Age sword - embellished with gold, inscriptions and other ornamentation – has now been revealed in Norway. Found in the southern Norwegian village of Langeid in 2011, the medieval weapon is being displayed for the first time at the Historical Museum in Oslo.

The sword must have belonged to a wealthy man in the late Viking Age. But who was he and what magic inscriptions are set into the decoration – in gold? Was the owner of the sword in the Danish King Canute's army when it attacked England in 1014-15?

"We just gaped"

In the summer of 2011, archaeologists from the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo discovered a Viking burial ground in the Setesdal valley region, southwest of Oslo. In one of the graves they made a startling discovery.

"Even before we began the excavation of this grave, I realised it was something quite special. The grave was so big and looked different from the other 20 graves in the burial ground. In each of the four corners of the grave there were post holes," said excavation leader Camilla Cecilie Wenn of the Museum of Cultural History.

The post holes reveal that there was a roof over the grave, which is a sign that the grave had a prominent place in the burial ground. But when they dug down in the coffin in the bottom of the grave, there were few traces of gifts for the afterlife, only two small fragments of silver coins. The coins were from northern Europe; one was probably from the German Viking Age, judging by how it was embossed, while the other was a penny minted under Ethelred II in England dating from the period 978-1016.

"But when we went on digging outside the coffin, our eyes really popped. Along both sides, something metal appeared, but it was hard to see what it was. Suddenly a lump of earth fell to one side so that the object became clearer. Our pulses raced when we realised it was the hilt of a sword! And on the other side of the coffin, the metal turned out to be a big battle-axe. Although the weapons were covered in rust when we found them, we realised straight away that they were special and unusual. Were they put there to protect the dead person from enemies, or to display power?"

Dating of charcoal from one of the post holes shows that the grave is from around the year 1030, at the very end of the Viking Age. "And that fits in well with the discovery of the English coin."

The sword

The sword must have belonged to a wealthy man who lived in the late Viking Age. The sword is 94 cm long; although the iron blade has rusted, the handle is well preserved. It is wrapped with silver thread and the hilt and pommel at the top are covered in silver with details in gold, edged with a copper alloy thread," said project leader Zanette Glørstad.

"When we examined the sword more closely, we also found remnants of wood and leather on the blade. They must be remains from a sheath to put the sword in," explained curator Vegard Vike. He has had the challenging task of cleaning up the handle and preserving the sword.

The sword is decorated with large spirals, various combinations of letters and cross-like ornaments. The letters are probably Latin, but what the letter combinations meant is still a mystery.

"At the top of the pommel, we can also clearly see a picture of a hand holding a cross. That's

Viking Magic Sword discovered in Norway – Photo: Ellen C. Holthe, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

see a picture of a hand holding a cross. That's unique and we don't know of any similar findings on other swords from the Viking Age. Both the hand and the letters indicate that the sword was deliberately decorated with Christian symbolism. But how did such a sword end up in a pagan burial ground in Norway? The design of the sword, the symbols and the precious metal used all make it perfectly clear that this was a magnificent treasure, probably produced abroad and brought back to Norway by a very prominent man," added Camilla Cecilie Weenn.

"The way swords are referred to in the sagas suggests that the sword is an important bearer of the identity of the warrior. A sword reveals the warrior's social status, his position of power and his strength. The sagas also tell us that gold had a special symbolic value in Norse society. In Norse literature gold represented power and potency.

Gold is rarely found in archaeological material from Viking Period and then too, it stood for power and potency. This indicates that gold had considerable economic and symbolic value. Based on the descriptions in the literature, we can say that the sword was the male jewellery par excellence of the Viking Age," said Hanne Lovise Aannestad, the author of a recent article on ornate swords from the days of the Vikings.

Magic

The sagas emphasise the importance of the ornate sword. Swords could have hilts of gold with ornamentation and magical runes. The mythical sagas tell of magical swords forged by dwarfs. The creation of myths around the art of the blacksmith and the making of high-quality swords may be related to the fact that few people mastered the art. The production of metal objects of high quality may have been a form of hidden knowledge unavailable to most people. This gave the objects a magical aura.

"In Mediaeval literature, swords are referred to

as aesthetic, powerful and magical objects. The many similarities between the descriptions of swords in Norse and Mediaeval literature suggest that the splendour of the sword in the latter had roots in the Viking notions of the symbolic power, magic and ritual aspects of the ornate sword. The Viking Age was a period of great social upheaval. At times like that, certain symbolic objects may play an important role in negotiating social positions. There is much to suggest that these magnificent swords were such objects, reflecting the status and power of the warrior and his clan," said Hanne Lovise.

The battle-axe

The axe found in the same grave has no gold decoration. But the shaft is coated with brass and it may well have flashed like gold when the sun shone. Such shaft coatings are very rare in Norway. But a number of similar battle-axes have been found in the River Thames in London. That makes the axe particularly interesting. Dating of the axe from Langeid shows that it belongs to the same period as the axes found in the Thames. There was a long series of battles along the Thames in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. The Danish king Sweyn Forkbeard and his son Canute led their armies against the English king in the battle for the English throne. Even the Norwegian king Olav (Haraldsson) the Holy was involved in the attack on London in 1009. The men under the Danish King were from all over Scandinavia. Did the axes get lost in the Thames during the numerous skirmishes, or did the victors throw them in the river?

Did the sword belong to a Viking from King Canute's army?

Further down the Setesdal Valley we find a runic stone, which says: "Arnstein raised this stone in memory of Bjor his son. He found death when Canute "went after" England. God is one." (Translated from the Old Norse). The text probably refers to King Canute's attacks on England in 1013-14. It is likely that the stone was erected just after the incursions, by a father whose son never came back home. A written source from the 12th century states that King Canute's closest army had to meet certain requirements. Soldiers had to honour the king, had to belong to the leading families in society and also had to provide their own gilded axes and sword hilts.

The Langeid sword would no doubt have been

Vegard Vike examining the Viking Sword – Photo: Ellen C. Holthe, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

Photo: Ellen C. Holthe, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

The Langeid sword would no doubt have been approved by King Canute, probably also the axe. The sword was made outside Norway and an Anglo-Saxon origin is quite possible. The axe is very similar to those found in the Thames, especially in its brass coating. The grave with the sword also contained the only coin found in Langeid from the Anglo-Saxon region, which increases the possibility that the dead man had a particular connection to the events in England.

"It's quite possible that the dead man was one of King Canute's hand-picked men for the battles with King Ethelred of England. Seen in connection with the runic stone further down the valley, it is tempting to suggest that it is Bjor himself who was brought home and buried here. Another possibility is that his father Arnstein only got his son's magnificent weapons back and that, precisely for that reason, he decided to erect a runic stone for his son as a substitute for a grave. When Arnstein himself died, his son's glorious weapons were laid in his grave. The death of his son must have been very tough on an old man. Perhaps their relatives honoured both Arnstein and Bjor by letting Arnstein be buried with the weapons with such a heroic history," said Zanette Glørstad.

The runic stone dates from the same period as the final phase of the burial ground and testifies that Christianity is about to take root in Norwegian society. It is the oldest runic stone in Norway that refers to Christianity. Could this also explain why the weapons were placed outside the coffin? In a transitional period, people may have chosen to use both pagan and Christian elements in a funeral. The Langeid grave is from one of the last pagan funerals we know of from Norway and marks both the greatness and the end of the Viking Age.

"Take it personally"

Ever since the summer of 2011, the sword found in Langeid has been unpublished. Its display today has been made possible by the meticulous work and research of conservators and archaeologists at the Museum of Cultural History. Finally, it can be seen by the public and is displayed in the exhibition called "Take it personally" – an exhibition of personal jewellery and adornment over time and space in the Historical Museum in Oslo.

How Much Taxes Did a Medieval Peasant Pay? The numbers from Sweden

A new study on taxation in late medieval Sweden has revealed fascinating details about how much peasants had to pay to the royal government in taxes.

The article 'The Late-Medieval Crisis Quantified: Real taxes in Sweden, 1320–1550', by Dag Retsö and Johan Söderberg, appears in the latest issue of *Scandinavian Journal of History.* The two economic historians from the Stockholm University were able to analyze all of the available taxation records from the Swedish crown during this period, and express those figures both in real money as well as calculate the quantity of butter and the number of oxen that could be bought for a given tax sum.

The historians note that during this period Swedish peasants saw dramatic changes in how much taxes they had to pay, with very low taxes during the period 1320–1363; followed by very high taxes for the next seventy years, and then ending the Middle Ages with lower taxes. Much of the income for the royal household would come from taxes on the peasantry, as the noble families, the clergy, and many townsmen (including those in Stockholm) were exempt from paying taxes. They also found that their was a great variety of taxes collected, mostly in kind (rye, barley, cattle, sheep, butter, pork and iron) as well as in cash.

During the middle decades of the fourteenth-century, the average tax-paying peasant would had to pay the equivalent of 32 grams of silver to the royal treasury. This would represent about 2% of the value of their farm, and if it was delivered as butter, it would be the equivalent of 16 kilograms. Retsö and Söderberg believe that during this period a typical peasant would have owned about four cows, which could deliver between 14 and 20 kilograms of butter per year.

The situation would change dramatically in 1363, when Sweden was invaded by German knights led by Duke Albert of Mecklenburg. Duke Albert's son, who was also named Albert, was elected King of Sweden the following year, and the family would rule until 1389. The historians call this era "a decentralized plunder economy" with extremely high taxes (as well as just outright theft of peasant property) being needed to support huge military expenses. Records from the years 1365 and 1366 show that the average peasant had to pay 168 and 227 grams of silver, or the equivalent of 105 and 162 kilograms of butter during those years.

The rule of the Mecklenburgs would come to end in 1389 as the forces of Queen Margaret of Denmark conquered Sweden (founder of the Kalmar Union, which united the Scandinavian countries until the 16th century). Taxes would remain high during her reign – the authors explain that "the regime of Margaret aimed at strengthening royal power and the central state. In order to broaden the tax base of the crown, Margaret enacted a reduction of several thousand farms that had been acquired by noblemen or the church and exempted from land dues to the crown. These properties were now brought back to ordinary tax-paying status, reversing the trend during the previous regime of King Albert. The queen strengthened royal control of the bailiffs, though local uprisings against them still occurred."

Overall, the period between 1365 and 1424 would see the average annual tax rate to be 177 grams of silver, or the equivalent of 105 kilograms of butter or 15% of the value of a farm. By way of comparison, in England during the 1370s, just prior to the Peasants' Revolt, the average taxes

average taxes per capita was about 10 grams of silver.

The article notes that:

> *A key question is how the peasants were able to survive the high taxes in the decades around 1400. Part of the answer seems to be that taxes were redistributed from poor to rich peasants due to the collective responsibility of the local community. Affluent taxpayers had to pay those amounts that the less wealthy did not manage to put up. In practice, then, the tax system was less regressive than it would appear at first sight.*

Eventually, the high taxes would help lead to the Engelbrekt rebellion of 1434–1436, which would depose King Eric of Pomerania and usher a new era of much lower taxes. Retsö and Söderberg calculate that between 1446 and 1551, the average peasant paid 17 grams of silver in tax, the equivalent of about 17 kilograms of butter. It was also noted that castles, which played a central role in the extortion of taxes, were often attacked and destroyed during the Engelbrekt rebellion. "Several of these strongholds were not rebuilt, with the result that the number of functioning castles was much reduced toward the end of the 15th century," they write.

Besides the great variations in taxation rates over time, the authors also found that amount of taxes paid would be much different depending on which area of Sweden you lived. While the northern areas paid little taxes, those in the central region, which was the most fertile and economically diverse, paid five times as much.

The article concludes:

> *Most of the late-medieval period, then, was characterized by low taxes. This state of affairs obviously was connected to the comparatively high material living standards of the period. It also stimulated labour-saving technological change in peasant agriculture. The other side of the coin was that the state was too weak to avert or subdue armed conflicts involving Swedish as well as Danish lords fighting for supremacy. No working monopoly of violence was created.*

'The Late-Medieval Crisis Quantified: Real taxes in Sweden, 1320–1550', by Dag Retsö and Johan Söderberg, appears in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol.40:1 (2015).

Map of Scandinavia by Egnazio Danti (1536 - 1586)

New online database allows users to explore the families of Medieval England

Mapping the Medieval Countryside has announced that the beta version of their searchable English translations of inquisitions post mortem (IPMs) – a major source into the lives and legacies of thousands of families from the Later Middle Ages.

The free database is being created by a collaborative research project between King's College London and the University of Winchester. The inquisitions post mortem describe the lands held by thousands of families, from nobles to peasants, and are a key source for the history of almost every settlement in England – and of many in Wales.

This week the first part of the database went live – it covers the years 1418-47. Eventually, users will be able to access records from the period 1236 to 1447 and 1485 to 1509.

The English government conducted Inquisitions post mortem when someone died who had lands held directly from the king. This could include powerful noble families, knights, townsmen and peasants. The records offer much detail about the property held by these individuals as well as their family relations.

While many volumes of the calendar of inquisitions post mortem were published in the early years of the 20th century, this project will not only be digitizing the volumes, but making many improvements on the originals, including:

1. fuller details of writs have been provided: in all instances, the name of the issuing Chancery clerk, and details of endorsements; in many cases, more accurate information about the nature of the writ
2. names of officiating escheators have been added
3. names of jurors have been added (around 48,000 names)
4. a substantial number of IPMs omitted for various reasons from the print volumes are published here for the first time

Dr Matthew Holford, research officer on the project, explains that "the IPMs are the single

most important source for the study of landed society in medieval England. They are widely used by academic historians and also by family historians, genealogists and local historians. Although they have been published, the printed volumes are difficult to access and cumbersome to search – this project makes a key source for the history of late medieval England freely available and widely accessible. It also lays the foundation, through extensive semantic markup, for much more detailed geo-spatial analysis of the medieval landed economy."

Users can access the databse from the project website **www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk**. Mapping the Medieval Countryside also has a blog that explores some of the interesting case studies that emerge from the records.
Professor Michael Hicks of the University of Winchester, one of the principal investigators of the proejct, says this beta launch is "the culmination of the great historical enterprise – now almost 200 years old – to publish all the inquisitions post mortem".

Dr Matthew Holford, from the University of Winchester, speaking last year about the project:

When Reality Becomes Fantasy: How Video Games are Hijacking the Middle Ages

"The Middle Ages is a space where white supremecy is legitimised. The maintenance of white privilege. The gamer community use 'historical facts' to legitimise this kind of literacy." ~ Victoria Cooper

Victoria Cooper at the International Medieval Congress, demonstrating how right wing political groups appropriate medieval imagery

Medieval representations in video games was the focus of Victoria Cooper's paper, Playing Politics: Exploring Nationalism and Conservatism in Fantasy Video Games, which was given earlier this month at the International Medieval Congress. Part of the session, The Use and Abuse of the Middle Ages in the Modern World, IV: Nationalism and Identity, it examined the ways in which medieval imagery and history are often hijacked by far-right political groups and nationalist organisations to legitimise their historical narratives.

Cooper, a PhD candidate at the University of Leeds, used player assessments of the Middle Ages, marketing, and player forums as the backbone of her research. Forums, in particular, are good resources for player observation because conversations here spring up organically and aren't censored. When Cooper was speaking to players, she was careful to never brings up the Middle Ages to see if they brought it up themselves. The result? Most players do.

What did these unchecked conversations reveal? The games don't inspire a specific kind of nationalism with another country per se, but they do harken to "the medieval' which becomes it's own space, and has its own nationalistic quality where real heritage is superimposed upon a fictional world.

Cooper notes that the medieval world is often exploited by right wing groups, such as the British National Party (BNP). They used the symbol of Excalibur to promote "Englishness", since, according to legend, Excalibur is the sword that confers the rightful kingship of England. There is even an online shop profiting from this perceived sense of English nationalism that declares, "Excalibur: the number 1 patriotic goods store". However, it appears that the BNP is no longer affiliated with the shop and Excalibur has taken great pains to extricate itself from the association by posting a large disclaimer on their front page stating, "Excalibur has no affiliation or ties to any political party. All merchandise sold on Excalibur belongs to Excalibur and any profits made from

made from such merchandise stays with Excalibur."

Groups like the BNP in England often attempt to tie a medieval past to their nationalism by framing it with shirts like, "White and Proud", or "Anglo Saxon", as a form of identity politics.

Video Games and Medieval History: The Elder Scrolls – Skyrim

Skyrim is a massively popular medieval-themed video game. Part of the greater Elder Scrolls video game series, Skyrim was released in 2011 by Bethesda Game Studios and was a critical success. Cooper's thesis focused on this game and the way players transpose their heritage and national identity onto the fictitious races of its gaming world. Skyrim is home to the Nords (Stormcloaks), a pseudo-Viking race. Tall, fair-haired, and pale, they are a sea-faring warrior society that values honour, family and glory. 34% of the players interviewed picked Nords, the vast majority of which were from Europe and the United States because they felt an affinity with Nord values and ancestral identity. Players associate themselves with the Nords/Stormcloaks because the Imperial soldiers remind them of Roman Britain, and they feel connected to Northern people, their plight, and this sense of "Englishness". The Stormcloaks legitimise their cultural heritage.

In players who identify as Scottish and Northern English, the Nords/Stormcloaks stimulate a sense of a northern, white nostalgia, that is ancestrally connected to a medieval place. Cooper suggests that, 'medievally-themed video games are a space where whiteness can be anchored, in a "happy history" where a world is free of multiculturalism and white guilt'.

The Crusades also attracts people to these types of games. Players create their own religions so as not to cause offense or appear bigoted. They cloak Christianity with an invented religion, yet one that mirrors reality.

Playing with Politics : #GamerGate II?

Cooper recalled the infamous "#GamerGate" – the 2014 scandal that erupted in the gaming world when several prominent women challenged the status quo of the community. The women received rape, violence and death threats. They (and their supporters) were also "doxed"; a tactic whereby private information, like a home address, phone number, place of work and personal details are made public in an effort to silence and publicly shame the person.

Cooper noted that the gaming community has traditionally had horrible reactions towards academic inspection of games because players want to maintain them as apolitical and are resistant to changing the status quo. The predominantly white, male players of Gamergate insisted that representations of the games should be divorced from modern politics.

However forcefully players maintain their arguments, many gamers continue to map their identity, heritage, and ancestry onto these games. They claim to be apolitical, yet in the same breath, refuse to acknowledge the politics behind these games. According to Cooper, they subscribe to the popular idea of the Middle Ages as 'gritty, white, male, and powerful'. They cling to the notion that women didn't fight in the Middle Ages, fiercely stating this as 'as fact', and steadfastly refusing to allow women agency in warrior roles.

Unfortunately for gamers, the tide is turning and the inspection of their identities is happening whether they like it or not, and will continue to gain momentum. Games like Skyrim, and The Elder Scrolls are only the tip of the iceberg. What Gamergate tried to shut down, instead, opened a Pandora's Box that can never be closed. Academics, like Cooper, will continue to challenge, examine and illustrate the ways these groups misappropriate medieval history.

You can learn more about Victoria Cooper's research at **Academia.edu** and follow her on Twitter **@Syrin_**

Ten Unusual Moments o

The First Crusade was one of the most written about events during the Middle Ages. Many Christian writers, including some who took part in the pilgrimage/campaign, left detailed accounts of what happened. They sometimes also included some more unusual tales, ranging from battles with bears to sitting on a throne when you are not supposed to.

1. The People's (and Animal's) Crusade

The First Crusade would include thousands of peasants, who made their way through Europe. Many of the contemporary writers were dismissive of the so-called People's Crusade, and portrayed them in a less than favourable light. For example, Albert of Aachen writes:

> *There was also another abominable wickedness in this gathering of people on foot, who were stupid and insanely irresponsible, which, it cannot be doubted, is hateful to God and unbelievable to all the faithful. They claimed that a certain goose was inspired by the Holy Ghost, and a she-goat filled no less with the same, and they had made these their leaders for this holy journey to Jerusalem; they even worshipped them excessively, and as the beasts directed their courses for them in their animal way many of the troops believed wholeheartedly, claiming it was the truth.*

2. Making Yourself Comfortable in Constantinople

Anna Komnene, daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I, was less than impressed with the crusaders as they began to arrive in Constantinople. She writes:

> *when the Franks had all come together and had taken an oath to the emperor, there was one count who had the boldness to sit down upon the throne. The emperor, well knowing the pride of the Latins, kept silent, but Baldwin approached the Frankish count and taking him by the hand said, "You ought not to sit there; that is an honor which the emperor permits to no one. Now that you are in this country, why do you not observe its* customs?" The

during the First Crusade

customs?" The insolent count made no reply to Baldwin, but said in his barbarous language, as if talking to himself, "This must be a rude fellow who would alone remain seated when so many brave warriors are standing up." Alexis noted the movement of the man's lips and called an interpreter in order to learn, what he had said; but when the interpreter had told him he did not complain to the Franks, although he did not forget the matter.

Peter the Hermit leading the People's Crusade

3. Bohemond accepts, refuses, and accepts, Alexius' gifts

Anna also offers an account of how Bohemond of Taranto, who had previously fought agains the Byzantines and after the First Crusade would be their enemy again, was very wary of the Emperor, even refusing to eat his food. To obtain his allegiance, Alexius had a room filled:

> *with garments and stamped gold and silver, and other materials of lesser value, that one could not even walk because of their quantity. And he told the man who was to show Bohemond these things, to throw open the doors suddenly. Bohemond was amazed at the sight and exclaimed "If all these treasures were mine, I should have made myself master of many countries long ere this!" and the attendant replied, "The Emperor makes you a present of all these riches to-day." Bohemond was overjoyed and after thanking for the present he went away to rest in the house where he lodged. But when these treasures were brought to him, he who had admired them before had changed his mind and said, " Never did I imagine that the Emperor would inflict such dishonour on me. Take them away and give them back to him who sent them." But the Emperor, knowing the Latins' characteristic fickleness, quoted the popular proverb, 'Let bad things return to their own master.' When Bohemond heard of this and saw the porters carefully packing the presents up again, he changed his mind – he, who a minute before was sending them away and was annoyed at them, now gave the porters pleasant looks, just like a polypus that changes its form in an instant. For by nature the man was a rogue and ready for any eventualities; in roguery and courage he was far superior to all the Latins who came through then, as he was inferior to them in forces and money. But in spite of his surpassing all in superabundant activity in mischief, yet fickleness like some natural Latin appendage attended him too. So he who first rejected the presents, afterwards accepted them with great pleasure.*

4. Godfrey fights a Bear

As he was making his way through present-day Turkey, Godfrey of Bouillon, a minor Crusade leader, fought a bear. Albert of Aachen writes that Godfrey

> *saw that a bear of most enormous and frightful appearance had seized a helpless pilgrim out gathering twigs, and was pursuing him as he fled round a tree to devour him, just as it was accustomed to devour shepherds of the*

Godfrey of Bouillon slaying a bear, f. 41v. Sébastien Mamerot, Les Passages d'Outremer, Fr. 5594, BnF

district, or at least those who went into the forest, according to their account. The duke, then, as he was accustomed and ready to help his Christian comrades at all times of misfortune, hastily drew his sword, vigorously spurred his horse and swooped down upon the wretched man; he hastened to snatch the distressed pilgrim from the butcher's teeth and claws, and racing through the middle of the thicket with a loud shout he was exposed in the way of the cruel beast. When the bear saw the horse and its rider bearing down on it at a gallop, trusting its own fierceness and the rapacity of its claws, met the duke face to face at no less speed, opened its jaws to tear his throat, raised up its whole body to resist – or rather to attack, unsheathed its sharp claws to rip him to pieces; it drew back its head and forepaws, carefully guarding against a blow from the sword, and, wishing repeatedly to strike, it feinted. Indeed it roused all the forest and mountains with its dreadful roaring, so that all who were able to hear it wondered at it. The duke, reflecting that the cunning and evil animal would oppose him him with bold savagery, was keenly provoked and violently angry, and with the point of his sword turned towards it he approached the brute in a rash and blind attack, to pierce its liver. But by an

its liver. But by an unlucky chance, as the beast was escaping the blow of the sword it suddenly drove its curve claws into the duke's tunic, the duke fell from his horse, brought down to the ground embraced in its forepaws, and it wasted no time before tearing his throat with its teeth. The duke therefore, in great distress, remembering his many distinguished exploit and lamenting that he who had up to now escaped splendidly from all danger was now to be choked by this bloodthirsty beast in an ignoble death, recovered his strength; he revived in an instant and was on his feet, and, seizing the sword, which had got entangled with his own legs in the sudden fall from his horse and the struggle with the frenzied wild beast, he held it by the hilt and aimed swiftly at the beast's throat, but mutilated the calf and sinews of his own leg with a serious cut. But nevertheless, although an unstaunchable stream of blood poured forth and was lessening the duke's strength, he did not yield to the hostile brute but persisted most fiercely in defending himself until a man called Husechin, who had heard the great shout of the poor peasant delivered from the bear, and the butcher's violent roaring, rode at speed from the comrades scattered through the forest to the assistance of the duke. He attacked the terrifying wild beast with drawn sword, and together with the duke he pierced its liver and ribs with his blade.

5. Discovering the Holy Lance

One of the most famous episodes of the First Crusade took place during the siege of Antioch, when a soldier named Peter Bartholomew claimed that he had visions of Saint Andrew where revealed the secret location of the Holy Lance that had once pierced Jesus Christ. Many of the chroniclers relate this story, including the *Gesta Francorum*:

There was a certain pilgrim of our army, whose name was Peter, to whom before we entered the city St. Andrew, the apostle, appeared and said: "What art thou doing, good man?"

Peter answered, "Who art thou?"

The apostle said to him: "I am St. Andrew, the apostle. Know, my son, that when thou shalt enter the town, go to the church of St. Peter. There thou wilt find the Lance of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, with which He was wounded as He hung on the arm of the cross." Having said all this, the apostle straightway withdrew.

But Peter, afraid to reveal the advice of the apostle, was unwilling to make it known to the pilgrims. However, he thought that he had seen a vision, and said: "Lord, who would believe this?" But at that hour St. Andrew took him and carried him to the place where the Lance was hidden in the ground. When we were a second time situated in such (straits) as we have stated above, St. Andrew came again, saying to him: "Wherefore hast thou not yet taken the Lance from the earth as I commanded thee? Know verily, that whoever shall bear this lance in battle shall never 'be overcome by an enemy." Peter, indeed, straightway made known to our men the mystery of the apostle.

The people, however, did not believe (it), but refused, saying: "How can we believe this?" For they were utterly terrified and thought that they were to die forthwith. Thereupon, this man came forth and swore that it was all most true, since St. Andrew had twice appeared to him in a vision and had said to him: "Rise' go and tell the people of God not to fear, but to trust firmly with whole heart in the one true God and they will be everywhere victorious. Within five days the Lord will send them such a token that they will remain happy and joyful, and if they wish to fight, let them go out immediately to battle, all together, and all their enemies will be conquered, and no one will stand against them." Thereupon, when they beard that their enemies were to be overcome by them, they began straightway to revive and to encourage one another, saying: "Bestir yourselves, and be everywhere brave and alert, since the Lord will come to our aid in the next battle and will be the greatest refuge to His people whom He beholds' lingering in sorrow."

Accordingly, upon hearing the statements of that man who reported to us the revelation of Christ through the words of the apostle, we went in haste immediately to the place in the church of St. Peter which he had pointed out. Thirteen men dug there from morning until vespers. And so that man found the Lance, just as he had indicated. They received it with great gladness and fear, and a joy beyond measure arose in the whole city.

6) Peter's Ordeal

Peter Bartholomew Undergoing the Ordeal of Fire, by Gustave Doré. However, many of the crusaders doubted Peter Bartholomew and accused him of fabricated the discovery. Nine months after the discovery, Peter decided to go through the Ordeal of Fire to prove himself. Here is

how Ralph of Caen described the scene in the Gesta Tancredi:

> *By means of this examination, the truth of the discovery would be proved by his unhurt state while its falseness would be proved by his burns. He was ordered to undertake a three-day fast that would serve as a period of quiet in which to pray and keep vigil. And so, this is what happened. But, soon after, on the day after the fast ended, there was another assembly. The logs burned in a double row. Peter, who was wearing nothing but a tunic and trousers, passed through the burning logs and fell down at the exit after being burned. He died the following day. When the people saw what happened, they decided that they had been fooled by clever words and regretted having erred.*

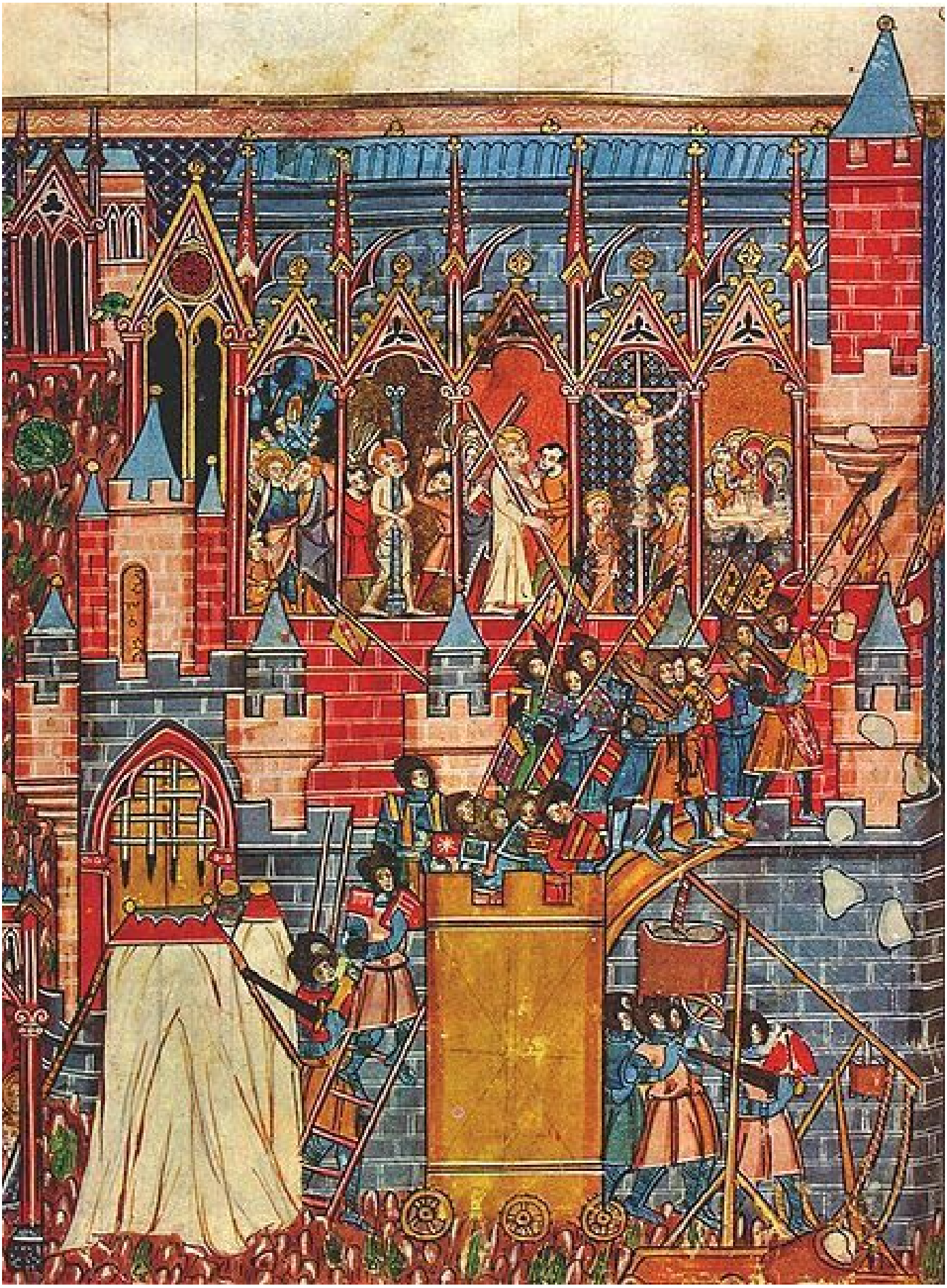
7. Cannibalism

One of the most shocking episodes of the First Crusade took place at the Siege of Marra in the fall of 1098. Fulcher of Chartres writes, "here our men suffered from excessive hunger. I shudder to say that many of our men, terribly tormented by the madness of starvation, cut pieces of flesh from the buttocks of Saracens lying there dead. These pieces they cooked and ate, savagely devouring the flesh while it was insufficiently roasted. In this way the besiegers were harmed more than the besieged. with Dobrawa's father, Boleslav I, Duke of Bohemia.

8. Is this a good eclipse or a bad eclipse?

As the Crusader army neared Jerusalem, a lunar eclipse took palace. Albert of Aachen describes the scene:

> *In that place an eclipse of the moon, which was the fifteenth, happened the same night, such that it totally lost its brightness and was entirely changed into the colour of blood up until the middle of the night, bringing all who saw this no little fear, except that comfort was offered by certain who understood the knowledge of stars. These people said that this portent would not be a bad omen for the Christians, but they were certain the absence of the moon and its being shrouded by blood showed annihilation of the Saracens. They claimed that an eclipse of the sun, indeed, would be an evil portent for the Christians.*



Siege of Jerusalem

9. Sorceresses at the Siege of Jerusalem

William of Tyre offers an unusual tale from the siege of Jerusalem, when the Crusaders' siege machines were inflicting a great deal of damage against the city:

> *When the infidels perceived that no skill of theirs could prevail against this, they brought two sorceresses to bewitch it and by their magic incantations render it powerless. These women were engaged in their magic rites and divinations on the wall when suddenly a huge millstone from that very engine struck them. They, together with three girls who attended them, were crushed to death and their lifeless bodies clashed from the wall. At this sight great applause rose from the ranks of the Christian army and exultation filled the hearts of all in our camp. On the other hand, deep sorrow fell upon the people of Jerusalem because of that disaster.*

10. Badmouthing the Patriarch

Shortly after the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem, the leaders began deciding who would be running their new territory. Arnulf of Chocques, the chaplain of Duke Robert of Normandy, was named the new Patriarch of Jerusalem, which was not a popular choice. Raymond d'Aguiliers was not happy with this choice, writing, "At this time, Arnulf, chaplain of the Count of Normandy, was chosen Patriarch by some, the good (clergy) opposing it not only because be was not a subdeacon, but especially because he was of priestly birth and was accused of incontinence on our expedition, so much so that they shamelessly composed vulgar songs about him."

Arnulf would be removed from the position within a few months.

Cracking down on illegal gambling in Medieval Livonia

Just like their modern day counterparts, medieval cities had to deal with their own criminal underworlds – the sex trade, gambling, and violence taking place within their walls. At the International Medieval Congress, held earlier this month at the University of Leeds, these issues were explored as part of session Perceiving and Regulating Vices. Historians examined different places in Europe, and asked questions such as what was permitted? What were the penalties for breaking the laws? How much was dictated by the church? Did officials turn a blind eye to misdeeds?.

In her paper, 'Crime and Punishment: Regulating Gambling in Livonian Towns (1440-1525)', Anu Mänd examined one of the favourite pastimes in the Middle Ages, but one that was condemned by the church and civic authorities. Mänd, who teaches history at Tallinn University, asked how was this vice regulated in medieval Livonian towns, and who were the most typical gamblers?

'No one shall practice unnecessary dobbelpil'

During her research Mänd discovered that guilds, confraternities and town councils in Tallinn, Riga, Tartu and New Pärnu all issued statutes regulating gambling, which was called "Dobbelen" or "dobbelspil" in Old German.

Fines for gambling depended on whether the offence was committed in the guild hall or elsewhere. If it occurred in the guild hall, the fine was usually higher. Guild and confraternity attitudes depended on the guild type so fines could range from minor to severe. Mänd examined the court records of Tallinn between 1394-1521. Gamblers were recorded as 'de dabbler". The actual fine for gambling in Tallinn was one mark, or half a mark in some cases. While this fine remained unchanged over the period, it could also be increased if the gambler combined their gambling 'with other misdeeds'. Some court records included punishments for up to 30 people at a time! Examples of gambling with other misdeeds included (but not limited to):

1412: organizing gambling in one's house

1435: grabbing a knife (during a game)

1458: tapping off wine after 9pm and organising gambling in one's cellar

Gambling was forbidden on feast days and Sundays under threat of excommunication, however, the most severe punishments were reserved for cheats. If you used weighted dice when you gambled, you paid with your life. Despite heavy punishments, the authorities found little success in clamping down on offenders. Since gambling was associated with drinking, the games could often lead to violence.

Who Gambled?

The short answer: Everyone. Gamblers could include ship's captains, sailors, young men, journeymen, people selling or storing alcohol, apprentices, and foreigners. Upper class gamblers were usually members of merchants guilds and were fined by their associations with the funds being re-invested into the guild. Interestingly, authorities didn't bother to record the occupations of foreigners, they just appeared in the record as 'Swedes' or whatever place they came from.

Much like today, gambling in the Middle Ages was a pastime enjoyed by people from all walks of life. The medieval gambler could be rich or poor, a merchant, a guild member or foreigner. Try as they might, church and lay officials found gambling difficult to stamp out. Instead of trying to eradicate the practice entirely, city councils attempted to regulate gambling but it appears they were not as successful as they had hoped; the violence and crime that were a result of gambling continued to plague cities well into modern times.

Ten Castles that Made Medieval Britain: Caernarfon Castle

By James Turner

Caernarfon Castle at night - photo by Kris Williams / Flickr

A true citadel, Caernarfon Castle casts a long shadow – its meticulously calculated and formidable stonework heavy with the weight of symbolism. Raised by Edward I (and I wince to do this, Longshanks of *Braveheart* fame) in 1283. Perhaps more than any other castle found within the British Isles, Caernarfon embodies that most terrifying of a castles aspects; a tool for the aggressive and utter domination of territory. Rising from a time of war, every beautifully designed facet of the castle is a manifesto for the imperialistic dreams of the English monarchy whose burning ambition laid a new narrative and shape upon the tumultuous relationship between England and its Celtic brothers.

That Caernarfon is sited in a place which represents a great strategic boon to anyone with designs to exert control upon northern Wales is an ancient piece of wisdom. The Romans in their own campaigns built a fortress named Segontium on the site of the modern town, a literal stone's throw away from the Castle. Likewise the Normans, in the high water mark of their initial spasmodic yet effective invasion of Britain, also built a castle on the site under the direction of the roguish gourmet, Hugh le Gros, Earl of Chester. Thirty years afterwards, this modest castle along with many of the bickering fiefdoms of the Norman robber barons fell to the resurgent and squabbling Welsh Princes. Like a middle aged couple trying something new, this up close and personal contact with their new neighbours had a profound effect upon the style and self-image of Welsh aristocracy. Indeed, until the eventually decisive intervention of Edward I, Anlgo-Welsh relations with their frequent dynastic marriages, permeable cultural membrane and fluidic political formations, none of which did much to hinder frequent conflict, resembled nothing more than a grand Punch and Judy show. The same old joke played out again and again with gleeful

and again with gleeful violence.

From 1066 to the close of the 13th century medieval Wales was the wild west of the British Isles. Ireland was like a larger further away wild west but we'll ignore it for the sake of a concise metaphor. Into this swaying equilibrium came Edward I, a man with a dream. Like many dreams, once coaxed into the lucid world it was mad. Like the maddest of all dreams and happily for our metaphor it involved the notion of a manifest destiny. Inspired both by the legends of Arthurian romance literature and his less fictitious but less influential Saxon and Norman ancestors, Edward, a martial King hardened by rebellion and crusade, sought to restore English power and hegemony in Britain. Prior to the great invasion of 1282, Edward had already fought a campaign in Wales comprehensively beating Llywelyn ap Gruffudd the greatest of the Welsh Princes in 1277 when the latter attempted to cling onto the high level of autonomy he had prospered upon under Edward's father, the inept Henry III. However, in large part due to the harsh peace treaty imposed by Edward and his determination to extend the reality of English royal authority across the border, as opposed to the largely nominal laissez faire overlordship of earlier Anglo Norman kings, Wales exploded into rebellion in 1282.

Although the English invasion struggled to gain traction in the early phases of the war, the tide began to turn when Llywelyn, the figurehead of the Welsh cause was killed at the Battle of OrewinBridge. Taking advantage of his superiority in capital and manpower Edward launched another two pronged invasion of Wales in conjunction with his uncle, William da Valence, which finally succeeded in subduing the defenders. In this once and for all move breaking the power of the Welsh Princes, Edward had snuffed out the last remnants of the ancient Sub Roman British Kingdoms glorified as the heroes of the Arthurian tales he loved so much.

In order to safeguard the vast territories he had annexed in the war's aftermath, Edward embarked upon a program of castle building unprecedented in scale and artistry. Caernarfon is the crown jewel in a chain of strategically placed castles that include the likes of the illustrious Conwy and Harlech Castles. Caernarfon, alongside many of Edward's castles was designed and constructed (although luckily not single-handedly) by James of Saint George, a master builder from Savoy. It was also, like many of Edward's castles, a staggeringly expensive undertaking, drawing on vast quantities of material and skilled labour; the enterprise costing somewhere in the region of £25,000.

Edward, implacable though he was in his desire to absorb Wales and later Scotland, was far from adverse to a subtler longer term plan rather than stabbing anything that spoke Welsh to him. Thus when she fell pregnant, a presumably annoyed Queen Eleanor was packed off to the building site that was Caernarfon so that her child could be born in Wales, hopefully developing a politically useful Welsh affinity. On the 25th of April 1284 the future Edward II was born at the Castle and in 1301 the young Edward was created Prince of Wales, a position which it was envisaged would alleviate Welsh discontent and ease the transition to English rule by giving them an alternative centralised power with a strong Welsh influence. Remaining in royal hands and heavily garrisoned, the Castle was a centre of imposed English governance and a site of significant strategic importance which was targeted by a number of rebellions. The Castle was first sacked in 1294 while still under construction, although it was quickly recaptured. It was later unsuccessfully besieged in 1401, 1403 and 1404. During the War of the Three Kingdoms in 1642, the Castle remained in royalist hands. Even in an age of gunpowder and cannons, the Castle's ingeniously designed defences remained formidable, enduring three separate sieges by Parliamentary forces before finally surrendering in 1646. In the succeeding centuries while remaining in royal hands, the Castle was largely neglected although luckily significant restoration work was undertaken in the late 19th and early 20th century which is responsible for the Castle's excellent condition today. In 1911 King George V fittingly enough had his son invested as Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle; a tradition which continued with the current heir to the throne Prince Charles who was formally invested at the Castle in 1969.

Physically Caernarfon is a masterpiece, a supermodel of the castle world, all stark lines and inviting subtle curves. Its lofty and segmented polygonal towers and twin turreted gatehouses are a beautiful and technically impressive exemplar of a rare species. Its imposingly muscular curtain wall, which has often been compared to the great walls overlooking the golden horn of Constantinople, gives the Castle a distinct profile sheltering a pleasant grassy interior where once the great hall, kitchens and various outbuildings stood. The views from the towers are breath-taking, as is, I found, the experience of climbing to the top of them. The entire design of the Castle strongly evokes that of a Roman fort, a deliberate affectation on Edward I's part, likely inspired by the nearby ruins of Segontium. The Castle's Roman-ness was yet another item in Edward's toolkit of ideological weaponry, filling the Castle to the brim with connotations of monolithic dominance and a legitimacy derived from synchronicity with a presumed Arthurian past. Set against the water's edge, so that it could be resupplied by sea if necessary, the Castle stands in the heart of the town which bears its name. While, of course, only a small fraction of the modern town, the medieval town's walls remain remarkably intact forming a picturesque district packed with pubs, restaurants and antique shops which could easily give Bruges a run for its money.

While the Castle, which is open to visitors all year round, would be well worth visiting purely on the basis of its spectacle and physique it also contains a number of extremely well executed and informative exhibits. These include a comprehensive outline of the Castle's history with particular attention lavished upon the means and mechanisms of its construction, a multimedia examination of Caernarfon's native symbolism and place within Anglo-Welsh relations, as well as fittingly an exhibit upon the history of the title of Prince of Wales. In addition to these, the Castle is home to the fascinatingly in depth, if not a little labyrinthine, regimental museum of the Royal Welch Fusiliers detailing every step of their long gallant history and the lives of the generations who served within the Regiment with a venerated and treasured landside of material evidence and regimental relics.

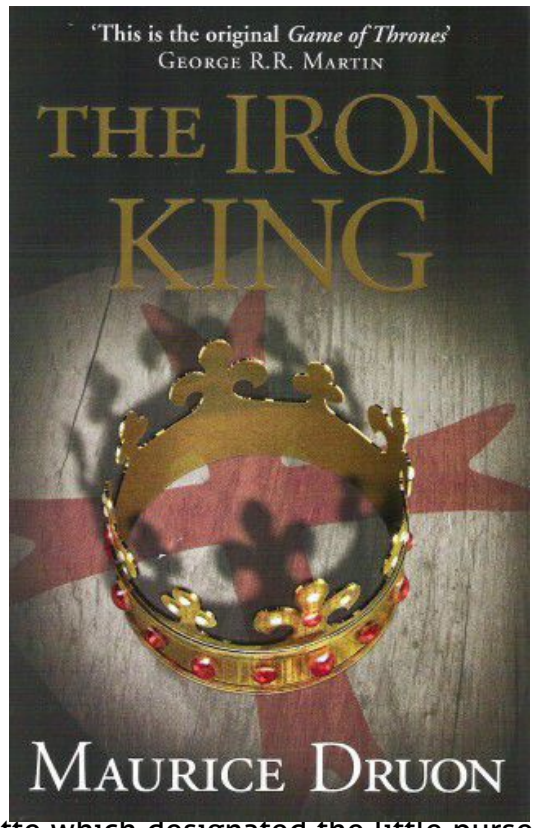
Few if any castles in Britain are as outwardly impressive as Caernarfon. Caernarfon's true value, though, transcends the physical, it is a living avatar to a vision of Britain's position in the world whose shadow clings to us still. For all history enthusiasts it is a must see.

Please visit **CADW** for more information about Caernarfon Castle

You can also follow the castle on Twitter **@CaernarfonCadw**

Book Review: The Iron King, by Maurice Druon

Reviewed by Danièle Cybulskie



The Iron King is the first in a series of novels by French author Maurice Druon, which deal with the royal struggles of several medieval rulers. Touted by George R.R. Martin as "the original *Game of Thrones*", Druon's series has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity recently, and can be found in major bookstores. I eagerly picked up a copy of this first novel, but was disappointed to find it fell short of Martin's praise.

The Iron King deals with France's Philip IV "The Fair" (1268-1314) and a few scandals of his reign, namely the destruction of the Order of the Knights Templar and the adultery of two of his daughters in law. This seems like pretty juicy stuff – and it is – yet *The Iron King* manages to fall flat in its retelling of this pivotal part of history. Partly, this is because of Druon's characters, which never really manage to jump off the page, and partly, this is because of the inclusion of side-plots and romances which aren't nearly as captivating as the royal scandals themselves.

Druon clearly admired Philip's ruling style, writing him as a cool, aloof monarch who yet feels misunderstood. Isabella of France, his daughter and wife of England's Edward II (and incidentally one of my favourite figures from history), is likewise admired, but stays a minor character. Grand Master of the Templars Jacques de Molay does have some feisty moments, including roaring out his curse on Philip's house "to the thirteenth generation". (That is some great stuff right there.) There are plots and revenge and murders and sexcapades, but if you are familiar with this moment in history, there are no surprises in store.

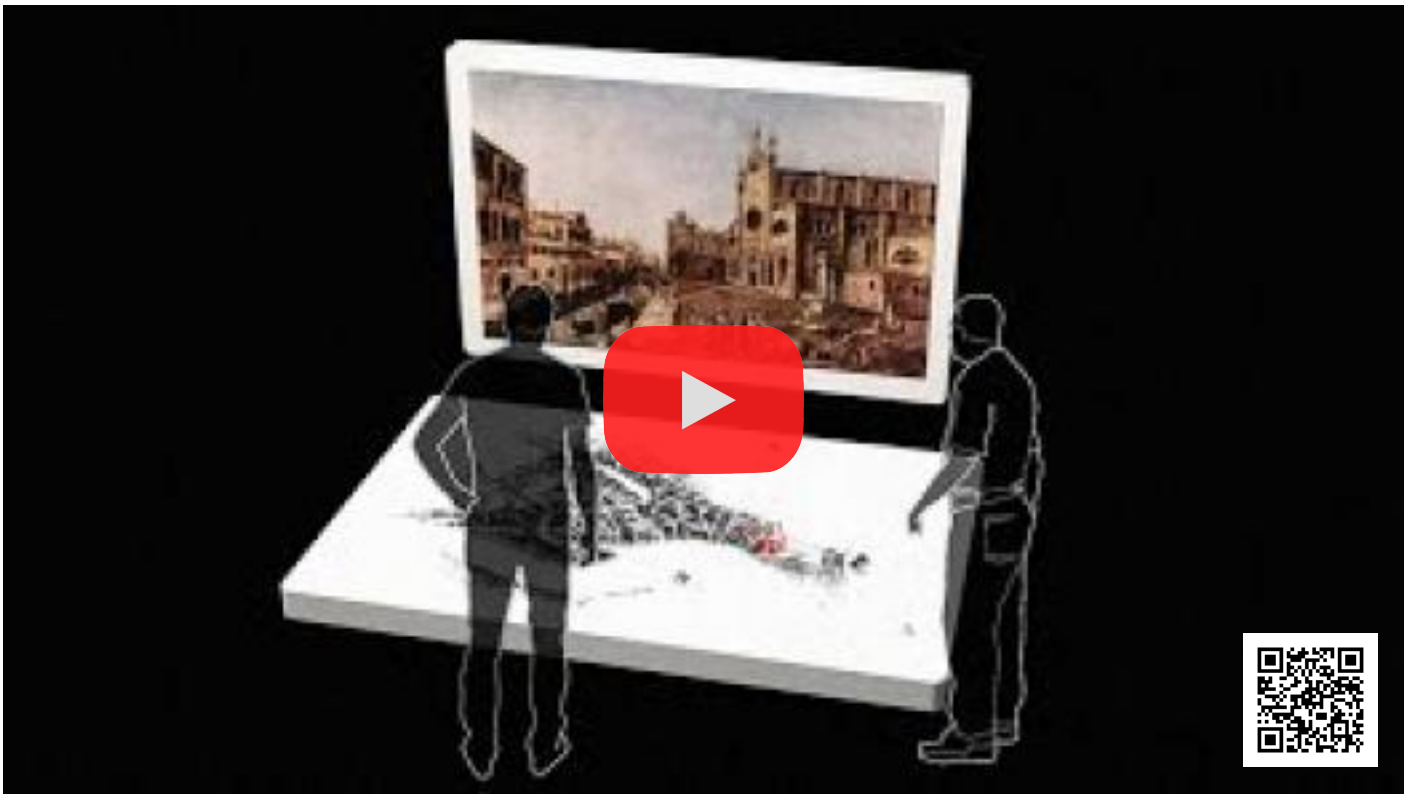
In Druon's defense, he has a really great grip on his history, and even includes page after page of historical notes at the back to help readers along. I did love these notes, and my favourite is this one: "the term 'budget' came from the word bougette which designated the little purse that the Norman lords, who conquered England, wore at their belts" (p.339). Who knew? Druon was a serious researcher and a hero of the French resistance – both redeeming qualities which shouldn't be discounted. I really admire the man, even if I won't be rushing out to buy his next book.

Readers who are not familiar with Philip the Fair's reign will find *The Iron King* to be a more entertaining way to learn real history than reading from a textbook, but Maurice Druon's novel does not hold the shocks and surprises or lovable and despicable characters of A Game of Thrones. I do recommend flipping to the endnotes for some really great tidbits, but I'll have to leave the series to Druon's "many and diverse fans," such as (the front matter claims) "George RR Martin, Nicolas Sarkozy and Vladimir Putin".

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

Medieval Videos

How I Built an Information Time Machine - Lecture by Frederic Kaplan, given at TEDxCaFoscariU in June 2013 - Imagine if you could surf Facebook ... from the Middle Ages. Well, it may not be as far off as it sounds. In a fun and interesting talk, Frederic Kaplan, Professor in Digital Humanities at EPFL, shows off the Venice Time Machine, a project to digitize 80 kilometers of books to create a historical and geographical simulation of Venice across 1000 years.



The Venice Time Machine, an international scientific programme launched by the EPFL and the University Ca'Foscari of Venice, aims at building a multidimensional model of Venice and its evolution covering a period of more than 1000 years. The project ambitions to reconstruct a large open access database that could be used for research and education. The Venice Time Machine will give the archives a new, virtual existence on the Web. It will reanimate Venice's past life from them by re-creating social networks and family trees, and visualizing urban development and design. An open digital archive of Venetian treasures will provide an entirely new research environment.

Click here to visit the Venice Time Machine website