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The Medieval Magazine

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The British Library wants to know what is written in this 13th century sword.

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Edited by:
Peter Konieczny and Sandra Alvarez

Website: **www.medievalists.net**

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Cover Photo: Sir Arturius, Count of Aranmore, and Baroones Ellice de Valles, at Pennsic

What does + NDXOXCHWDRGHDXORVI+ mean?

13th century sword currently on display at British Library

Earlier this month the British Library called upon its website readers to help them solve a mystery about a 13th century sword. Their **Medieval Manuscripts blog** detailed how this blade, which is on display as part of its *Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy* exhibition, was powerful enough that "it could easily have sliced a man's head in two."

They add:

An intriguing feature of this sword is an as yet indecipherable inscription, found along one of its edges and inlaid in gold wire. It has been speculated that this is a religious invocation, since the language is unknown. Here's what the inscription seems to read:

+NDXOXCHWDRGHDXORVI+

Since posting a call for comments from readers, the mystery sword story has been picked up major media outlets in Britain, and gone viral on social media.

They received hundreds of replies, and their is grounds to believe the inscription is possibly a religious message. The ND is likely a reference to either Nostrum Dominus (our Lord) or Nomine Domini (name of the Lord) , while XOX may refer to the Holy Trinity.

Meanwhile, Julian Harrison, the curator of the Magna Carta exhibit, has announced that 100,000 visitors have so far come to the British Library to see the exhibition that celebrates the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta. The exhibition runs until September 1st.

Figurehead from 15th century ship discovered in Baltic Sea

Photo courtesy Södertörn University

Södertörn University in Sweden has announced that a unique figurehead from the 15th century ship "Gribshunden" was salvaged earlier this month, following its discovery during diving operations in June

This figurehead was positioned at the fore of the ship, and was carved from the top of a 3.40 m-long beam. It has the appearance of the grimacing head of a dog or other monstrous animal, and may depict the very "Grip Dog" that the name of the ship ("Gribshunden") reflects.

ohan Ronnby, professor of marine archaeology at Sodertorn University told Reuters "I'm amazed, We knew that it should be a fantastic figure, but it was over our expectations when we saw it now. It's a fantastic figure, unique in the world."

No similar item from the 15th century has ever been found anywhere in the world. This "monster" last saw the light of day at the end of the 15th century, the period in which Columbus discovered America and Leonardo da Vinci was creating his masterpieces.

It is now resting in a waterbath at the Blekinge Museum storehouse, while waiting for the preservation procedure. It is hoped that it will later be possible to exhibit the figurehead at the museum.

The wreck was discovered in the 1970s by sport divers, but it was several decades before it was identified as the Danish royal ship Gribshunden, which sank in 1495. This ship belonged to Danish King Hans, who had anchored in Ronneby on his way to Kalmar to negotiate the Kalmar Union. The ship caught fire and sank following an accident.

How a 16th-century earthquake changed the course of the Po River

The knowledge of past earthquakes provides essential elements to understand the seismicity of a certain region and to implement proper prevention practices. An example of this is the study conducted in the Ferrara area (Po Valley) by Livio Sirovich and Franco Pettenati of the National Institute for Oceanography and Experimental Geophysics (OGS) based in Trieste, Italy. The paper is in press in the *Journal of Geophysical Research* (JGR) of the American Geophysical Union.

On May 20, 2012 a destructive earthquake shook the Emilia region (with epicenter at the town of Finale Emilia). On May 29, a second destructive shock sowed despair and panic. Even the members of the new Major Risks Committee of the Government were worried because they knew that in 1570 there had been a destructive earthquake, which had severely affected the area of Ferrara, a few kilometers east of the one damaged on May 20.

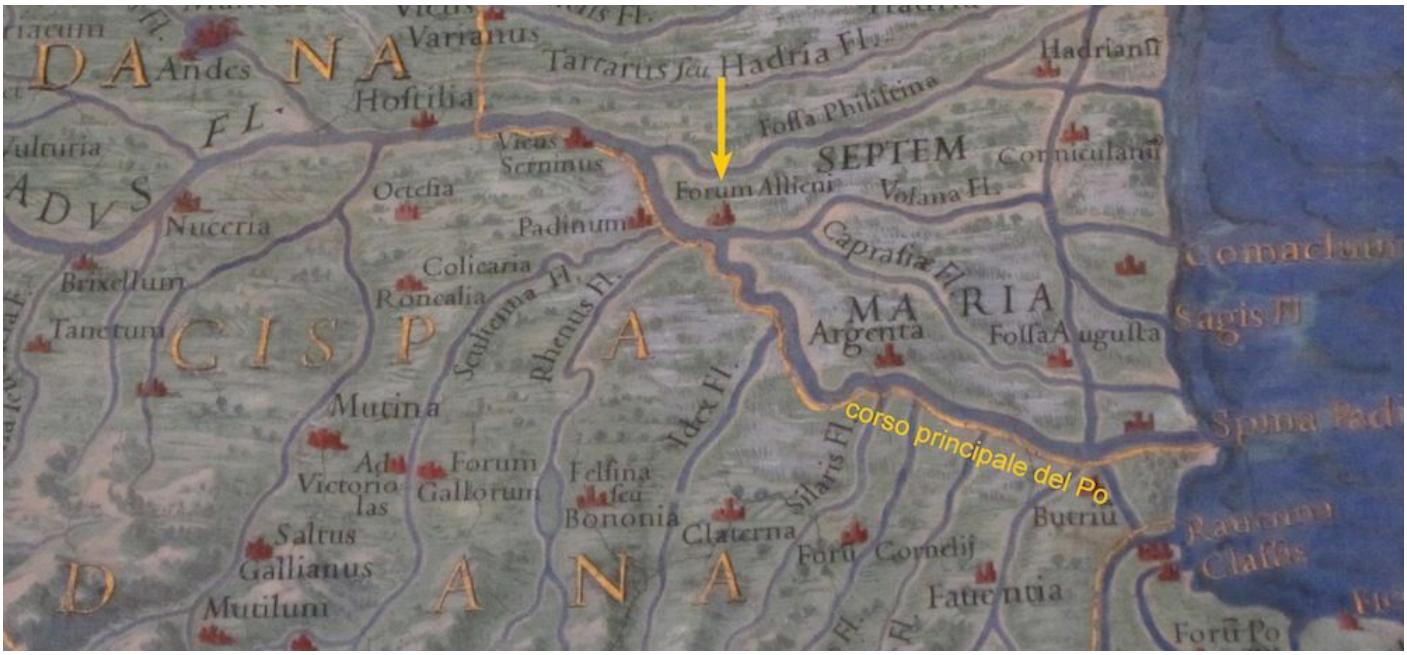
"Unfortunately, regarding the earthquake of the 16th century, only the regional pattern of damage was known. Nothing was known of the location of the deep fracture (fault) that had caused it, nor its rupture mechanism" explains Pettenati. "According to the seismological knowledge in 2012, the fault-source of the 1570 earthquake could well have been a segment of the same fault broken on May 20, 2012 several kilometers deep" adds Sirovich.

"In this way - continues the researcher - on June 7, 2012 the National Service of Civil Protection (Dipartimento di Protezione Civile) issued an appropriate statement in which they said that the activation of a segment [of earthquake fault; ed] between Finale Emilia and Ferrara, with shocks of energy comparable to that of the major events recorded in the sequence, could not be excluded. "

The study of OGS seismologists shows that:

- the earthquake of 1570 was not due to the eastward prolongation of the fault responsible for the event on May 20, 2012; the event of the 16th century was due to a blind fault (buried by the sediments of the Po river) at depth about 14 kilometers north-north-east of Ferrara;

- the fault corresponds to the outermost front of the Apennine Chain, that slowly, over millions of years, is rising causing uplift of the southern part of the Po Valley (on the right orographic flank of the River



A reproduction of part of a painting by Dominican Egnazio Danti, completed around 1581 to immortalize the position of the Po River before an earthquake changed its course. Pope Pius V commissioned this painting in part to undermine the Este family of Ferrara, who had controlled a great deal of river trade before the Po shifted away from the city. Ferrara's position is identified with the yellow arrow. Photo: OGS

(on the right orographic flank of the River Po);

- over the past 2,800 years or so, this uplift (probably materialized through earthquakes) forced the Po to move approximately 20 km north between Guastalla and Ficarolo (along the Emilia, Lombardia and Veneto borders);

- with its 10-15 cm uplift, the earthquake of 1570 was "the straw that broke the camel back" of the Po river. In fact, it abandoned the delta of the time (the "Valli di Comacchio") to bring all its water in the present delta, 40 km northward: an epochal event that in 1580 Pope Gregory XIII wanted to immortalize in the Gallery of geographical maps of the Vatican Museums.

"Today we know that the earthquake of May 20, 2012 transferred so-called 'Coulomb' stress at depth in the west-south -west direction, where it was able to trigger another fault in that area (that was already loaded by geodynamic stress) and this produced the shock of May 29" said Sirovich. Conversely, fortunately, the shock of May 20 did not transmit significant stress towards the fault found today by OGS, that ruptured in 1570 (and presently is in an unknown stress regime)."

The earthquake in Ferrara at the end of the 16th century is so far the oldest destructive seismic event in the world for which it was possible to calculate the geometry and the rupture mechanism with an automatic technique. This was possible thanks to the extraordinary quality of the historical data on the damage of 1570 (http://emidius.mi.ingv.it/DBMI11) and the method developed by OGS.

"The new algorithm - tells Pettenati - treats the regional pattern of damage to buildings in the affected region and recalculates the fault-source at depth, that produced the damage (by a process called "geophysical inversion")."

The Evil Spirit that Terrorized a Medieval village

Today's horror movies could make use of this story from the ninth-century, of how an evil spirit terrorized a village, and the attempt to get rid of it, which seems to be one of the earliest recorded exorcisms from the Middle Ages.

The account from the Annals of Fulda, an East Frankish account that offers a history of events taking place in Carolingian Europe during the ninth-century (the annals end in the year 901). While most of the Annals deal with internal conflict among the Carolingians as well as the Viking raid across Europe, it also offers the story of a strange event that take place in the year 858:

There is a certain villa not far from the town of Bingen, called 'Caput Montium" because the mountains along the valley of the Rhine begin here (though the common people corrupt the name to 'Chamund'). Here an evil spirit gave an open sigh of his wickedness. First, by throwing stones and banging on the walls as if with a hammer, he made a nuisance of himself to the people living there. Then he spoke openly and revealed what had been stolen from certain people, and then caused disputes among the inhabitants of the place .

Finally he stirred up everyone's hatred against one man, as if it were for his sins that everyone had to suffer such things; and so that he might be the more hated, the evil spirit caused every house which the man entered to catch fire. As a result the man was forced to live outside the villa in the fields with his wife and children, as all his kin feared to take him in. But he was not even allowed to remain there in safety, for when he had gathered in and stacked his crops, the evil spirit came unexpectedly and burnt them. To try to appease the feelings of the inhabitants, who wished to kill him, he took the ordeal of hot iron and proved himself innocent of the crimes which were alleged against him.

Priests and deacons were therefore sent from the town of Mainz with relics and crosses to

Photo by Craig Cloutier / Flickr

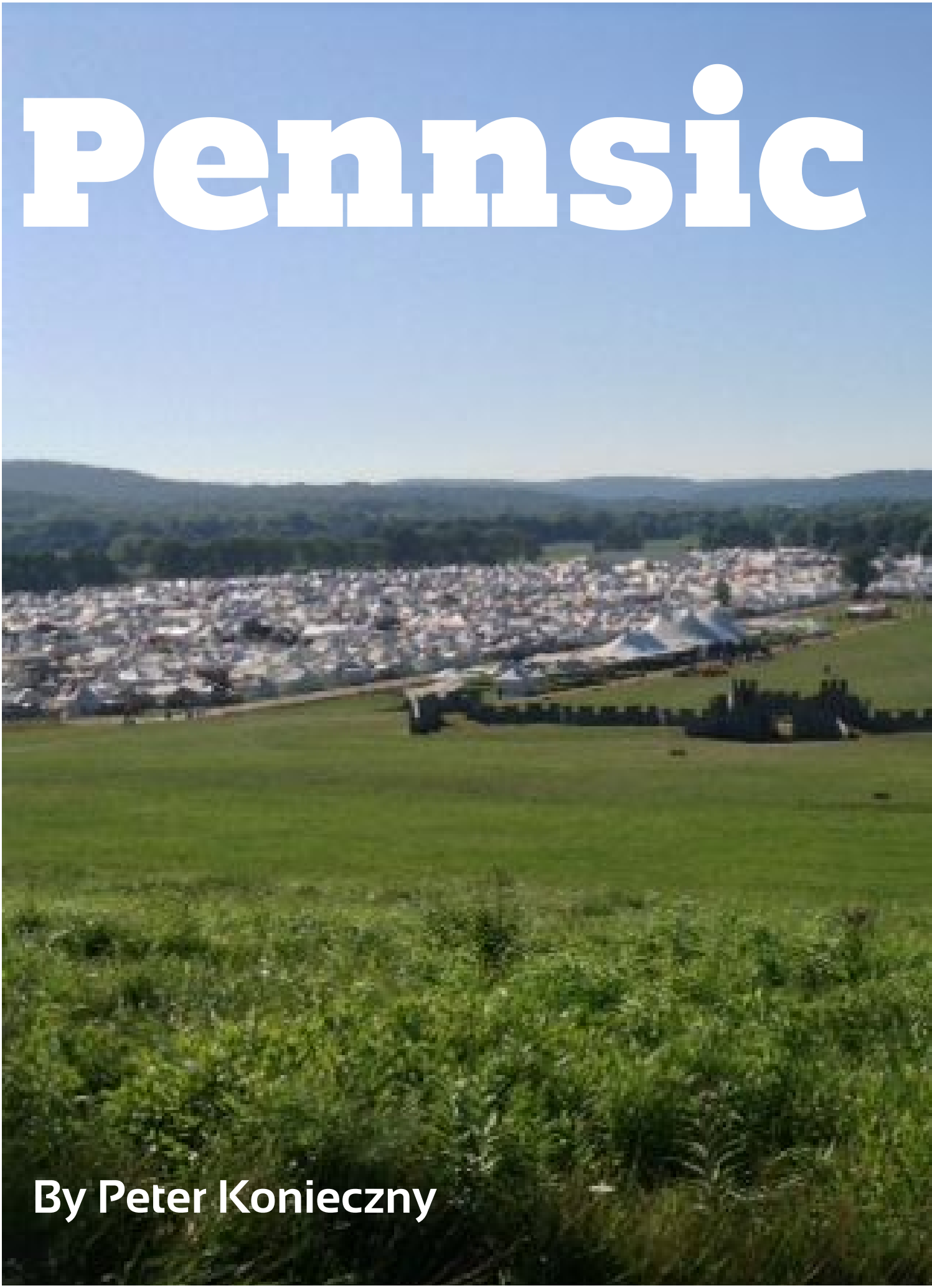
expel the wicked spirit from that place. As they were saying the litany and sprinkling holy water in a house where he had been particularly active, the old enemy threw stones at men coming there from the villa and wounded them.

After the clerics who had been sent there had departed, the same devil made lamentable speeches in the hearing of many. He named a certain priest and said that he had stood underneath his cope at the time when the holy water was being spread around the building. Then, as men crossed themselves in fear, he said of the same priest, "He is my servant. For anyone who is conquered by someone is his servant; and lately at my persuasion he slept with the daughter of the bailiff of this villa." This crime had not before been known to anyone except those who had committed it. It is clear that as the Word of Truth says, "nothing is hidden which will not be revealed" (Matthew 10:26).

With these and similar deeds the apostate spirit was a burden to the above-mentioned place for the course of three whole years, and he did not desist until he had destroyed almost all the buildings with fire.

The Annals of Fulda were translated by Timothy Reuter and published by Manchester University Press in 1991..

Pennsic



By Peter Konieczny

For Two Weeks, a Medieval Kingdom in Pennsylvania

There is a customary greeting when some arrives at the Pennsic War: "Welcome Home". For two weeks each summer a campground in western Pennsylvania hosts the world's largest gathering of medieval enthusiasts - thousands of men and women from around the world who want to experience a little of living in the Middle Ages, complete with huge battles.

For years I had heard of the Pennsic War - an annual two-week event that is the highlight of the year for those involved in the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). I wondered what it might be like to join the thousands of people who will dress in medieval gear and take part in the legendary mock battles.

This August I got my chance to attend, at least for a day, as a member of the media. Driving into the campground that lies north of the city of Pittsburgh, I immediately noticed how large Pennsic is, as a sea of medieval-style tents greeted me. That day there was over 10,000 people on the site, making it more populated than most medieval towns.

With the help of a couple of guides, I was driven (via golf cart) throughout the vast area where Pennsic takes places. For most of the 44 years it has been held at the Cooper's Lake Campground, and this has allowed the event to build up its own sense of geography. Many of those who come here will have particular areas where they camp (based on the SCA kingdom they hail from). The Europeans, who are said to be the most dedicated to medieval authenticity, can be found at Drachenwald, while the Bog is where you will find the people that are more into the fantasy aspects of the SCA. I've also been told that is where you can find the best parties at night. Every place has its own name, and even the streets are well marked - it certainly adds to Pennsic's charm - even though it only last for two weeks, one feels like this place is always here.

One of my guides, Steve Maynard, who in SCA circles goes by the name William Castille, Baron of Riverhorn, refers to Pennsic as a micronation that has taken on the better aspects of past cultures and civilizations. The Australian calls its "a living ongoing experimental archaeology" where people who have a fascination with the Middle Ages can take part in battles, learn about creating historical artefacts, share stories and have fun. Like many of the people I spoke with, he notes the strong sense of community.

Among those attending Pennsic is Steve Muhlberger, the recently retired history professor who is well known for his research on medieval warfare. Here he is called Sir Finnvarr and has been involved with the SCA for decades - he even earned the title of King of the East back at the second Pennsic War. These days he is working on a history of the SCA - next year it celebrates its 50th anniversary - and agrees that the shared interests and ideals of those taking part give this place an added vibrancy. Muhlberger says that when you take part in Pennsic, "you are intensely immersed into it," adding that "this is where you will the someone that you will marry."

The SCA was founded in 1966 and has now grown to over 30,000 paid members. Flieg Holllander, also known as Duke Master Sir Frederick of Holland, was there from the very beginning. "The first event was a one-off," he explains, "but everyone had so much fun that we had to do it again."

Flieg notes that the SCA grew slowly and organically, but throughout the 1970s and 80s many dedicated people were sharing enthusiasm and knowledge. While he notes that some "strange ideas" were passed around, there was also a great deal of progress and learning, creating a more medieval experience. As academic research on the Middle Ages got filtered down to the SCA community, it was passed on through oral transmission or by many of the newsletters that circulated between various SCA groups. The Internet has only further stimulated the sharing of knowledge, allowing people to access more and more research. This has led to the SCA members gaining a lot of expertise in recreating the look and feel of the medieval world. Steve Maynard explains that "the garb you see now is 100 times better than what you saw 10-20 years ago."

A beautiful tent at Pennsic

By mid-morning the male and female warriors are gathering at the main battlefield. This day over 2000 fighters will take part in a "bridge battle", while later on this afternoon the archers and artillery-men will take to field. Nearly everyday of the Pennsic War features some type of battle, including those that take place in a nearby forest and others along the ramparts of a wooden castle (which is a permanent feature in the campground).

The battles have a controlled mayhem feel to them - while the scene of hundreds of people attacking each other with weapons looks scary, in reality the participants are too well protected (both by medieval armour and modern day groin protection) and their weapons rendered much less dangerous for there to be much chance of injury. While the blows can leave one with bruises, heat exhaustion is a much more serious concern than battle wounds.

Instead those who take part in the battles have to follow an honour-system - if they receive a blow that would kill them, they need to depart from the field of battle. Referees are on hand to make sure that people are following the rules. Once the cannon from a nearby hill is fired signalling an end to the fight, the participants head back to their camps to get refreshments and tell stories of what heroics they accomplished.

However, most people who come to Pennsic don't take part in battles, and there is much else for them to do. I was impressed with the dozens of well-attended classes that were taking place in the 'University' area of the site. You can learn everything from 'Matthew Paris: 13th-Century Chronicler' to 'The Art of Making the Medieval Bed'. Nearby, in the crafts area,

Making the Medieval Bed'. Nearby, in the crafts area, I came across a group of people working on recreating a type of toothpaste based on a 12th-century recipe. Steven Muhlberger notes that there is "an unbelievably energetic craft scene in the SCA". which is supported by formal and informal encouragement.

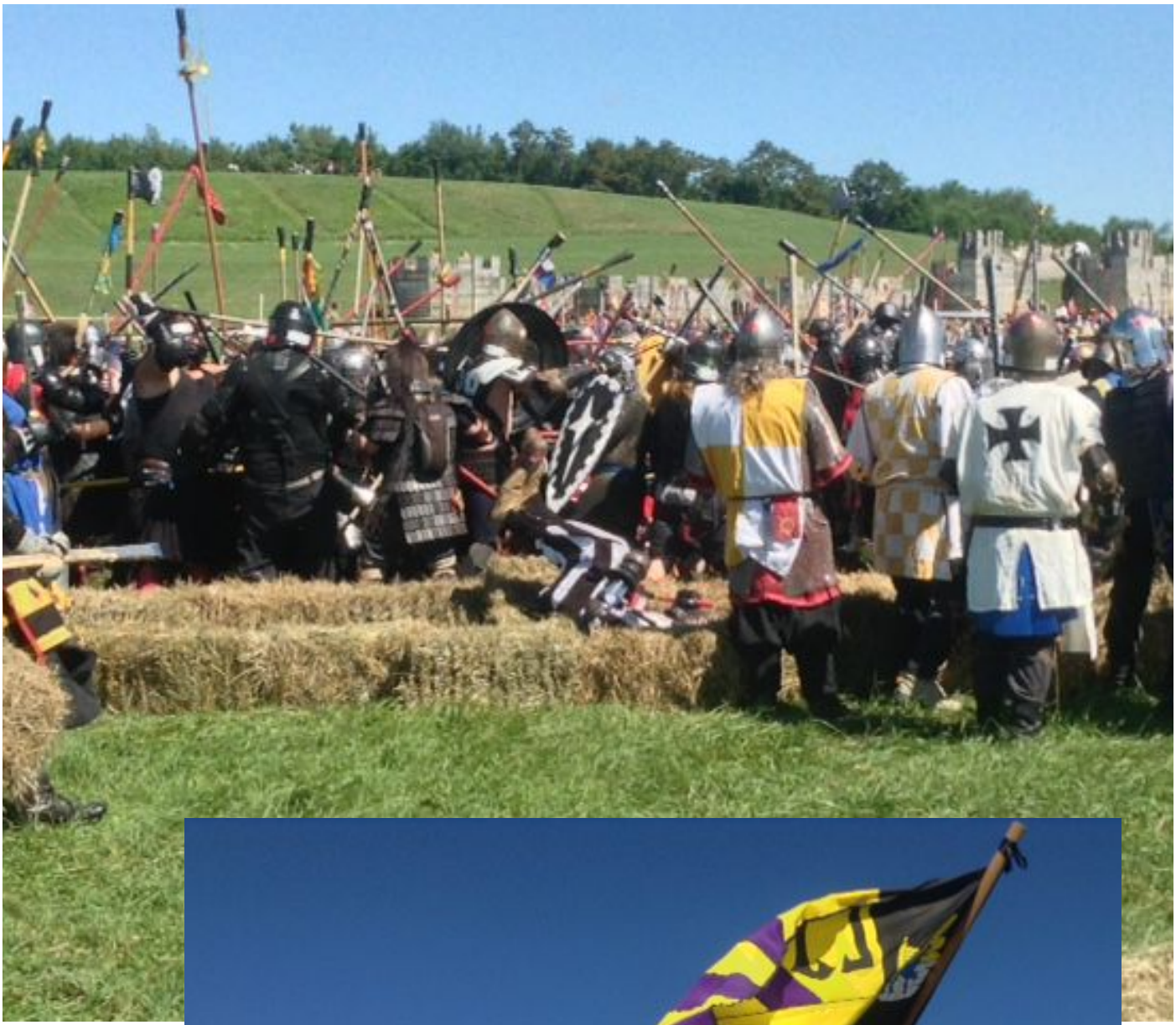
Some of the campsites I got to see were truly impressive - beautiful reconstructions of historical furniture and artefacts. Others were seemingly inspired by creative imagination, but there does not seem to be much grumbling that they are not aiming for medieval authenticity. As Fleig Hollander explains, "the tremendous variation on how period things are - this is the strength and weakness of the SCA."

Those who don't have the time or ability to hand sew their own cloaks and dresses can find them for sale, along with many other items, among the hundreds of merchants who have stalls at Pennsic. Some businesses, such as Steven Boyd's **Calontir Trim**, earn about 20% of their annual sales during this two-week period, while John Van Hassel of **Windrose Armoury** explains that while most of his business takes place online, an event like Pennsic allows him to show off his products to thousands of prospective customers.

So much is happening at Pennsic that to keep track of it all you need to buy their daily newsletter, which is printed and sold throughout the site by kids (other children can find work selling ice to campsites). The *Pennsic Independent* mixes reports on the previous day's battles, with news on the hundreds of daily events taking place and articles on topics such as how to properly store your archery gear.

With my day at Pennsic finishing up, I begin my trip home thinking about how impressed I am with this place. The admininstrators and volunteers who help to run this event have certainly given me a memorable experience. I have met many knowledgeable and enthusiastic people who share my interest in the Midde Ages, and like them I am already planning on returning next year.

Some of the more elaborate campsites created at Pennsic



Some of the sights and scenses from the daily battles that take place at Pennsic.

How to destroy gods

In the year 1168 a Danish bishop destroyed three pagan gods. The story is told in *Gesta Danorum*, by Saxo Grammaticus, which has recently been entirely translated into English for the first time.

Saxo Grammaticus was a Danish cleric and historian who around the year 1188 began writing the first full history of Denmark. Stretched over 16 books, the Gesta Danorum goes back to the time before Jesus Christ to relate the mythological beginnings of the Danes. It has long been popular reading for the tales and legends it gives relating to the pagan past of this region, as well as for covering the rise of important leaders such as Cnut the Great.

As it moves into the twelfth century, the focus of the work concentrates on the rule by various Danish kings, most notably Valdemar I, who was King from 1146 to 1182. While Denmark had long been a Christian country, some of its neighbours in the Baltic Sea region were still pagan, including the Wends, a people who inhabited the island of Rügen, which lies just off the coast of northeastern Germany.

After years of pirate attacks by the Wends, King Valdemar was persuaded by Absalon, the Bishop of Roskilde and the chief royal advisor, to launch a crusade against the people. In the year 1168 the Danes landed on Rügen and besieged the capital city of Arkona. Once Valdemar's forces set fire to the walls and buildings of the city, the residents of Arkona made a deal to surrender.

Once King Valdemar took control of Arkona and received hostages from the leaders of the Wendish people, he ordered the statue of local deity a god named Svantevit. Saxon writes that the men:

found themselves unable to wrest it from its position without the use of axes; they therefore first tore down the curtains which veiled the shrine, and then commanded their servants to deal swiftly with the business of hacking down the statue; however, they were careful to warn their men to exercise caution in dismantling such a huge bulk, lest they should be crushed by its weight and be thought to have suffered punishment from the malevolent deity. Meanwhile a massive throng of townsfolk ringed the temple, hoping that Svantevit would pursue the instigators of these outrages with his strong, supernatural retribution.

After much work, the men cut down the statue:

Bishop Absalon topples the god Svantevit at Arkona – created by Laurits Tuxen (1853–1927)

With a gigantic crash the idol tumbled to earth. The swarths of purple drapery which hung about the sanctuary certainly glittered, but were so rotten with decay that they could not survive touching. The sanctum also contained the prodigious horns of wild animals, astonishing no less in themselves than in their ornamentation. A devil was seen departing from the inmost shrine in the guise of a black animal, until it disappeared abruptly from the gaze of bystanders.

While the god in Arkona was being destroyed, the Danes received word from the people of Karenz – another important town on the island – they were ready to surrender. Absalon traveled to the town along with 30 men, where they were met by 6000 warriors. However, the Wends prostrated themselves to the Christians and welcome the bishop.

Karenz was the home to three pagan deities - Rugevit, Porevit and Porenut – which were believed to be the gods of war, lightning and thunder. Bishop Absalon came to destroy these gods, and Saxo Grammaticus (who may have been an eyewitness) describes the scene of coming across the the first of the three pagan temples:

The largest shrine was surrounded by its own forecourt, but both spaces were enclosed with purple hangings instead of walls, while the roof gable rested only on pillars. Therefore out attendants tore down the curtains adorning the entrance area and eventually laid hands on the inner veils of the sanctuary. Once these had been removed, an idol made of oak, which they called Rugevit, lay open to the gaze from every quarter, wholly grotesque in its ugliness. For swallows, having built their nests beneath the features of its face, had piled the dirt of their droppings all over its chest. A fine deity, indeed, when its image was fouled so

revoltingly by birds! Furthermore, in its head were set seven human faces, all contained under the surface of a single scalp. The sculptor had also provided the same number of real swords in scabbards, which hung on a belt at its side, while an eighth was held brandished in its right hand. The weapon had been inserted into its fists, to which an iron nail had clamped it with so firm a grip that it could not be wrenched away without severing the hand; this was the very pretext needed for lopping it off. In thickness the idol exceeded the width of a human frame, and its height was such that Absalon, standing on the toes of its feet, could hardly reach its chin with the small battleaxe he used to carry.

The men of Karenz had believed this to be the god of war, as though it were endowed with the strength of Mars. Nothing about the effigy was pleasant to look at, for its lineaments were misshapen and repulsive because of the crude carving.

Bishop Absalon soon ordered his men to begin destroying the gods:

Every citizen was possessed by sheer panic when our henchmen began to apply their hatchets to its lower legs. As soon as these had been cut through, the trunk fell, hitting the ground with a loud crash. Once the townsfolk beheld this sight, they scoffed at their god's power and contemptuously forsook the object of their veneration.

Not satisfied with its demolition, Absalon's workforce now stretched their hands all the more eagerly towards the image of Porevit, worshipped in the temple close by. On it were implanted five heads, though it had been fashioned without weapons. After that effigy had been brought down, they assailed the sacred precinct of Porenut. Its statue displayed four faces and a fifth was inserted in its breast, with its left hand touching the forehead, its right the chin. Here again the attendants did good service, chopping at the figure with their axes until it toppled.

After the idols had been broken, the Danish bishop wanted to inflict a more permanent destruction on the pagan gods:

Absalon then issued a proclamation that the citizens must burn these idols the city, but they immediately opposed his command with entreaties, begging him to take pity on their overcrowded city and not expose them to fire after he had spared their throats. If the flames crept to the surrounding area and caught hold of one of the huts, the dense concentration of buildings would undoubtedly cause the whole mass to go up in smoke. For this reason they were bidden to drag the statues out of town, but for a long time the people resisted, continuing to plead religion as their excuse for defying the edict; they feared that the supernatural forces would exact vengeance and cause them to lose the use of those limbs they had employed to carry out the order. In the end Absalon taught them by his admonitions to make light of a god who had not power enough to rise to his own defence, once they had become confident of being immune from punishment, the citizens were quick to obey his directions.

As the remains of the pagan gods were being dragged away, Sven of Arhus, another bishop who came with Absalon, added insult to injury:

So that he might show them the idols deserved disdain, Sven made it his business to stand high on top of them while the men of Karenz were heaving them away. In so doing he added affront by increasing the weight and harassed the pullers as much with humiliation as with the extra burden, when they viewed their deities in residence lying beneath the feet of a foreign bishop.

As this was being done, Bishop Absalon went about preparing the area to be Christian. He first consecrated three burial sites in the countryside just outside Karenz, and after celebrating a mass baptized the people. Saxo then adds, "Likewise by constructing

churches in a large number of localities, they exchanged the dens of an esoteric superstition for the edifices of public religion."

The island of Rugen came to accept Christianity – and Danish rule. Bishop Absalon would become the Archbishop of Lund in 1178, serving until his death in 1201. Saxo Grammaticus would finish his Gesta Danorum in the early thirteenth-century, covering his account of Denmark's history up to year 1185.

Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes, has been edited and translated by Karsten Friis-Jensen and Peter Fisher and was published in two volumes earlier this year by Oxford University Press.

Map of the island of Rugen from 1608

Ten Castles that Made Medieval Britain

Bamburgh Castle

By James Turner

Windswept and interesting, the spectacle of the venerable old man of Northumbria, Bamburgh Castle, cannot help but stoke the imagination. Enthroned upon a rearing dais of sub-volcanic rock, the Castle rises rugged yet regal over the village that bears its name and the wild iron blue sea. Its roots reaching deep into the formless rolling fog of Britain's ancient past, Bamburgh Castle is built about the fossilised heart of a primordial kingdom. Emerging from the whirling, scrambling mêlée of shattered Sub-Roman Britain's dusk and the marauding Saxon dawn, ageless Bamburgh taken with fire and sword was the grain of sand around which a pearl coalesced. The Kingdom of Northumbria, high water mark of Germanic conquest within Britain, was for a time the most powerful kingdom in the Saxon Heptarchy holding sway over all others. The soon Christianised Northumbrian monarchs from their seat, the mighty fortress of Bamburgh, oversaw a great flourishing of monastically driven scholarship and literature, transmuting a backwards kingdom on a half-forgotten and benighted island into one of Christendom's great strongholds of learning and culture. Yet all things come to an end, the dynasties and people of Northumbria changed under waves of settlement and conquest, its definitions became blurred until it was subsumed into the newly awakened England. While Northumbria was largely washed away, clinging onto the peripheries of peoples' identity, the craggy robust grandeur of Bamburgh Castle rose up to mark its passing, carrying and expanding its legacy down the ages.

The site of the current Castle, like many of Britain's most iconic and enduring fortresses, seems to have served as a stronghold almost since time immemorial; archaeological evidence pointing to the presence of an extensive Celtic settlement and fortification by the Votadini tribe. During their extended efforts to tame and reshape Britain, during their centuries of settlement and cultural conversion, the Romans constructed a watch tower on the site, a link in a vast chain of coastal defences. From these murky origins the history of the Castle swims into view when in 547 it was wrested from the grasp of the local Briton Kingdom, which had sprung up to fill the power vacuum caused by the withdrawal of Roman troops, by the evocatively titled Anglo-Saxon warlord Ida Flame-Bringer of Bernicia. Here Ida established the centre of his hard won domain which was to play a pivotal role in the Saxons ongoing and bitter struggle for dominance under the auspices of the royal inhabitants

Bmburgh Castle - Photo by Tim Gorman

inhabitants of Bamburgh. It was this foundation that turned Northumbria into one of Europe's premier centres of learning and a powerhouse of book production. As well as training such luminaries as the historian, the Venerable Bede and Emperor Charlemagne's adviser Alcuin who played a vital role in the Carolingian Renaissance, Northumbria's scholarly and literary revivals were transmitted across Europe.

However, as Northumbria's power inevitably waned, losing their stranglehold over Mercia, the relatively isolated fortress at Bamburgh became superfluous to the expanding interests of the Northumbrian Kings, especially when compared to the rising star of York, now an important episcopal centre. Saxon domination of Northumbria came to an end in 867 with a full scale invasion by the much maligned Vikings under the Lothbrok brothers, Halfdan and the ominously and confusingly nicknamed Ivar the Boneless. In 993, after a long period of grudging co-existence with the neighbouring Viking settlers, Bamburgh was finally captured and sacked by the unabashedly stereotype embracing Vikings

Following the Invasion of the Normans and the eventual dispossession of the Northumbrian Earl Morcar, together with remaining Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Danish noblemen, the newly minted King William experimented with numerous replacements in order to ensure his control of the wild northlands and impose a semblance of order on his followers and allies as they frenziedly and haphazardly sought to carve out their own holdings. The Normans, likely out of a mixture of tactical awareness and habit, constructed a castle at Bambrugh, on the site of the old Saxon fort and palace complex, which was then occupied by Aubery de Coucy, who the Conqueror installed as Earl after the harrowing of the north.

The Conqueror, himself, visited the newly

created Bamburgh during his preparations for a raid into Scotland. Aubery, perhaps tiring of the weather or the animosity of his new subjects, decided to return to Normandy, permanently forfeiting his English lands which were awarded to Robert de Mowbray, another Norman mercenary adventurer. Robert, one of the most powerful lords in the newly fused Anglo-Norman world and from a family that constituted a formidable network of power, had an eventful tenure as Earl rising up against the Conqueror's successor, William Rufus in 1088 only be pardoned before then slaying the invading King Malcolm III of Scotland and his heir at the Battle of Alnwick.

Knowing when to call it quits though is a quality entirely absent from the psychological makeup of a Norman magnate and in 1095 Robert rebelled once again against King William Rufus who promptly retaliated by besieging Bamburgh Castle. Such was the formidable nature of the defences that the King was unable to breach them and the Castle only fell when Robert himself was captured, the King having struck a deal with Robert's wife, the formidable Matilda who had been serving as castellan throughout the siege, saying that if she surrendered he would refrain from gouging out her husband's eyes. The Castle was then taken over directly by the Crown and further fortified to better fulfil its role in the network of border defences.

Centuries later during the turmoil and confusion of the War of the Roses, Bamburgh Castle briefly served as a refuge for the Lancastrian King, Henry VI. Not coincidentally then, does Bamburgh Castle possess the rather dubious honour of being the first English castle reduced by cannon as the proto-Machiavellian Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick - called King Maker by many for his role in championing and stage-managing the Yorkist cause - used his artillery train to batter down the walls in an attempt to capture the King.

In 1610, the Castle was granted by James I to the Forster family who had long acted as the Castle's custodians. However, operating a castle proved to be a cripplingly expensive endeavour and while they managed to retain it for several generations, Bamburgh Castle suffered from a degree of deterioration. The Castle changed hands several times after it was auctioned off following the death and bankruptcy of William Forster in 1701. Perhaps one of the noblest moments in the Castle's long history came in 1751 when it was purchased by Dr John Sharp who sought to create a bizarrely, ahead of its time, socialist utopia using the Castle as a focal point for a number of charitable endeavours. These included the opening of both a free hospital and school for the local residents, stock piling of food and fuel which could then distributed to the needy, as well as the creation a coastguard. The Castle was eventually bought in 1894 by a Victorian industrial magnate, Lord Armstrong. Lord Armstrong and his successors invested a vast amount of money in the full restoration and modernisation of the Castle; an investment which in terms of the culture heritage of Britain continues to pay dividends.

The Castle while not amongst the largest or most complex of its ilk within the British Isles nevertheless boasts its own roguish good looks. Its evocative location and complementary design have even brought it to the attention of the fabled and golden land of Hollywood with the Castle appearing in a number of film and television productions such as Peter Glenville's 'Becket', two adaptations of 'Robin Hood' and perhaps in the lowest point of the Castle's long tattered yet glorious history, it featured in an episode of 'Most Haunted.' The aptly named Great Keep, the oldest part of the Castle standing today, was raised by Henry II in 1164 while the rest of the Castle spreads out around it enclosing entirely the outcrop upon which it is built. Its wide, occasionally layered battlements braced as they are against the sea are perfect for purposefully striding

Main Keep at Bamburgh Castle -photo by Steve Collus / Wikicommons

Bamburgh Casle in 1808, by J.S. Cotman

across before halting suddenly between ramparts to stare dramatically across the horizon, something I once saw in a movie and now find inexplicably therapeutic. Bamburgh Castle is awash with historical artefacts, together with treasures of great beauty and historic import which are proudly displayed throughout the Castle and its numerous exhibition rooms all of which do an admirable job in informing visitors of its long history.

The King's Hall features a beautifully carved roof made from teak provided by the King of Siam and is awash with historical artefacts many of which predate the War of the Three Kingdoms. Tantalisingly for those so blessed, it is worth noting that the Hall is available for weddings.

The real jewel in the Castle's crown is the Archaeology Room featuring a host of artefacts from Bamburgh's Dark Age past, ably conveying both the significance and context of the various relics within. The two most prominent pieces in this collection are the Bamburgh Beast, a golden plaque dating back to the 7th century upon which is intricately carved the design of an unknown animal and the Bamburgh Sword. Originally excavated in 1961, this 7th century sword features what would have been at the time revolutionarily advanced metallurgical techniques. The sword has only recently been the subject of research due to the bizarre circumstances surrounding its retrieval. The archaeologist who originally found the blade left it in his garage, forgetting about it for some forty years!

A still beating heart of ancient kingdoms, standing tall as it always has above the endless crash of waves, Bamburgh Castle is one of those rare and blessed places where you can feel the breath of history on your neck.

Click here to visit the Bamburgh Castle website

Click here to follow the castle on Twitter @Bamburgh_Castle

The King's Hall at Bamburgh Castle - photo by Steve Collis / Wikicommons

What is a Psalter?

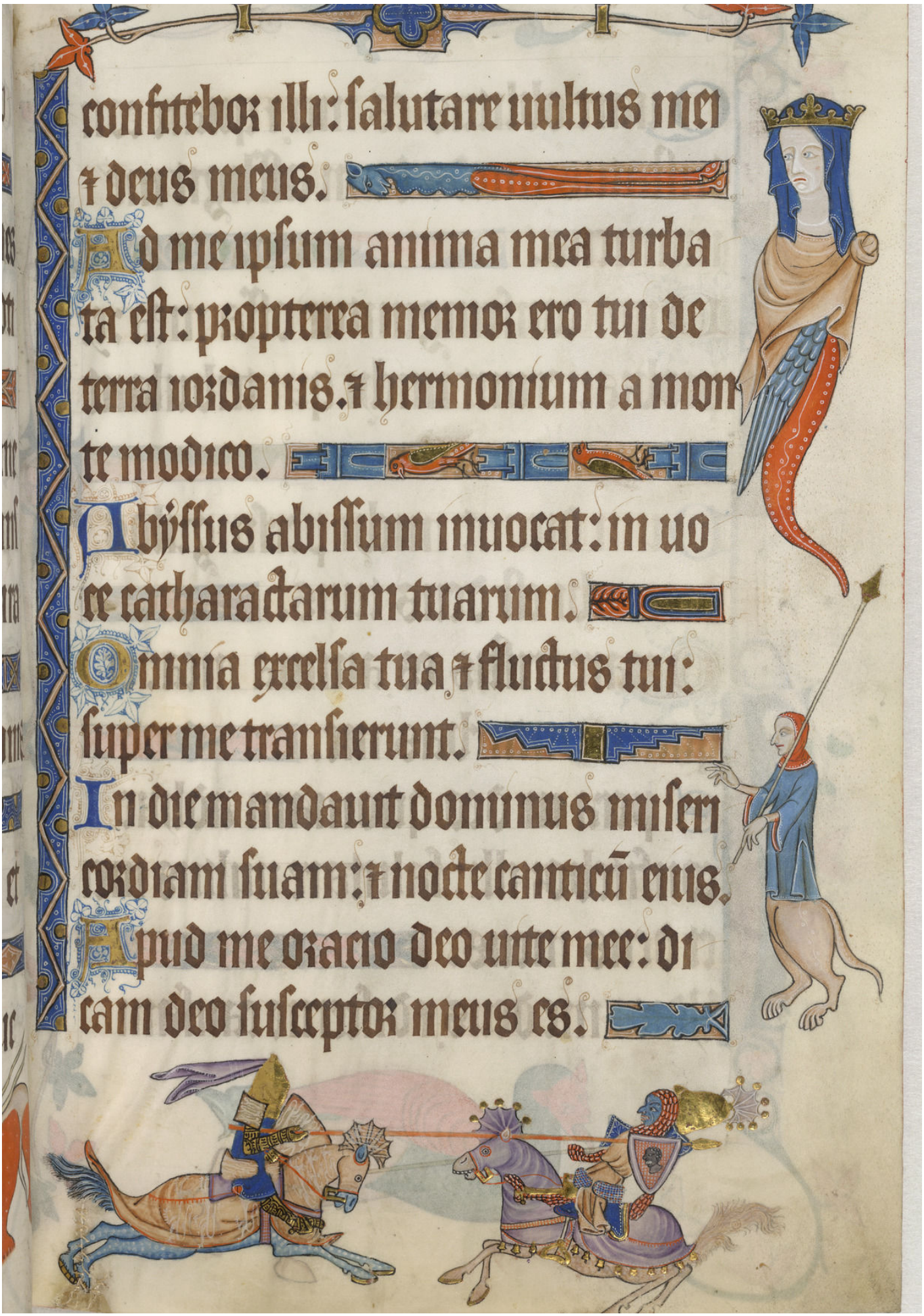
By Danièle Cybulskie

Although much of the European population in the Middle Ages was illiterate, their faith was heavily based on religious texts. As James B. Tschen-Emmons remarks in ***Artifacts from Medieval Europe***, "Christianity is a religion closely associated with books." (p.227) Indeed, it was largely in religious houses that books were copied and kept, and it was the church that taught the populace how to access these books by teaching them to read. One of the most frequently-copied and shared books was the psalter.

Psalters were (as the name suggests) books that contained the Book of Psalms from the Bible. Because they didn't contain the entire Bible, psalters were nice and portable, making good girdle books for the devout – or those concerned with showing off – to carry with them. (Anne Boleyn owned a particularly beautiful and tiny psalter in the sixteenth century.) The psalms contain a little bit of everything in them, and they are short, self-contained passages which were easier to discuss and contemplate than the entire Bible all at once. For this reason, the psalms were excellent teaching tools for beginning readers learning Latin.

As Michael Lapidge notes, children entering the monastery would memorize the psalms as part of their learning of the Divine Office, and move from there to learning Latin as a language (***Latin Psalter Manuscripts in Trinity College Dublin and the Chester Beatty Library***, p.20). Because the psalms were such a vital part of the service, the laity listening would have picked up on the words, as well (whether or not they understood them), and the wealthy who could own their own psalters could read them in anticipation of the day's service, or to reflect upon it later. As Tschen-Emmons points out, "Some psalters retained the same divisions, in five books, that the Bible does, but others were organized into seven sections corresponding with the days of the week" (*Artifacts*, p.228), which made it easy

confitebor illi: salutare vultus mei
& deus meus.
Ad me ipsum anima mea turba
ta est: propterea memor ero tui de
terra iordanis. & hermonium a mon
te modico.
Abyssus abyssum invocat: in vo
ce cataractarum tuarum.
Omnia excelsa tua & fluctus tui:
super me transierunt.
In die mandavit dominus miseri
cordiam suam: & nocte canticum ejus.
Apud me oratio deo vite mee: di
cam deo susceptor meus es.



Luttrell Psalter - British Library Add MS 42130

Sir Geoffrey Luttrell at a table - Luttrell Psalter

which made it easy for the laity to incorporate their devotions into their daily lives.

A notable feature of many psalters is the lavish illustration. Given that psalters were teaching aids for monastic students, as well as young nobles who were receiving an education, pictures were a helpful device for students struggling with the Latin words on the page. They were also a good jumping-off point for contemplation for people who could already read. Pictures could sometimes illuminate the actual words of the psalm, to mark particularly important psalms (*Latin Psalters*,p.32), to glorify the person who commissioned the psalter, or – in the case of the *Luttrell Psalter* – just make the pages interesting (the *Luttrell Psalter* has given us many beautiful and educational pictures of daily medieval life). Sometimes, as Laura Cleaver mentions, those psalters intended for daily use began to include calendars with religious feasts and saints' days marked in red or gold (*Latin Psalters*, p.32), and prayers.

Because psalters contained, at a basic level, the same material, historians can compare them to each other to get a sense of what was important to which owner, where the psalter might have been made, and what the evolving trends of religious devotion were, in terms of iconography and content – even use, if we are lucky enough to find forensic traces of reading (like dirt and fingerprints). As such, psalters, besides being hugely important to the devout people of the Middle Ages, are a treasure trove for historians interested in medieval Christianity and education.

For a solid introduction to psalters, filled with beautiful images, check out Laura Cleaver's and Helen Conrad O'Brien's ***Latin Psalter Manuscripts in Trinity College Dublin and the Chester Beatty Library***. For an always-rewarding look at a psalter in cyberspace, check out the British Library's **Luttrell Psalter.**

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

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why did they stop building Tower House Castles in Ireland?

One of the most visible reminders of Ireland's medieval history are the tower house castles that are scattered throughout the country. For centuries they were the homes and fortresses for the native Irish elites as well as the English and Scottish settlers. However, by the early seventeenth-century it seems that they were now being abandoned and left the fall into ruin. What happened?.

This is the topic of the article "The death of the tower house? An examination of the decline of the Irish castle tradition", by Vicky McAlister, which appears in the new book Space and settlement in medieval Ireland. She focuses her research on the situation in County Down, which is located in Northern Ireland, and begins by noting that, "the decline of the tower house seems to have occurred over a relatively short timescale, petering out in the mid-seventeenth century, but the lower numbers constructed in the 1620s and 1630s compared to the previous decades implies that their abandonment was not prompted by a sudden event, such as the importation of new military technology or strategy."

While some historians believe that these castles, which rise several storeys and offer a strong military deterrent, had become obsolete because of the use gunpowder artillery. However, while gunpowder weapons were being used in Ireland by the

Mahee Castle, Ringneill Road, Mahee Island, County Down, Northern Ireland, Photo by Ardfern / Wikicommons

late 15th-century, this did not put a dent in the construction of new tower houses, nor is there evidence that these castles were being overrun by sieges. McAlister notes that these fortifications would have remained a challenging obstacle even during the 17th century.

Instead, McAlister finds that economic reasons, especially those related to maritime trade, were important factors for the use of tower houses. She explains that "almost all of the Co. Down tower houses are situated by water. However, they are not alone in this as even a cursory glance at a distribution map of tower houses across Ireland shows the sheer numbers that are located on the coast and on major waterways."

These tower houses would have served as places to store trade goods, such as oats, barley, beef, live cattle and horses, as well as protecting the money that was coming back to the owners. This situation would change in the early seventeenth-century, with port towns such as Belfast and Carrickfergus becoming the focus of trade.

McAlister writes:

> *The need for smaller-scale ports and creeks interspersed at strategic locations along the coast was consequently removed. There is a correlation between the Co. Down tower houses and anchorages and maritime 'roads'. A shift away from these maritime routes reduced the need for tower houses. In addition to this situation, the opportunity for local lords to capitalize on their resources by exporting the produce from their lands from their own ports and creeks was eradicated by the overwhelming growth of Belfast and Newry. With the prospect for competition finally removed, the emphasis shifted to estate production, thus reducing the need for investment outside of expanding agricultural land, with the tower house a direct casualty of this.*

By the early 17th century one could see that tower houses were being used less and that

other types of manor estates were being built. While some continued to be inhabited for decades and centuries afterwards, many were allowed to fall into ruin. It has only been in the 20th century that efforts started to conserve and rehabilitate these medieval landmarks.

The article "The death of the tower house? An examination of the decline of the Irish castle tradition" appears in Space and settlement in medieval Ireland. which is edited by McAlister and Terry Barry and just published by Four Courts Press. This book contains eleven papers that were originally given at the Space and Settlement conferences held annually in Trinity College Dublin. They include:

- The Normans and the Irish Sea world in the era of the Battle of Clontarf, by Patrick Wadden

- Studying early medieval Irish urbanization: problems and possibilities, by Rebecca Wall Forrestal

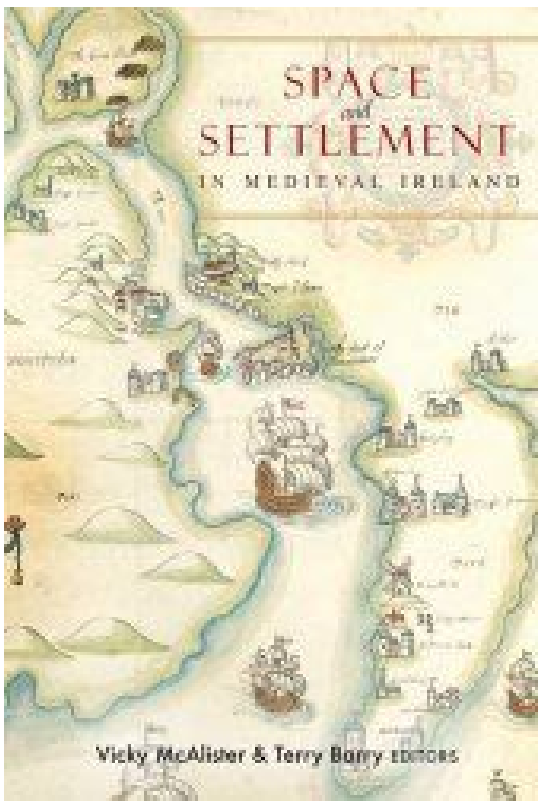
- Deer parks: lost medieval monuments of the Irish countryside, by Fiona Beglane

- The economic hinterland of Drogheda in the later Middle Ages, by James A. Galloway

Click here to visit the publisher's website for more details.

Vicky McAlister is an Assistant Professor of History at Southeast Missouri State University. You can read more about her research on tower houses on her **Academia.edu page**.

Jordan's Castle, at the junction of Quay Street and Kildare Street, Ardglass, County Down, Northern Ireland Photo by Ardfern / Wikicommons



Book Review

The Arrow of Sherwood

By Lauren Johnson

Pen and Sword Fiction, 2013
ISBN: 978-1783030019

Reviewed by Sandra Alvarez

I've always loved the legend of Robin Hood. Countless books, TV shows and films have been dedicated to the most beloved of England's heroes, so I was more than happy to read this novel. The legend of the swashbuckling hero has been rewritten by Lauren Johnson from a refreshingly different angle.

By happy coincidence, I met Johnson at the University of Leeds when she was giving a paper about live historical interpretation. Johnson is the Research Manager for Past Pleasures, a company that does live historical interpretation at Hampton Court, The Tower of London and Dover Castle. Her passion for breathing life into history, her attention to detail, and commitment to historical accuracy is evident throughout Arrow of Sherwood.

The legend of Robin Hood has been disputed by scholars for many years. There are ballads dating to the 15th century recalling his exploits; there are court records of a "Robert de Lockesly" and a "Robert Loxley". There are theories that Robin could have been the Earl of Huntingdon, Robin Hood of Wakefield, Robin Hood of York, and even the suggestion that "Robin Hood" was an alias commonly used by outlaws during the period. The name "Robin Hood" (in various iterations) appeared as early as 1228 in court rolls. He was loosely tied to several medieval periods and then the Victorians had their way with Robin and his mythology was firmly entrenched as the Crusader, outlaw-hero of the poor and downtrodden during the reign of Richard the Lionheart. Folklore, myth, legend, sprinkled

Lauren Johnson

the Arrow of Sherwood

poor and downtrodden during the reign of Richard the Lionheart. Folklore, myth, legend, sprinkled generously with a bit of history and heroics make for a fantastic story. Johnson banked on this and managed to tell the tale behind the myth with a serious dose of historical accuracy. Johnson even went to the trouble of explaining her research, and what liberties she took in the creation of this novel.

The Plot

It's 1193, and Robin of Locksley has returned home from the Third Crusade. Robin finds much has changed in Nottingham during his 4 year absence. His father and sister have died, his mother has remarried the sheriff who has taken up residence in Robin's home, and to add insult to injury, his former fiancèe, Marian, is now betrothed to the the son of the new Norman lord, Eudo Vipont.

To make matters worse, Robin was presumed dead due to a false rumour while on Crusade so he lost his lands to the new rulers, the Viponts. The Viponts are close friends of John the Count of Mortain, later to become the notorious King John of Magna Carta fame, and will do anything to curry favour with King Richard's younger brother while Richard is locked away in a German prison. In Robin has to suffer the indignity of being "allowed" to live on his former estate under the sheriff's charity. Not the quite the welcome home a Crusader expects. Robin decides to go through the proper channels to regain his estate, so he marry the beautiful lady Elaine Peverill (Marian's cousin) and leave his sordid past behind. Unfortunately, this is not an easy task as the new lords are loathe to relinquish their interest in his land, or their hold on his nephew, Jocelyn. Undeterred, Robin sets out to make his father proud by attempting to become the lord he always wanted him to be, by staying within the confines of the law, and avoiding his former lowborn friends.

Robin finds, however, that he can't abandon his friends or his tenants to the rapacious, predatory, and cruel Viponts. The Norman lords have imposed extortionate and unfair taxes, starved the tenants, and arrested people in Nottinghamshire on trumped up charges, so they can pocket their livelihoods and fill their already overflowing coffers. Robin realises he doesn't want to be a lord, but knows the best way to help his family and friends is by playing the system and keeping up appearances so he can get ahead.

The Twist

What makes this book brilliant is that Robin chooses to fight back as a lord. he doesn't run off into the forest with a band of Merry Men and hijack passing wagons laden with coin at every chance he gets, (although there is some of that later on) initially, Robin tries to work with the system. He plays the system and exploits his position and his power to try and undermine the crooked Viponts. Doesn't sound exciting? Well, it is. This is where Johnson shines. She gets to showcase her attention to detail and vast knowledge of medieval history. She has every minute detail down - from daily peasant life, to religious rites and holidays, to the changing of the seasons on a manorial demesne, to the complexities of medieval English law and the political conflicts raging between John, the Normans, and the common people. Everything is in the details and this book is comprehensive and well researched. Johnson brought the real twelfth century to life in the story of a legend and managed to create fascinating characters, humour and an exciting plot. The best parts of the book are the moments when Robin is able to work the system to his advantage and make fools out of his oppressors using his smarts, not brawn. Sherwood forest and his "Merry men" do emerge but not in the typical form we're used to seeing from Hollywood or other, less thoughtfully researched books. This was far from a "Disneyfied" version of the Middle Ages.

Characters

Robin of Lockley is a complex character and you don't fall in love with him right away. He has a troubled past, he's not the nicest hero at the beginning of the book, and his reasons for going on Crusade were far from altruistic. Robin's a flawed character, chivalry is definitely not his forté, but it makes him a realistic one. The same can be said for the other prominent characters of the book: Marian, Will Scarlette, and John Blunt (who would be "Little John"). Even the Viponts aren't typical two-dimensional "bad guys", Guy Vipont, who is betrothed to Marian, shows a kinder side than the rest of his family and opposes them where he can. Marian and Robin's relationship isn't a starry-eyed romance, far from it, in fact, it was interesting that Robin actually was given an alternate love interest in Elaine Peverill. The characters are well rounded, interesting and authentic. Their struggles and reactions are believable and perfectly blended with the history behind the legend.

I have read many takes on Robin Hood over the years but this book has been, by far, my favourite. It pleasantly surprised me and I could not put it down, I was completely engrossed in it. It's a unique blend of legend, history, genuine characters, and page-turning storytelling. If you are a fan of this English outlaw and you'd like to read a realistic take on this magical myth, Arrow of Sherwood definitely won't disappoint..

Follow Lauren Johnson on Twitter: @History_Lauren

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