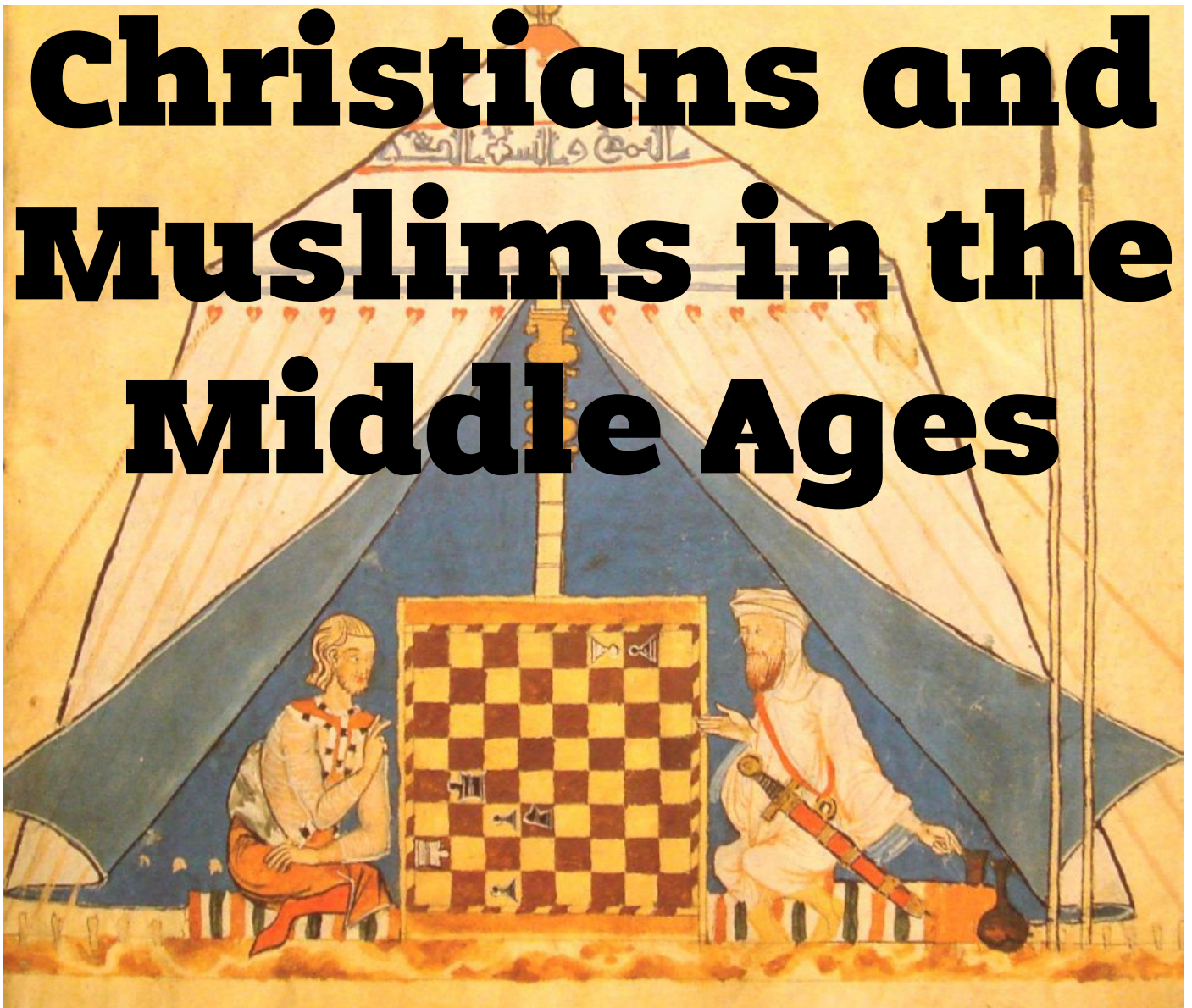


The Medieval Magazine

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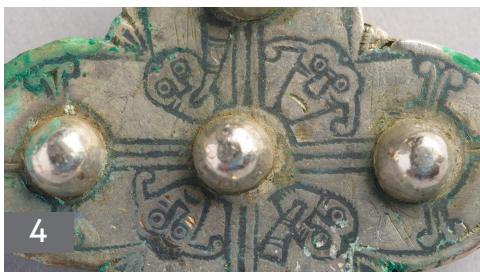
Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages



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Viking Treasures seen for the first time in a thousand years

Images from a discovery in Scotland are released, showing the beautiful items found in a Viking hoard



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Muslim - Christian violence threatens to leave Egypt's capital in ashes.



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The Imperial Knights of Medieval California

Danielle Trynoski tells us why are knights are fighting just outside a school in California.

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THE MEDIEVAL MAGAZINE

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Cover Photo: Christian and Muslim playing chess in al-Andalus, from The Book of Games of Alfonso X, el Sabio, c. 1285.



Medieval News

Viking Treasures seen for the first time in a thousand years

More than ten centuries after being buried in a field in Galloway, conservators are releasing images that reveal the contents of a pot of Viking treasure for the first time.



**How it looked when the pot was opened after it was found in Galloway, Scotland
in 2014 - photo courtesy Historic Scotland**



Likely a Viking brooch - photo courtesy Historic Scotland

Although the objects are not currently on display, a series of images will give the public a chance to see the Viking treasure for the first time, following a painstaking conservation project to remove and conserve the rare items, which date from 9th-10th centuries AD.

The project is being funded by Historic Environment Scotland, working in partnership with the Treasure Trove Unit, and the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer (QLTR).

The cache of objects were, until recently, contained in a 'Carolingian' (West European) vessel, or pot, which was part of a wider hoard, amounting to around a hundred items, which includes a large number of silver ingots and armrings, a beautifully-preserved cross, and an ornate gold pin in the likeness of a bird.

Richard Welander, of Historic Environment Scotland, said: "Before removing the objects

we took the rather unusual measure of having the pot CT scanned, in order that we could get a rough idea of what was in there and best plan the delicate extraction process. That exercise offered us a tantalising glimpse but didn't prepare me for what was to come. These stunning objects provide us with an unparalleled insight to what was going on in the minds of the Vikings in Galloway all those years ago. They tell us about the sensibilities of the time, reveal displays of regal rivalries, and some of the objects even betray an underlying sense of humour, which the Vikings aren't always renowned for!"

Stuart Campbell of the Treasure Trove Unit, said: "The complexity of the material in the hoard raises more questions than it answers, and like all the best archaeology, this find doesn't give any easy answers. Questions about the motivations and cultural identity of the individuals who buried it will occupy scholars and researchers for years to come."

The hoard is the most important Viking discovery in Scotland for over 100 years. The items from within the vessel, which may have been accumulated over a number of generations, reveal objects from across Europe and from other cultures with non-Viking origins. The hoard includes six silver Anglo-Saxon disc brooches of early 9th century date, equal in itself to the largest such hoard of brooches from England, the Pentney hoard in the British Museum.

Other material includes a silver penannular brooch from Ireland, Byzantium silk from around modern-day Istanbul, a gold ingot and some gold and crystal objects that have been carefully wrapped in cloth bundles. At the moment, their purpose remains a mystery. While it's clear many of the objects collected have a value as precious metal, the nature of the hoard remains a mystery, and includes objects in base metals and glass beads which

have no obvious value. The decision about which material to include in the vessel appears to have been based on complex and highly personal notions of how an individual valued an object as much as the bullion value the objects represented.

The vessel contents are now with the Treasure Trove Unit, who are responsible for assessing the value of the hoard on behalf of the Office of Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer. The hoard will then be offered for allocation to Scottish museums, with the finder eligible for the market value of the find – a cost that will be met by the successful museum.

The objects were found by metal detectorist Derek McClennan in a field in Galloway in September 2014.

**See more photos on the Historic Scotland Instagram page:
www.instagram.com/historicscotland/**



Santa Maria Antiqua reopens after 36-year restoration



The public can once again enter the early medieval church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, after a 2.7 million euro restoration project was completed. The church, which was built in the sixth-century, is home to a beautiful collection of early Christian art.

"This church is the Sistine Chapel of the early Middle Ages," art historian Maria Andaloro told Reuters. "It collected the very best of figurative culture of the Christian world between Rome and Byzantium."

Santa Maria Antiqua is located at the bottom of the Palatine Hill and in the year 847 AD was buried during an earthquake. Instead of digging it out, the Pope simply built a new church nearby. Therefore the site remained buried and forgotten for more than a thousand years until it was discovered in an archaeological dig in 1900.

Frescoes from the seventh and eighth centuries have survived and were restored in the project, which started in 1980 and was funded by the Italian government and the World Monuments Fund.

Lost Medieval Castle Discovered in Scotland

Recent archaeological fieldwork in the Scottish city of Glasgow by GUARD Archaeology has revealed the medieval remains of Partick Castle.

Prior to the work commencing, GUARD Archaeologists little suspected they might encounter such significant archaeological remains. Although historical evidence strongly suggests there was a royal estate at Partick when nearby Govan on the opposite south of the Clyde was a medieval ecclesiastical centre, and which later became a seat of the Bishop of Glasgow, previous evaluations and testing by other archaeological companies had drawn a blank. These apparently showed that the overall site had been heavily disturbed by industrial works during the nineteenth century. Therefore the assumption was that there was only a very slim chance of any remains of the medieval castle of Partick surviving here. However, it was not known whether one area of slightly higher ground in the west of the site was a result of underlying archaeological remains or whether it was artificially raised during the clearing of later industrial buildings; this spot became the focus of our attention.

During a watching brief within this part of the development area, GUARD Archaeologists discovered a series of archaeological features including ditches, a well and several stone walls. Further excavation has recovered significant

amounts of pottery, as well as metalwork, leather, glass and animal bones, that suggests a date range of twelfth/thirteenth century to the seventeenth century.

"This fits well with the historical references to the original Bishop's residence being erected no earlier than the twelfth century and demolished in the early seventeenth century prior to a new tower house being constructed on the site," said GUARD Archaeologist Beth Spence, who is leading the excavation. "So the archaeology we are encountering is probably the remains of both of these residences and what we will need to do once we have completed our excavation is disentangle the remains of the later tower house from the earlier castle."

"These findings are of national significance and provide a rare glimpse into the medieval beginnings of Partick and Glasgow," added GUARD Project Manager, Warren Bailie. "The survival of these medieval remains is especially remarkable given that the site, not unlike many industrial river banks across Britain, has witnessed such large-scale destructive development over the centuries. However, this recent wave of development, part of Scottish Water's programme of work to upgrade Glasgow's waste water



Excavation of Partick Castle walls and ditch. Photo: © GUARD Archaeology Ltd

infrastructure, has seen Scottish Water work closely with GUARD Archaeology and West of Scotland Archaeology Service to ensure that this important site is afforded the ethical approach it deserves.'

Any areas where these significant medieval remains cannot be preserved in situ will be fully excavated and any subsequent research and specialist analyses on the assemblages will be published in due course.

The lands of Partick were given to Glasgow Cathedral in 1136 by King David. It was believed to have subsequently become the country seat of the Bishops of Glasgow, with a fortified stone structure of some kind likely erected on the site; building documents relating to the construction by George Hutcheson of a tower house in 1611 specify the demolition of a pre-existing structure.

Conversely this later tower house became known locally as the 'Bishop's Palace'. The ruin of this seventeenth century building stood on the west bank of the River Kelvin, near the position of the railway bridge until it was removed around 1837. The site was subsequently used as industrial ground.

Two Medieval Manuscripts arrive at the University of British Columbia

The acquisition of two outstanding medieval manuscripts – including a rare 13th-century Bible – has bolstered the University of British Columbia (UBC) Library's rare book holdings and provided valuable, real-life texts for teaching and learning.



Book of Hours now at the University of British Columbia - Photo Credit: Don Erhardt / UBC Public Affairs

"These were very strategic acquisitions," said Siân Echard, head of UBC's department of English. "They bring the Library's medieval collection to an entirely new level."

UBC Library purchased the titles by auction in December. They include a "student Bible" and a private devotional book called a Book of Hours. Both purchases were entirely

donor-funded; the Bible cost about \$172,000, while the Book of Hours cost about \$39,000.

"We're grateful for the generosity of our supporters," said Ingrid Parent, UBC's university librarian. "Their efforts have

enabled UBC Library to enhance its medieval collections for research, learning and enjoyment.”

Student Bibles were typically produced in Paris for the university market so pupils and professors could use them for their daily studies. However, UBC Library’s Bible was made in Oxford, England around 1250, making it the only one of its kind in a Canadian collection.

The thick, gorgeous manuscript features intricate text in Latin, which is punctuated by blue and red initials. Notes from past users are scribbled in the margins, while a handwritten “concordance” – or reference section – is featured at the back.

The “Book of Hours” dates to the 15th

century, and is written mostly in Latin, with some French. While these texts are more common, this addition to UBC Library’s collection stands out for its stunning, hand-painted illuminations.

Echard has already used both texts to teach her class on the history of the book. “Students react to the age of the manuscripts,” she said. “All of the senses get engaged in a way that just doesn’t happen with a facsimile.”

Both manuscripts can be viewed at the Library’s Rare Books and Special Collections division, located at the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre. Digitized versions of the **student Bible** and **Book of Hours** can be viewed via the Library’s open collections portal.



The slender text with the cross on the cover is the Book of Hours, while the thicker manuscript is the student Bible. Photo Credit: Don Erhardt / UBC Public Affairs

UK buyer sought for Robert the Bruce Seal



The "bokete" Seal of the Regality of Dumfriesline; Ad. 1322. - Vide Dalrymple's Monastic Antiquities page 72: - Macfarlane's History of Dumfriesline page 63 Chalmers's History of Dumfriesline vol. 1, page 253. (S. Henderson. 2 Feb. 1867.)

A seal commissioned by Robert the Bruce is at risk of being exported from the UK unless a buyer can be found to match the asking price of £151,250.

British Culture Minister Ed Vaizey has placed a temporary export bar on a two-part bronze seal commissioned by Robert I, King of Scotland.

Authorised in 1322 by Robert the Bruce, it was used to seal customs documents by Dunfermline Abbey as proof of their authority and endorsement by the King.

The upper part of the seal is engraved with St Margaret, Dunfermline Abbey's founding saint, and the lower part bears the royal arms of Scotland. The inscription on the side translates as 'Robert, by the Grace of God, King of the Scots'. The seal is extremely rare, and is of outstanding significance for the study of medieval Scotland, and medieval goldsmiths' work.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said in a statement, "This amazing artefact represents one of the few objects directly associated with Robert the Bruce's reign. Its departure would not only result in the loss of this irreplaceable item, but it would also strip us of the opportunity to learn more about this exceptional figure."

The minister took the decision to defer granting an export licence for the seal matrix pair following a recommendation by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA), administered by The Arts Council. The RCEWA made their recommendation on

the grounds that it was of great value for the study of medieval goldsmith work and sigillography and the re-establishment of Scottish institutions under Robert the Bruce.

RCEWA Member Leslie Webster commented, "This remarkable and handsome seal-die is of national importance on several counts; it is closely linked to the charismatic figure of Robert the Bruce, and to the history and institutions of Scotland at a crucial time in its evolution as a nation; its association with the royal abbey of Dunfermline sheds light on how the king acted out his authority, delegating the powers of the crown; and its outstanding quality may suggest the influence of French craftsmen."

The decision on the export licence application for the seal matrix pair will be deferred for a period ending on 21 June inclusive. This period may be extended until 21 September inclusive if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase the seal matrix pair is made at the recommended price of £151,250.

Please contact the RCEWA Secretariat on 0845 300 6200 for further information

**Seal of Robert the Bruce - image courtesy the
UK Department for Culture, Media & Sport**

Traces: People and the Book

Les Enluminures Exhibition in New York City

Opening reception:
April 6, 2016 6pm to 8pm

Exhibition:
April 7 to April 23, 2016
(closed Sundays and Mondays) 10 am to 6 pm

23 East 73rd Street, 7th Floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021
+ 212 717 7273

newyork@lesenluminures.com

Les Enluminures is one of the world's leading retailers in medieval manuscripts. Next month they will be launching a new exhibition and catalogue entitled ***Traces: People and the Book***.

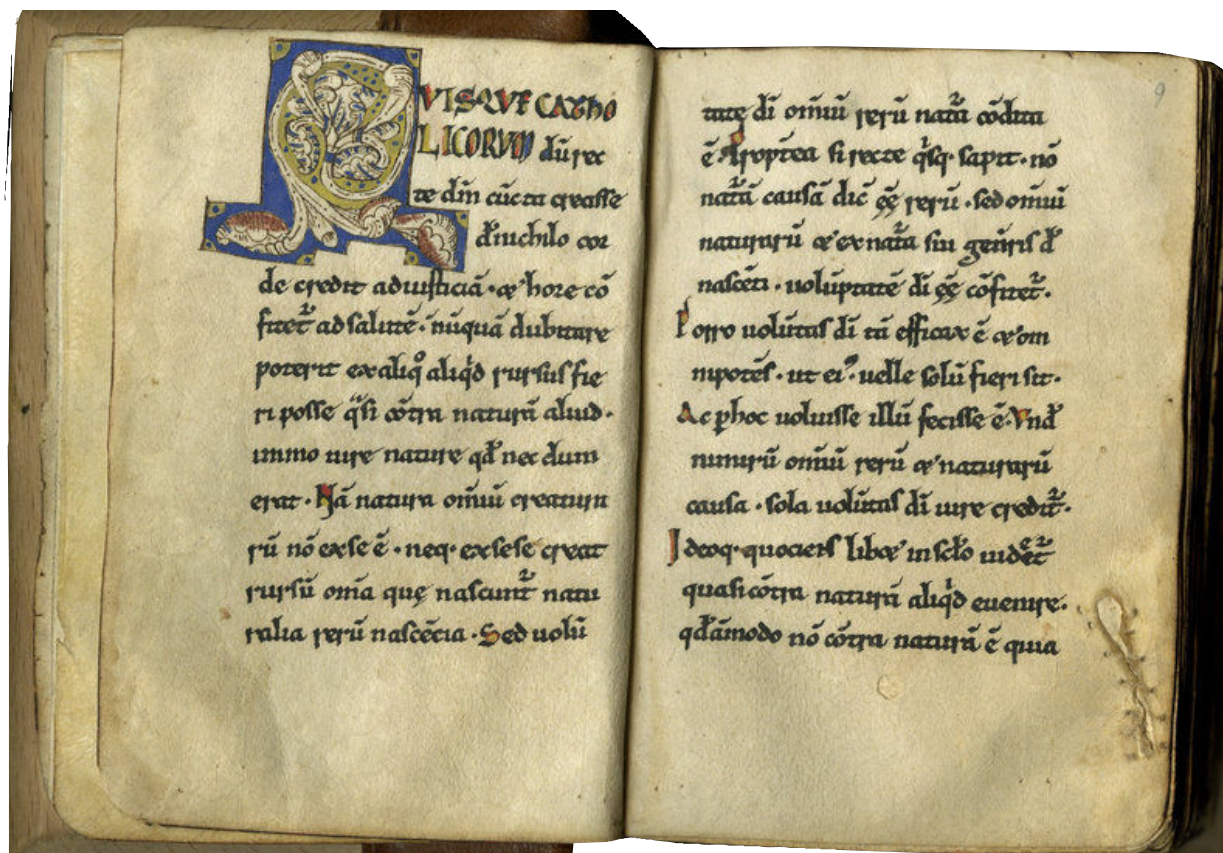
In a press release, they explain this exhibition "is about the manuscript and the people who came into contact with it. We examine what physical evidence can reveal about who made manuscripts and how they made them, who used them and in what ways, and how over time up to the present day many different people left their marks, their footprints, on manuscripts.

"With the help of this catalogue, we will be able to conjure up the mostly nameless people who touched the manuscripts, turned their pages, scribbled on them. We will talk about animal skins and their hair follicles, mesh molds that left their marks on the paper they produced, scraped and reused skins known as palimpsests, catchwords, pointing hands, marginalia, things added (initials, signatures, random notes, other texts), and taken away (offending images or rubbed out body parts, etc.). We will talk about dirt."

Learn more at **www.textmanuscripts.com**



Erasure of St. Dominic, Psalter, Southern Germany (diocese of Constance or Augsburg), c. 1240-60



12th century manuscript of *De corpore et sanguine domini* by Pascasius Radbertus

King Richard III Reburial Anniversary

This week marks the one year anniversary of the reburial of King Richard III, whose remains were discovered in Leicester in 2012. Those remains were carried in procession to the city's cathedral on 22 March 2015, and reburied on 26 March 2015. The University of Leicester also carried out extensive research on the king's body, providing history with new details about his life and death. This video was created by the university's Marketing and Student Recruitment Department.



Cairo in 1321: How a City Burned in Religious Violence

By Peter Konieczny

A quick look at today's news headlines will reveal many stories of terrorism and religious violence from around the world. The same was often true in the Middle Ages, especially in places where people of two or more faiths mingled together. Medieval Egypt was one such place, where Muslims, Christians and Jews found themselves living in the same cities and villages, interacting with each other, and as we will see, fighting and killing each other.

By the mid-13th century Egypt was largely an Islamic country, with most of its population having converted to Islam over the previous centuries. However, the Christian Coptic community remained a large group, perhaps as much as twenty percent of the population, while the Jewish inhabitants would have been much smaller minority.

Relations between Muslims and Christians was evolving, with good and bad periods, but from the years 1250 to 1354, the country would see eight episodes of large-scale violence, with the Muslim majority attacking the Christian minority. For some Muslims, particularly the lower classes, there was anger over the Crusades, which at times was directed against Egypt itself, and perceived support of the crusaders by the Coptic Christians. Perhaps more troubling was that Christians were getting high ranking jobs within the Mamluk government or were becoming wealthy at the expense of the Muslim poor. One can see parallels to how the Christian majority treated its Jewish minority in parts of Europe.

Outbreaks of violence could start out from strange incidents - the riots that took place in 1293 started when a wealthy Christian decided to lead a Muslim debtor through the streets with a rope around his neck. In another incident from 1314, a group of Copts had borrowed some candles from mosque for their church, and when another group of zealous Muslims heard about this they attacked the church to rescue the candles. The violence was directed at the Mamluk authorities as often as it was against



Cairo in the late 1800s - photo by Antonio Beato

the Christian community, and would end with the Sultan issuing an edict with new laws against the minority. The new laws were often ignored and then rescinded a few months later.

However, an undercurrent of anger would continue, which would explode in 1321. Again, the cause of it seemed unusual - the Sultan had ordered a particular area of Cairo to be excavated so that soil could be used for a huge animal enclosure he was building. A Christian church was in this zone, and the Mamluk leaders had made a secret deal to have the building be torn down at night. However, groups of Muslims, upset that their buildings were being torn down, while the church remained, attacked it with axes and spades, destroying the building, looting its furnishings, capturing and murdering monks and nuns.

The violence did not stop there, but spread to other parts of Cairo. Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi (1364–1442), one of the most prolific historians of the Middle Ages, wrote how other churches were being attacked by Muslim mobs. For example, he reports:

In the Mosque of Al-Azhar it happened that when the people were assembled that day for the Friday prayers, one of the fakirs (a Muslim ascetic) fell into a sort of trembling,

and when the hour of prayer was announced, before the preacher appeared, he stepped forward and said: "Destroy the churches of the enemies and unbelievers! God is great! God grant victory and help!" Then he began again to tremble, and cried out: "Down to the ground! Down to the ground!" The people looked at him and did not know what he meant; they were of various opinions regarding him, some saying, "He is mad;" and others, "This means something." When the preacher came forward the fakir ceased shouting, and at the end of the prayers he was sought for but could not be found; and when the people came out of the door of the mosque they saw the plunderers with the woodwork of the churches, the garments of the Christians, and other plunder, and when they asked about these things they were answered that the Sultan had proclaimed that the churches should be destroyed ; and the people believed this until they heard soon afterwards that all had happened without orders from the Sultan.

In fact the Mamluk Sultan was very upset over the attacks, and had sent in his troops to protect the churches and arrest any of the looters. But the violence would spread beyond Cairo, and in other parts of Egypt there would be more attacks on Christian and their churches. Over a couple of weeks eleven Christian churches would be damaged or destroyed in Cairo, and another 49 in other parts of the country.

The violence had seemingly died down when three weeks later a fire broke out in Cairo. Fires were always a great danger for a medieval city, as the flames could spread rapidly through the crowded buildings. This fire began in one of the homes of the roast-meat vendors, and burned down many of his neighbours. It took an entire day before it was it was extinguished, and soon after another fire broke out in another part of Cairo. The winds had picked up, and the fire began to spread. Al-Maqrizi writes how the Mamluk Sultan was so concerned that he went out to inspect the firefighting efforts:

The Sultan went up to the roof of the castle, but could not slay there on account of the strong wind ; the fire lasted, and the Sultan repealed his command to the Emirs to extinguish it until Tuesday. Then the Sultan's Deputy went down and took all the Emirs and water-carriers with him; and the Emir and Cupbearer Baktimur also went down; it was a terrible day; none more terrible has ever been seen. At the gates of Cairo guards were set to bring back the water-carriers if they tried to leave Cairo, in order to extinguish the fire; not one of the water-carriers of the Emirs and of the city was spared, all had to work; and they brought the water from the academies and baths; all the carpenters and attendants of the baths were taken to pull down the houses, and in this time of necessity many lofty buildings and great houses were pulled down.

Eventually the fire was put out, but despite orders to be better prepared, including having barrels of water placed in every street and every shop, more blazes erupted. People were also noticing that some of the fires had started in mosques or schools, and in one place they found that it had "arose from naphtha (a flammable liquid often used in medieval warfare) rolled up in cloths steeped in oil and pitch."

One night two monks were captured coming out of a school where a fire had started, and the smell of sulphur was still on their hands. Meanwhile others had seized a Christian caught in a mosque who they found rags with rags pitch and naphtha - "he had already thrown one of them down by the pulpit, and had stood by it until smoke rose from it; then he went to depart from the mosque; some one, however, had noticed him, and watched him from a place where the Christian could not see him; then he seized him" - these three men were tortured and soon confessed to a diabolical plot - they and other monks from a monastery outside of Cairo, known as the Monastery of the Mules had decided to take revenge on the Muslims for the destruction of the churches, and having collected money and supplies to prepare the naphtha, they set out to different quarters within the city, in order to set it on fire.

The Sultan brought in the Coptic Patriarch of Egypt to see what he knew about the plot, but all he could say was that "these are fanatical Christians, who wished to avenge themselves on the fanatical Muslims on account of the destruction of the churches."

The fires continued, and more monks were caught - they would be publicly executed - but their actions would provoke a backlash from the Muslims. "From this time the common people were enraged against the Christians," al-Maqrizi writes, "and began to insult them and tore their garments off them, so that every form of outrage was allowed, and such as exceeded all measure."

Their anger was also directed against many of the Christian officials within the Mamluk government, and protests were directed against the Sultan himself. He responded by having his men attack the protesters, even executing some, but as the fires continued, the demands grew louder. When the size of the protest reached 20,000 people, the Sultan gave in and issued a new series of laws blaming "corrupt Christians" for the arsons, and ordering that any Christian wearing a white turban or riding a horse could be seized and killed, and that those who held office around the country be dismissed. According to the reports of chroniclers, some Christians then converted to Islam, in one case to avoid being killed by a Muslim mob.

Those Christians who sought help from their Jewish neighbours also received less support than they hoped. Al-Maqrizi writes:

Nothing had been said at this time of the Jews, and so the Christians began, when they wished to leave their dwellings, to borrow a yellow turban from one of the Jews, and to wear it so as to be safe from the people. Then it happened that one of the Christians in the Divans was owed 4,000 dirhams by a Jew, so he came by night in disguise to the Jew's house to demand the money; then the Jew seized him and cried, "Help from God and the Muslims!" and shouted so that people ran together to seize the Christian; but he fled into the inner part of the Jew's house and hid himself with the wife of the latter; he was, however, obliged to write a receipt stating that the Jew had paid him his debt, and then he was set free.

There would be more fires, and more revenge attacks on Christians - it would take weeks before the remaining monks were caught and the tensions to calm. The government soon rescinded their proclamations, and those who had lost their positions were restored to them. In the end, all that al-Maqrizi could do was lament what had happened:

so many persons perished, so much property was destroyed, and so many buildings ruined that for their multitude they cannot be described. The end of all things rests with God!

Sources:

An English translation of al-Maqrizi's account of the events of 1321 can be found in ***The churches and monasteries of Egypt and some neighbouring countries***, by Basil Evetts (Oxford, 1895)

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European Representations of Islam in the Era of Crusade

Paper by Suzanne Conklin Akbari, given at New York University on December 15, 2011



Did the Crusades lead to Islamic State?

By Carole Cusack

In 1996, late US political scientist Samuel P. Huntington published the book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Following the collapse of communism in 1989, he argued, conflicts would increasingly involve religion. Islam, which Huntington claimed had been the opponent of Christianity since the seventh century, would increasingly feature in geopolitical conflict.

So, it wasn't particularly shocking when, after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, the then-US president, George W. Bush, used the term "crusade" to describe the American military response.

Framing the subsequent "war on terror" as a crusade acted as a red flag to journalists and political commentators, who could treat the events as simply the most recent stoush in a centuries-old conflict.

The actual Crusades (1096-1487) themselves evoke a romantic image of medieval knights, chivalry, romance and religious high-mindedness. But representing them as wars between Christians and Muslims is a gross oversimplification and a misreading of history.

Early Islamic conquests

That there were wars between Muslims and Christians is certainly true. After the death of Abu Bakr (573-634), the Prophet Muhammad's father-in-law and first caliph, the second Caliph Umar (583-644) sent the Islamic armies in three divisions to conquer and spread the religion of Islam.

Whole regions that were Christian fell to Islam. The Holy Land, which comprised modern-day Palestinian territories, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, for instance, was defeated. And Egypt was conquered without even a battle in 640.

The ancient and vast Persian Empire, officially Zoroastrian in religion, had been conquered by 642. Weakened by war with the Christian Byzantine Empire, Persia was no match for the Muslim forces.



Map of the Crusades from an 1838 edition of The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, by Edward Gibbon

Muslim armies marched across north Africa and crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into modern Spain, eventually securing a large territory in the Iberian Peninsula, which was known as Al-Andalus (also known as Muslim Spain or Islamic Iberia).

They also marched across the Pyrenees and into France in 732, the centenary of Muhammad's death. But they were decisively defeated at the Battle of Poitiers (also known as Battle of Tours and, by Arab sources, as Battle of the Palace of the Martyrs) by the Frankish general, Charles Martel (686-741), grandfather of the great Emperor Charlemagne.

This was seen as a Christian victory and, after Poitiers, there were no further attacks on Western Europe. The Crusades came much later.

The causes of the Crusades

The proximate causes of the First Crusade (1096-1099) include the defeat of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus

(1056-1118), who was crowned in 1081 and ruled until his death. His armies met the Muslim Seljuk Turks at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 and were defeated.

This placed the city of Constantinople at risk of conquest. So, the emperor requested that the West send knights to assist him – and he was prepared to pay.

Pope Urban II (1044-1099) preached the Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095. **He argued that the Turks and Arabs attacked Christian territories and had "killed and captured many, and have destroyed the churches and devastated the empire".**

He also promised his audience:

All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested.

This was recorded by a monk called Fulcher of Chartres, who wrote a chronicle of the First Crusade.

Thousands answered the pope's call and the First Crusade conquered Jerusalem in 1099. But the Crusaders' presence in the Middle East was short-lived and the port city of Ruad, the last Christian possession, was lost in 1302/3.

Many later conflicts that were called Crusades were not actions against Muslim armies at all. The Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), for instance, was a Venetian Catholic army, which besieged Constantinople. Catholic Christians attacked Orthodox Christians, then looted the city, taking its treasures back to Venice.

Islam was not a factor in the Albigensian Crusade of 1209-1229, either. In that instance, Pope Innocent III (1160/1-1216) used the language of war against the infidel (literally "unfaithful", meaning those without true religion) against heretics in the south of France. So, "right-thinking" Christians killed "deviant" Christians.

The end of the Middle Ages

It wasn't all intermittent fighting. There were also periods of peace and productive relationships between Christian and Muslim rulers in the Middle Ages.

For instance, Charlemagne (742-814) (also known as Charles the Great or Charles I), who united most of Western Europe during the early part of the Middle Ages, sent gifts to Harun al-Rashid (763-809), the Caliph of Baghdad. In return, he received diplomatic presents such as a chess set, an elaborate clepsydra (water clock) and an elephant.

In Spain, the culture from the early eighth century to the late 15th was known as "la Convivencia" (the co-existence), as Jews, Christians and Muslims lived in relative peace

(though the level of harmony has been exaggerated). And there was an exchange of ideas in fields including mathematics, medicine and philosophy.

The Christian kingdoms of the north gradually reconquered Al-Andalus. And, in 1492, King Ferdinand (1452-1516) and Queen Isabella (1451-1504) reclaimed Granada and expelled the Jews and Muslims from Spain, or forced them to convert to Christianity.

A clumsy view

Clearly, to speak of an "us versus them" mentality, or to frame current geopolitical conflicts as "crusades" of Christians against Muslims, or vice versa, is to misunderstand – and misuse – history.

Modern Westerners would find medieval Crusader knights as unappealing as they do Islamic State.

And it's impossible to miss the fact that the immediate entry into heaven Pope Urban promised to Christian soldiers who died in battle against the infidel Muslims is conceptually identical to the martyrdom ideology of contemporary jihadists.

Reality is more complex – and more interesting – than the simple continuation of a historical struggle against the same enemy. Muslims conquered Christian territories, yes, but Christians engaged in reconquest.

There were forced conversions to both Islam and Christianity, and – very importantly – actual governments and monarchs were involved. It's a simplistic thing to say that "Islamic State is neither Islamic nor a state", but there's an element of truth in it.

The most important reason we should resist the lure of the crusade tag to any fight against jihadists is that groups like Islamic State *want* the West to think like that.

It justified the Paris bomb attacks of November 2015 as attacks against "the Crusader nation of France". Osama bin Laden used the same reasoning after the September 11 attacks.

By adopting the role of Crusaders, Western nations play into Islamic State's hands. It's how these jihadists want the West to understand itself – as implacably opposed to Islam. But it's not, and it never has been.

**Carole Cusack is a
Professor of Religious Studies,
University of Sydney**

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The Crusades: What Were They and Why are They still Relevant?

SENIORS PROGRAM

The Crusades: What Were They and Why are they still Relevant?
Dr. Matt Christie
September 12, 2011





SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
LEARNING AT THE BORDER

Islamic State and the Assassins: reviving fanciful tales of the medieval Orient

By Farhad Daftary

Many Western commentators have tried to trace the ideological roots of Islamic State (IS) to earlier Islamic movements. Occasionally, they've associated them with the medieval Ismailis, a Shi'ite Muslim community made famous in Europe by returning Crusaders as the Assassins.

But any serious inquiry shows the teachings and practices of medieval Ismailis, who had a state of their own in parts of Iran from 1090 to 1256, had nothing in common with the senseless terrorist ideology and ruthless destruction of IS and its supporters.

Attacks on civilians, including women and children, and engaging in the mass destruction of property are forbidden both by Prophet Muhammad and in the tenets of Islamic law. Needless to say, the Ismailis never descended to such terrorist activities, even under highly adversarial circumstances.

Significant discordance exists between the medieval Ismailis and contemporary

terrorists, who – quite inappropriately – identify themselves as members of an Islamic polity.

Fanciful Oriental tales

The Ismailis, or more specifically the Nizari Ismailis, founded a precarious state in 1090 under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah. As a minority Shi'ite Muslim community, they faced hostility from the Sunni-Abbasid establishment (the third caliphate after the death of the Prophet Muhammed) and their political overlords, the Seljuq Turks, from very early on.

Struggling to survive in their network of defensive mountain fortresses remained the

primary objective of the Ismaili leadership, centred on the castle of Alamut (in the north of modern-day Iran). Their state survived against all odds until it was destroyed by the all-conquering Mongols in 1256.

During the course of the 12th century, the Ismailis were incessantly attacked by the armies of the Sunni Seljuq sultans, who were intensely anti-Shi'ite. As they couldn't match their enemies' superior military power, the Ismailis resorted to the warfare tactic of selectively removing Seljuq military commanders and other prominent adversaries who posed serious existential threats to them in particular localities.

These daring missions were carried out by the Ismaili *fida'is*, who were deeply devoted to their community. The *fida'is* comprised the fighting corps of the Ismaili state.

But the Ismailis didn't invent the policy of assassinating enemies. It was a practice employed by many Muslim groups at the time, as well as by the Crusaders and many others throughout history.

Unfortunately, almost all assassinations of any significance occurring in the central lands of Islam became automatically attributed to the Ismaili *fida'is*. And a series of fanciful tales were fabricated around their recruitment and training.

These tales, rooted in the "imaginative ignorance" of the Crusaders, were concocted and put into circulation by them and their occidental observers; they're not found in contemporary Muslim sources.

The so-called Assassin legends, which culminated in Marco Polo's synthesis, were meant to provide satisfactory explanations for the fearless behaviour of the *fida'is*, which seemed otherwise irrational to medieval Europeans.

The very term Assassin, which appears in medieval European literature in a variety of forms, such as *Assassini*, was based on variants

of the Arabic word *hashish* (plural, *hashishin*) and applied to the Nizari Ismailis of Syria and Iran by other Muslims.

In all the Muslim sources where the Ismailis are referred to as *hashishis*, the term is used in its pejorative sense of "people of lax morality". There's no suggestion that they were actually using hashish. There's no evidence that hashish, or any other drug, was administered to the *fida'is*, as alleged by Marco Polo.

The literal interpretation of the term for the Ismailis as an "order of crazed hashish-using Assassins" is rooted entirely in the fantasies of medieval Europeans.

Modern scholarship in Ismaili studies, based on the recovery and study of numerous Ismaili textual sources, has now begun to dispel many misconceptions regarding the Ismailis, including the myths surrounding their cadre of *fida'is*.

And the medieval Assassin legends, arising from the hostility of the Sunni Muslims to the Shi'ite Ismailis as well as the medieval Europeans' fanciful impressions of the Orient, have been **recounted and deconstructed**.

A culture of learning and tolerance

Living in adverse circumstances, the Ismailis of Iran and Syria were heirs to the Fatimid dynasty that founded the city of Cairo and established al-Azhar, perhaps the earliest university of the world. Although preoccupied with survival, the Ismailis of the Alamut period maintained a sophisticated outlook and a literary tradition, elaborating their teachings within a Shi'ite theological framework.

Their leader, Hasan-i Sabbah, was a learned theologian. And the **Ismaili fortresses of the period**, displaying magnificent military architecture and irrigation skills, were equipped with libraries holding significant collections of manuscripts, documents and scientific instruments.



An agent (fida'i) of the Ismailis (left, in white turban) fatally stabs Nizam al-Mulk, a Seljuk vizier, in 1092. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

The Ismailis also extended their patronage of learning to outside scholars, including Sunnis, and even non-Muslims. They were very tolerant towards other religious communities.

In the last decades of their state, in the 13th century, even waves of Sunni Muslims found refuge in the Ismaili fortress communities of eastern Iran. These refugees were running from the Mongol hordes who were then establishing their hegemony over Central Asia.

All this stands in sharp contrast to the destructive policies of IS, which persecutes religious and ethnic minorities and enslaves women.

The medieval Ismailis embodied qualities of piety, learning and community life in line with established Islamic teachings. These traditions continue in the modern-day Ismaili ethos. And the present-day global Ismaili community represents one of the most progressive and enlightened communities of the Muslim world.

The Ismailis have never had anything in common with the terrorists of IS, who murder

innocent civilians at random and en masse, and destroy monuments of humankind's shared cultural heritage.

Global terrorism in any form under the banner of Islam is a new phenomenon without historical antecedents in either classical Islamic or any other tradition. IS's ideology reflects a crude version of the intolerant Wahhabi theology expounded by the Sunni religious establishment of Saudi Arabia, which is itself a narrow perspective that fails to recognise any pluralism or diversity of interpretations in Islam.

Farhad Daftary is the Co-Director and Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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The Life of Lady Katherine Gordon, wife of Perkin Warbeck

By Susan Abernethy

By all accounts, Lady Katherine Gordon was a beautiful woman. She was the daughter of a Scottish nobleman with royal connections and married four times, including to the pretender to the English throne, Perkin Warbeck. She was a witness to many important events in Tudor history.

Katherine was born c. 1474, the daughter of George Gordon, 2nd Earl of Huntly and his third wife, Elizabeth Hay, who was the daughter of the 1st Earl of Errol. Katherine was the great-granddaughter of King James I and therefore of royal blood. She most likely spent time at the Scottish court in her youth and received an education worthy of her rank. She may or may not have heard rumors and reports about the war being fought over the English throne.

In July of 1495, a young man arrived at the Scottish court of King James IV who claimed to be Richard, Duke of York, one of the young sons of King Edward IV of England. The Duke of York and his elder brother, King Edward V had disappeared after being lodged in the Tower of London in 1483 following their Uncle Richard III's proclamation as king. Whether James IV believed this man was the Duke of York or not, he saw the possibilities of using him as a pawn in his political negotiations and international alliances. He genuinely liked this young man and they

became fast friends. James received the supposed Richard with all honors, treated him like a king, dressed him as a king, gave him a pension and took him on progress throughout the kingdom. He also gave him his cousin Lady Katherine Gordon as a wife.

In January of 1496, "Richard" and Katherine were married and she was now known as the Duchess of York. After the ceremony, there was more celebration, including a jousting tournament in which the king himself participated. After the tournament, the couple traveled to Falkland Palace in Fife and James made plans to go to war with England with "Richard" as his ally. No one in England rose up to support the supposed Duke of York. In the meantime, the spies of King Henry VII of England had found the true identity of Katherine's husband. He was the son of a boatman of Tournai, a city in what is now Belgium and his name was Pierrechon de Werbecque or Perkin Warbeck as Henry called him.

Warbeck spent a period of nearly two years in the Scottish court. Perhaps James began to tire of him. He was trying to negotiate a marriage to King Henry VII's daughter Margaret and Warbeck was seen as an obstacle since Henry wanted to get rid of the threat Warbeck posed to his throne. In the summer of 1497, King Henry had implemented a tax to raise funds for war against Scotland. The people of Cornwall found the tax excessive and a rebellion started. Warbeck considered joining the rebellion and making another bid for the English throne. James outfitted him with a ship and Katherine, Warbeck and their son set sail.

Katherine and Warbeck sailed to Ireland first and spent about a month there trying to raise troops. It became obvious there was no support for their cause so they sailed for Cornwall, landing at Whitesand Bay. Warbeck declared himself king and called for supporters. On the way to Penzance it is believed he left Katherine in St. Buryans at the halfway point. There is some confusion in the records. Another citation has her left at St. Michaels Mount. Either way, she was safely away from any action and would remain so for about five weeks while Warbeck gathered troops and went into battle. King Henry VII's army came after him and after slowly losing support, Warbeck fled for sanctuary at Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire where he eventually was persuaded to surrender in October of 1497. He was put under strong guard.

King Henry's forces came to Katherine who was found wearing the clothes of mourning. She may have lost her son or miscarried. There is a mention in a Welsh chronicle of a son called Richard Perkins. Perhaps the son was left behind in Ireland? She had to be persuaded to surrender and the king's men made it clear they would deal with her kindly. She was brought to Exeter where King Henry met her in person. Henry was particularly concerned Katherine was pregnant and the

whole Warbeck affair would be never-ending through her children. But she wasn't pregnant.

The chronicler Bernard Andre describes a meeting between Henry VII, Warbeck and Katherine. Henry met with Warbeck first and told him he would spare his life. Katherine then entered the room looking particularly beautiful. Warbeck confessed his true identity to her. Henry promised his Queen would look after her. Katherine wept and expressed her disappointment that Warbeck was not who he said he was and said she placed herself in the hands of the king. Henry complimented Katherine on her dignity and high birth and said she deserved a man of higher rank. Andre hints Henry may have been smitten with her. Henry treated the couple fairly well but wouldn't allow them to sleep together.

Katherine was either forbidden or chose not to return to Scotland and resumed her maiden name. Henry outfitted her with horses, food and clothing and she traveled to the royal palace at Sheen. Queen Elizabeth accepted her and gave her a pension and a high place in her household according to her rank. In June of 1499, King Henry and Queen Elizabeth went to Calais to meet Archduke Philip who had married Juana of Castile, sister of Katherine of Aragon. Katherine Gordon accompanied them on this trip. On November 23, 1499, Perkin Warbeck was executed at Tyburn for conspiring against the king and Katherine became a widow. In January of 1502, the treaty of marriage between King James IV of Scotland and Margaret Tudor was finalized at Richmond. There was a betrothal ceremony the next day and Katherine was among Queen Elizabeth's ladies and took precedence at the royal party.

Queen Elizabeth died in February of 1503. At the funeral, Katherine was one of the chief mourners. She took her place in the procession from the Tower of London to Westminster behind the Queen's sister and

she laid her pall on the coffin in Westminster Abbey after the Queen's sisters. After Elizabeth died, Henry kept Katherine by his side. The royal accounts give evidence he relied on her for support for the rest of his life. She played cards with him and got medicines for him when he was ill. She painted cloths with religious scenes to be held before him as he lay ill and dying. But he didn't marry her and there is no evidence of impropriety between the two. Payments appear in the records of 1509-1510 indicating she was one of Katherine of Aragon's ladies when she was Princess of Wales.

Shortly before Henry VIII became king, Katherine received grants for land in Berkshire upon her promise she would not leave England. Sometime between 1510 and 1512, Katherine married James Strangeways who was a Gentleman Usher of the King's Chamber. Strangeways died in 1516, leaving all his property to Katherine. In July 1517, Katherine married a Welshman named Matthew Craddock, a gentleman and knight of Glamorganshire. She obtained leave to live in Wales. Katherine was employed in the household of Henry VIII's eldest daughter

Mary Tudor from 1525 to 1530 as a Chief Lady of the Privy Chamber. Craddock died in 1531, naming Katherine the executor of his will and leaving her income from some of his property in Wales and 500 marks.

Katherine married another Gentleman Usher of the Chamber named Christopher Aston sometime before January 1536. The last six years of her life were spent on her lands in Berkshire where she was regularly seen riding horseback around the parish. Katherine died on October 14, 1537. In her will she never mentions her first husband or any children. She calls herself the "sometime wife" of James Strangeways, referred to Craddock as her "dear and well beloved husband" and Ashton as her "beloved husband". She left clothing to Margaret Kyme, the daughter of Cecily Plantagenet, to her servant Philippa Huls and to another woman she refers to as her "sister", Alice Smyth who may have been the sister of Craddock or Ashton. Katherine was buried in the chancel of the parish church of Fyfield in Berkshire where there is a tomb with missing brass figures that is still referred to as "Lady Gordon's Monument". Ashton outlived Katherine and died in 1561.

Further Reading:

The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy 1491-1499, by Ian Arthurson

Blood Sisters: The Women Behind the War of the Roses, by Sarah Gristwood

The Last Medieval Queens, by J.L. Laynesmith

The Last White Rose: The Secret Wars of the Tudors, by Desmond Seward

Elizabeth of York: A Tudor Queen and Her World, by Alison Weir

Susan Abernethy is the writer of The Freelance History Writer and a contributor to Saints, Sisters, and Sluts. You can also follow Susan on Twitter @SusanAbernethy2

The Imperial Knights of Medieval California

By Danielle Trynoski

An enormous horse gallops down the lane. Flaxen mane and tail fly up, amplified by her speed. A knight, helmeted and in armor, lowers his lance. It crashes against an opposing knight's breastplate, shattering into pieces. The victor slows his horse and raises the handle in an unmistakable show of success. Hundreds erupt in cheers and smartphone cameras snap photos.

I know what you're thinking. This is not a review of the film *A Knight's Tale*, nor a recap of a North American Renaissance Faire. The Imperial Knights Production Company, managed by Tom and Andrea Montgomery of Norco, California, performs educational jousting demonstrations for hundreds of schools in the Southern California region. In addition to their school presentations, the Imperial Knights perform at North American Renaissance Faires and in film productions. Their members compete in national jousting competitions, and are winners in both team and individual competitions. Andrea and Tom are experienced performers with an abundance of other important skills. Andrea toured with the Lipizzaner Stallions' National Touring Troupe and trains classical dressage, and Tom creates most of their knights' weapons and equipment.



**Knights do battle outside John Muir Middle School in Burbank, California
- photo by Danielle Trynoski**

The Imperial Knights perform at approximately 50 schools per year, and hope to double their volume over the next two years. While there is an element of showmanship and theatrics, the show's script highlights values like honor, chivalry, and honesty. Tom and Andrea started doing the school programs in 1996 as an extension of America's "Say No to Drugs" campaign, through which schools could access funding. In the last few years, that funding has decreased so the script has broadened to incorporate positive character virtues, healthy decision making, and medieval history.

Tom gleefully showed off a new pair of gauntlets when I arrived to see one of the shows at John Muir Middle School in Burbank, California. Andrea works on unloading the horses; today they've brought Nala, Hercules, Shadow, and Cappi. She tacks up the horses - getting their saddles and bridles on - while Tom, the Master of Ceremonies, and today's knights Jason and Bryce get on their armor and accoutrements. Their chainmail is actually a crocheted fabric garment, made by an obscure supplier in England. The fabric is treated with a metallic finish so it gives off a nice glimmer without having the weight of metal links. This facilitates the knights' movement during the show. They don colored tunics with leather belts and prepare to start.

The company's set-up is entirely mobile; all they need is a big turf field. A modest sound system, an arena outlined by stakes and a string of flags, a central rope for the



Jason reviews his troops - photo by Danielle Trynoski

jousting lists, a straw bale target propped on a stand, a few flags, and weapons stuck in the grass set the stage. The truck and trailer at the end of the arena serve as a movable wall and delineate a backstage area for mounting the horses and changing armor. One storage compartment in the trailer holds all of the horses' equipment and a second holds the weapons, costumes, sound system, and arena equipment.

As the seventh grade students (usually 12 year olds in the United States) amble out to the field, I see that some of them are in various costumes for their World History Day. The Imperial Knights have participated in this program for the last 8 years, representing medieval history, a key part of the seventh grade curriculum standards. I notice a pair of girls across the arena, one wearing a long white chemise with a green dress and lace-up top a *la* corset style. Her friend is carrying the train of the green dress for her and both are giggling. A boy on the other side of the arena wears a bedsheet toga and a victor's crown. Other costume elements include island sarongs, blanket ponchos, and cardboard shields. Tom and the other knights are walking along the edge of the arena, talking with students, showing off swords and weapons, and passing out stickers with the company's logo. They gently guide the students into two groups along the long sides of the arena, Tom mounts up on Nala, and the show begins.

He gives the students the briefest introduction to medieval political structure; that there was a king who ruled the land, counts who ruled the counties, and knights who served the counts, helped protect the land and served in a military function. The knights would need to keep their fighting skills sharp, and tournament games were a

medieval form of competition used as practice and as sport. He details the role of the horse, as a part of a knight's essential equipment and requiring specific training. At this point, Andrea, in costume and mounted up on Cappi, rides forward and gives a demonstration of basic gaits (the main speeds of the horse being walk, trot, and canter) and maneuvers. Tom narrates over a soundtrack, encouraging students to cheer for the completion of certain moves. Andrea signals Cappi to give a bow, and the pair exits the arena.

Next, Tom begins introducing the two knights, Sir Bryce the Green Knight and Sir Jason the Black Knight. Each side of the arena becomes the supporters for the two knights, and they are encouraged to cheer and clap for their champion. The speakers boom as each knight emerges from behind the trailer, waving and smiling as their hair blows in the wind. The narration continues as Tom introduces the knights, their horses (Bryce is on Hercules, Jason rides Shadow), and the tournament games. The first event is the Ring Grab, in which rings are suspended from an upright stand and the knights must use a lance to nab the ring...while the horse is cantering. The different size rings are assigned a point value which increases as they get progressively smaller. The game becomes tied, so Tom directs the squire (Zane, Bryce's younger brother) to hang the Golden Ring, less than an inch in diameter. Jason wins the prize, and his section of the crowd cheers enthusiastically.



Sir Bryce and Hercules - photo by Danielle Trynoski

The second game is a javelin toss. The knights canter to the straw bale target and attempt to fling the javelin into the center of the painted target, outlined with a silver ring. This game ends in a tie, and the third and final tournament game is an attack on cabbages. Yes, leafy green cabbages. The squire Zane and Andrea stand along the jousting list, and toss a cabbage high as a knight canters toward them. The knight uses his sword to slice the cabbage, attempting to cut it in half. As the cabbage gets increasingly smaller, the point value goes up. The crowd ooh's, aah's, and claps appreciatively as the green leaves fly dramatically through the air.

This last tournament event also ends in a draw, and the knights withdraw for an armor change to prepare for the joust. Tom, still mounted, works the crowd and keeps their interest by asking questions about how to make good decisions and awarding stickers for correct or witty answers. After a few minutes, the knights re-emerge and the joust begins. They wear helmets, breastplates, and shields, and now carry lances. Bryce and Jason salute each other and gallop down the lists. The lances strike the shields and the pre-cut balsa wood splinters into long, blunt pieces. They receive new lances from Zane and Andrea and turn for another pass. The lances break again and at the end of the lists the knights discard the lances, helmets, and shields, then turn to each other with swords drawn. The horses spin and dance without any anxiety; they've done this choreography before. Bryce is "unhorsed" and Andrea is right there to take Hercules back over to the trailer. The sword fight continues until Jason finally dismounts. There is an exchange of blows as the knights move through several different weapons including the mace, bola, and battle axe, and finally Jason is brought to his knees. Tom roars into the microphone, asking if Bryce will go for the kill or show mercy. The students scream in response, and Bryce helps Jason to his feet. The tournament is over. Andrea and Zane bring the horses back to the arena and Tom closes the show as the knights canter the arena one last time.

Teachers usher students back towards the buildings and the field slowly empties. Andrea offers the horses some water as the men shed their armor and tunics. The equipment is rolled, folded, and packed away. As the horses step onto the trailer, the field completes its transformation back into a children's playground. These folks are skilled performers, and even if they present an idealized version of medieval history, it's a story that engages the senses of the audience. The students can feel the reverberations of the horses' feet and hear the lances breaking. They see sparks fly off the swords and smell the dirt kicked up in the arena. This is a way to experience the medieval, not just study it.

Learn more about the Imperial Knights Production Company via their website:

www.imperialknightslive.com



Packing up - photo by Danielle Trynoski

Danielle Trynoski earned her MA in Medieval Archaeology at the University of York in England. When she's not visiting museums and historical sites, she's riding horses or reading about Vikings. She currently lives in southern California and manages the website CuratoryStory.com



Spies, Sadists, and Sorcerers: The History You Weren't Taught in School

By Dominic Selwood

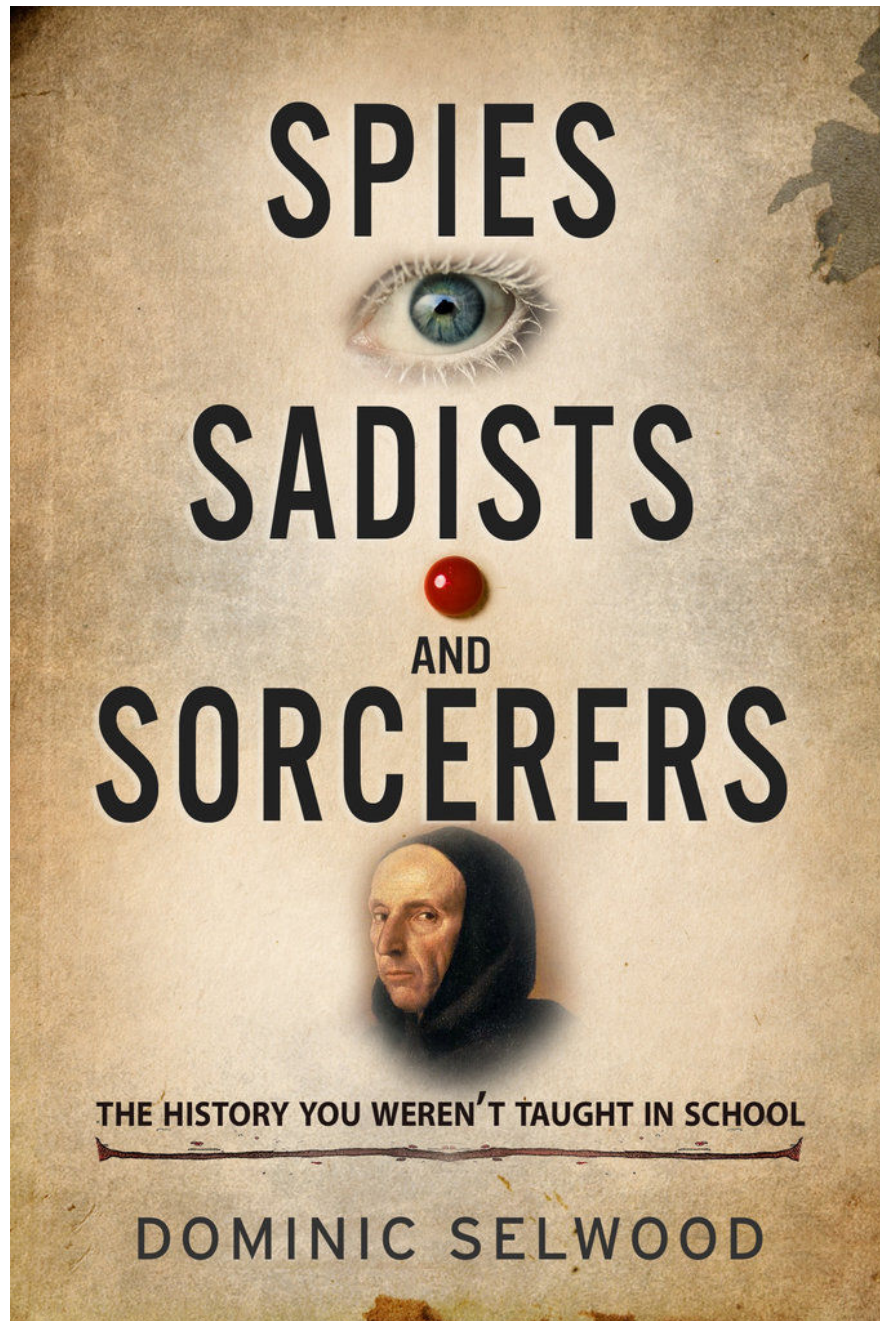
Crux Publishing, 2015

Reviewed by Sandra Alvarez

History is not a hard science. It is much more soft and yielding, capable of being defined and shaped – or distorted and falsified – by those who live it, or those who tell it...in fact a lot of the history we learn turns out to be only half the picture. Worse, some of it is just plain wrong. ~Dominic Selwood

History is written by the victors. So much of the history we think we know, is really only the history propagated by one side, filtered and carefully curated information that eventually becomes known to us as "fact".

Dominic Selwood has presented a different picture, daring to show us the stories that are omitted, covered up or dismissed because they don't conform to what we've been told by our parents, or taught in school. In an intriguing collection of essays, *Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers: The history you weren't taught in school*, dares to break rank and expose lies, debunk myths and set the record straight about English history from Roman Times to the present day.



The ancient section is rather light, with only two papers for the period; a look at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and to clear up the confusion that Constantine I the Great (272-337 AD) was responsible for bringing Christianity to the empire. Selwood turns our attention to the forgotten role of Flavius Theodosius (347-395 AD), who actually made Christianity global.

By far, the largest section is medieval. Selwood tackles a lot in this chapter; he dispels some of the ridiculous myths about the Middle Ages, such as: that the medieval period was 'uncivilised' compared to the Roman period, and puts to bed the notion that the Middle Ages were the 'Dark Ages'.

He picks apart the commonly held view that the Anglo Saxons were better than the Vikings, and sheds light on some of the contributions Vikings made to England and the English language. He does away with the erroneous notion that they were unclean and ignorant, and that they were any less violent than Anglo Saxons, referring to a recent exhibit at the British Museum on Viking culture:

It cannot be denied that they were quite spectacularly violent. But they did not have a monopoly in treating life cheaply. The British

Museum's exhibition will highlight a recently excavated mass grave in Dorset where a group of Vikings had been summarily executed by the locals...The Vikings were far from being ignorant, unclean, and boorish. In fact, they were rather advanced. For a start they were highly literate. Great stones carved with jagged Tolkienesque runes (called futhark) carpet Scandinavia, some going back as far as the AD 300s. There is more traditional writing, too – especially in the Eddas and Skaldic poetry....As for the idea the Vikings were unkempt and unwashed, the truth is the polar opposite/ Archaeology reveals endless combs, tweezers, razors, and other grooming items. They used special strong soap for cleaning and bleaching their hair blond.

Selwood also discusses the (un)importance of the Battle of Hastings, the Magna Carta, the Shroud of Turin, the ridiculous myths surrounding the Knights Templar, and does away with the romanticized notions many people have about popular medieval figures, such as Richard the Lionheart (1157-1199).

Known as England's 'golden boy', national hero, and a symbol of everything "English", Selwood demonstrates that this is little more than a farce. It's funny because Richard didn't speak a lick of English, or care to spend much time on the island he ruled. He was also buried in France, which, is most likely the way he perceived himself – as French. Aside from the little time he spent actually crusading, and more time war mongering, he nearly bankrupted England with his heavy ransom after being captured by Duke Leopold V of Austria (1157-1194). Not exactly a stellar king, yet (pardon the pun) he's lionized as the epitome of Englishness and good kingship in popular culture. I can think of many other English kings that deserve more praise and applause than Richard I. I've always wondered (and been amazed by) why Richard I was held up as a symbol of all things "English"? Selwood captures this sentiment in his in an essay on Richard and Saladin (1137-1193), exposing their true "chivalry".

"Eight hundred years later, Richard the Lionhearted remains a shining hero, with a unique place in popular culture – a name every school child repeats with conviction when asked for a great medieval English king. Richard inspires a misty reverence, and somehow, like Arthur, personifies a certain historic Englishness...

As an adult, he visited England only twice, and on each occasion for as short a period as humanly possible. The first was in 1189, when he came for four months to be crowned (an event he could hardly avoid) and also oversee a fire sale of everything that was not nailed down. He famously remarked that he would have sold London if he could have found a buyer. Once back in France with his shiny English crown, he took no ongoing interest whatsoever in the running of his new kingdom. He was an absentee landlord, only concerned with the rents England yielded to fund his personal wars of dynastic consolidation and self aggrandisement...he was a thoroughbred Frenchman."

This chapter also explores the other, more sinisterly viewed Richard, Richard III (1452-1485) and discusses his involvement with the death of the Princes in the Tower, and the hubbub around his reburial in Leicester in March 2015. Although I knew many of the stories in this chapter, this section is a good read for a general audience waylaid by Hollywood myth into believing a lot of erroneous ideas about the Middle Ages.

Selwood moves onto to the Renaissance and Reformation, to expose the Tudor spin machine, the witch craze, the Gregorian calendar change, an examination of Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540), and Guy Fawkes (1570-1606). Selwood also talks about Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) "discovering" America, and his horrendous treatment of Native Americans.

In his Victorian chapter, he touches on the controversial topic of the Elgin Marbles, and shines a light onto Ada Byron Lovelace's (1815-1852) contribution to coding, years before Alan Turing (1912-1954). The last few chapters deal with WWI, WWII, and modern topics like the Queen's German roots, and why the English continue to be fascinated by witchcraft in the 21st century.

The Verdict

This book was definitely an ambitious undertaking. In covering a span of English history from the ancient world to the present day means that there are a lot of stories, and myths to sort through and select. This book could easily have swelled to another five hundred pages but Selwood manages to get it done in easily digestible chunks, each era

sectioned off with several essays devoted to dismantling well known, and lesser known "facts". The book is for anyone, academic or general interest because even if you know some things, you will discover things you didn't know. The essays are quick reads, enjoyable, controversial in some places, and compelling in others. Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers challenges you to question what you know, understand why we're taught to believe certain things, and to think about how to move forward, armed with this new information. Selwood does not expect, nor ask us to cast off everything we know, but just to be aware of the workings of historical writing, to ask questions, and at times, to challenge things when we know there was egregious wrong doing. It's a great book, and provided some laughs and a lot to chew on. Happy reading!

Learn more about Spies, Sadists and Sorcerers from Crux Publishing at

<http://cruxpublishing.co.uk/crux-books/spies-sadists-sorcerers/>

Common reasons why a fantasy sword wouldn't work in real life

From the popular Youtuber Channel Skallagrm, this bit of infotainment already has a quarter of million views after just two weeks



Tales from Sacchetti

Dante Alighieri

We bring you another tale from a work called *Novelle* by Franco Sacchetti. Sacchetti was a 14th-century Italian novelist and poet, who spent most of his life in Florence. He wrote various works, but is most remembered for the about 300 short stories he made. It is difficult to know which tales are real and which parts are fictitious, but often they are very funny and offer a look at the daily lives of medieval people that we rarely see.

Dante Alighieri makes a smith and an ass-driver perceive their mistakes, because they sang out of his book with changed words

The most excellent poet of our native tongue, whose fame will never diminish, Dante Alighieri the Florentine, lived in Florence near to the family of the Adimari, and a young knight of that family having fallen into trouble, for I know not what offence, and fearing to be condemned in the course of justice by a certain executor, who was thought to be a friend of Dante, the poet was prayed by that knight that he would intercede with the executor to have mercy upon him. Dante said that he would do it willingly.

When he had dined he left his house and set out upon his way to do the errand. And passing by the Gate of San Piero he saw a smith beating iron upon his anvil, and all the while he sang from Dante's poem as one sings a song, and he so jumbled his verses, clipping here and adding there, that he seemed to Dante to be doing him a very great injury. He said nothing, but he approached the smith's shop, there where he had many irons with which he plied his trade; and Dante took the hammer and flung it into the street, he took the pincers and threw them into the street, he took the scales and threw them into the street, and thus he threw out many of the tools. The smith, turning upon him with a threatening gesture, cried, "What the devil are you doing? Are you mad?"

Dante asked him, "What are you doing?"

"I am doing my own business," answered the smith, "and you are spoiling my tools, throwing them into the street."



Profile portrait of Dante, by Sandro Botticelli

Said the smith, "What am I spoiling of yours?"

Dante answered: "You are singing out of my book, and are not singing it as I wrote it; I have do other trade but this, and you are spoiling it for me."

The smith was taken aback, and, knowing not what to reply, he gathered his things together and returned to his work. And now if he wishes to sing, he sings Tristan or Lancelot and leaves Dante alone. Then Dante went to the executor, where he had been sent. And having come to the executor he thought to himself how that the knight of the Adimari, who had prayed his assistance, was a haughty and disagreeable youth, who when he went about the city and especially upon horseback, went with his legs so stuck out that he occupied all the street, if it were not very wide, in such a manner that those who passed by him were forced to polish the points of his shoes; and Dante, who saw everything, had always been greatly displeased.

So he said to the executor, "You have before your Court such a knight for such a fault; I recommend him to your mercy, although his manners are so bad that he deserves a greater punishment, and I think that usurping what he does from the public is a very grave fault."

Dante spoke not to deaf ears, for the executor asked what it was that he usurped from the public, Dante answered:

"When he rides about the city on horseback he goes with his legs so stuck out, that whoever meets him is compelled to turn back and cannot pursue his way."

Said the executor, "And does this seem a joke to you? It is a worse offence than the other."

"Now listen," said Dante. "I am his neighbour, and I recommend him to your mercy."

And he returned to his house, and there the knight asked him how the matter stood, Dante said, "He gave me a good answer." After a few days the knight was summoned to justify himself for that of which he was accused. He appeared, and the first accusation having been read to him, the judge caused the second to be read to him also, concerning the manner in which he rode. The knight, hearing his punishment doubled, said to himself, "Much have I gained for whereas by the coming of Dante I thought to be absolved, I find I shall be doubly condemned."

Having justified himself for this accusation, he returned to his house, and meeting Dante, he said, "By my faith, you have served me well, for, before you went to him, the executor thought to condemn me for one thing only, but since you were there he is desirous of condemning me for two." And in great anger against Dante, he continued: "If he does condemn me I am able to pay, and when the time comes I will reward him who has been the cause of this."

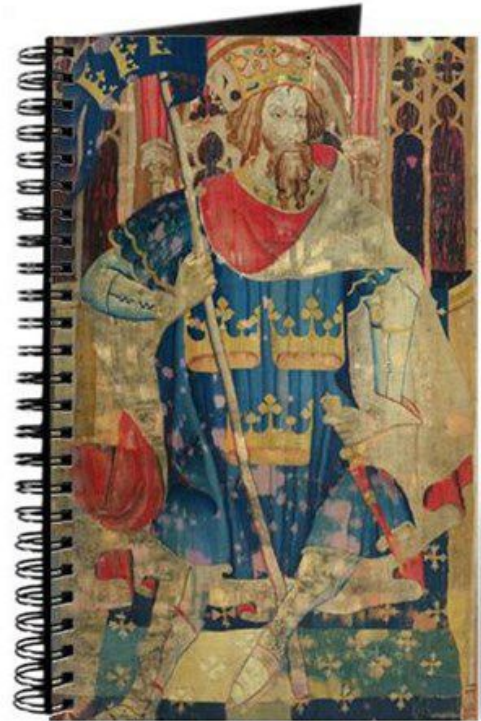
Dante replied, "I asked mercy for you so earnestly that, if you had been my own son, I could not have done more; if the executor acts otherwise, I am not the cause of it."

The knight shook his head and departed to his house. A few days afterwards he was condemned to pay a fine of a thousand lire for the first offence, and another thousand for his riding; wherefore he could never forgive the injury, neither he nor any of the house of Adimari.

And for this, being the principal reason, Dante was expelled from Florence a little time afterwards, as belonging to the White Party; and he died in exile, in the city of Ravenna, to the shame of his own town.

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