

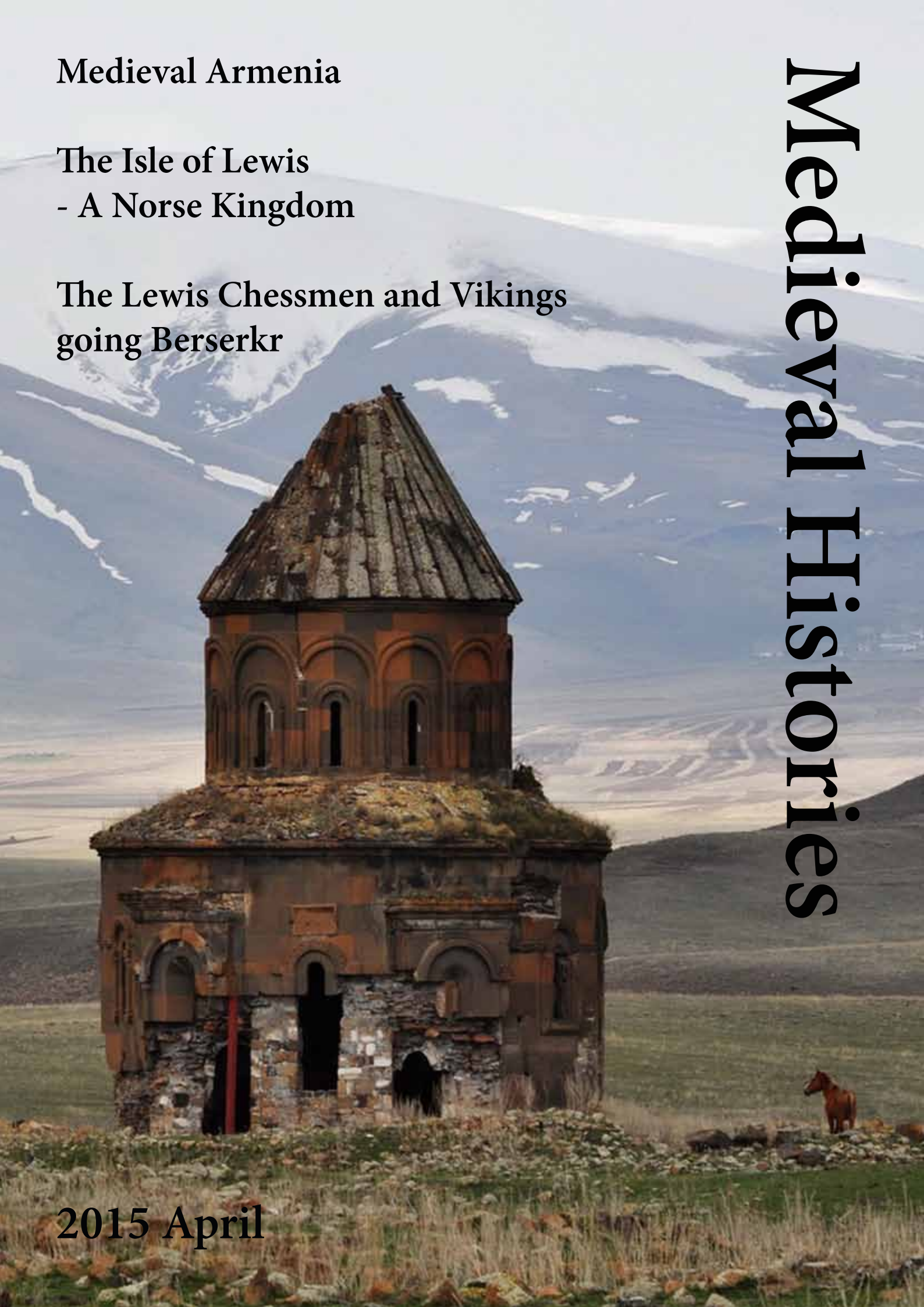
Medieval Armenia

**The Isle of Lewis
- A Norse Kingdom**

**The Lewis Chessmen and Vikings
going Berserkr**

Medieval Histories

2015 April



Medieval Histories

Magazine about our Medieval Heritage & History

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Medieval Histories

News about our
Medieval Heritage &History

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Photo (frontpage):

The Armenian church in Ani in Eastern Turkey is one of a few monuments standing, keeping the memory alive of a city which in its heyday was home to more than 100.000 Armenians
© Peopleofar



One of the many ruined Armenian churches in present day Turkey. This one from the 12th century is hidden in a forested area of Dilijan National Park. The church is currently in ruins and is difficult to find - onloved and forgotten by nearly all. © Peopleofar

Medieval Armenia

Today the world remembers the 100-year anniversary of the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians, who died as the result of a horrible massacre. We should also remember the awful cultural destruction, which followed in its wake

Not quite so awful as the genocide proper, but also of world-historical importance, was the accompanied destruction of the Armenian heritage: churches, manuscripts, art. Most of the properties formerly belonging to Armenians were confiscated by the Turkish government and turned into military posts, hospitals, schools and prisons. After the genocide at least 600 place-names were changed into Turkish.

More specifically churches were given over to Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and Greece, and turned into Mosques. The legal justification for the seizures was the law of 'Law of Abandoned Properties', which legalized the confiscation of Armenian property if the owner did not return.

Thus, in 1914 the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul controlled 2549 religious sites, amongst which were 200 monasteries and 1600 churches. In 1974 it was estimated by UNESCO that of 913 registered monuments in Eastern Turkey only 21% were still in existence, although demanding repairs. The rest had either vanished or lay in ruins.

It has to be remembered that very many of these monuments were very ancient foundations from the earliest days of Christianity. Armenian Christianity traces its roots back to the apostolic endeavour of the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus. Whatever the actual truth in this: it is a fact that the Armenian Church was the first to be officially adopted as a State church. This happened in AD 301.

Churches and Monasteries - a few of the more famous of the destroyed



The Holy Arakelots Monastery

was founded in the 4th century by one of the founding fathers of the ancient Armenian Church, Gregory the Illuminator. In 1915 the monastery was attacked and looted and the last inhabitants were murdered. In 1960 it was blown up by a local Turkish administrator.



The Cathedral of Kars

or the Holy Apostles Church was built in the 10th century. After the genocide the church was confiscated by the Turkish State. In the 60s and 70s it was used as a museum. In 1998 however, it was turned into a mosque.



Varagavank Monastery

founded in the early 11th century is today in ruins; it ceased to function in 1915, but was not demolished until 1951. Today, the remains of the vast complex are used as a stable.



The Saint Karapet Monastery

in the Taron province, also founded by Gregory the Illuminator. It was blown up by the Turkish army and today nothing remains except a few shapeless ruins.

Manuscripts

T'oros Roslin Armenian illuminator google art project At the beginning of WWI the largest collection of Armenian manuscripts was kept in the Cathedral of Holy Echmiadzin. In February 1915, 4.660 manuscripts plus other valuables were sent to Moscow. Others were saved during the next months. However, it is estimated that more than 10.000 medieval manuscripts were destroyed.

The collection from Echmiadzin constitutes the core of the 11.000 Armenian manuscripts currently kept at the national museum in Yerevan at the Matanadaran. Some of the treasures in this collection dates to the 5th century: Another treasure is the Homilies of Mush, which measures 55.3 x 70.5 cm and weighs 27.2 kilos. It was written in 1200 -1202. The Mashtots Matenadaran Ancient Manuscripts Collection was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme Register in 1997 in recognition of its world significance



Toros Roslin (circa 1210–1270) was the most prominent Armenian manuscript illuminator in the High Middle Ages. Canon Table from 1255. Part Of Google Art Project.

Medieval Illuminated Armenian Bible from 1261 © Peopleofar

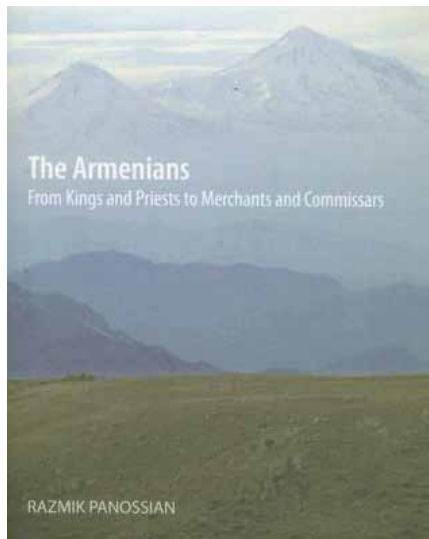


Books about Medieval Armenia:

The Armenians:

From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars

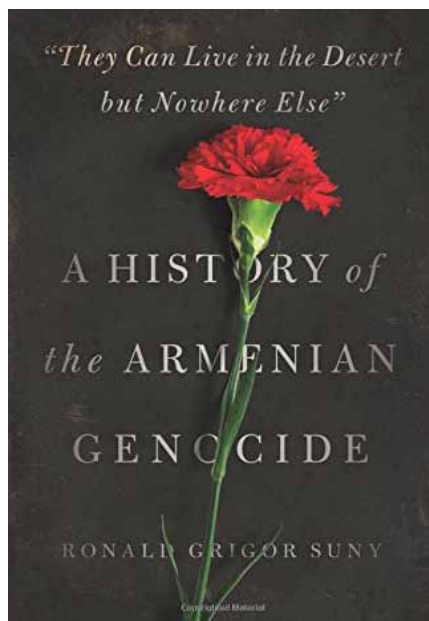
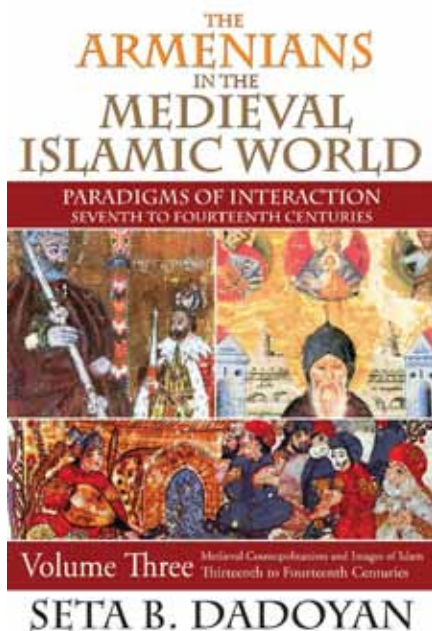
by Razmik Panossian
Columbia University Press
2015



The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World:

Medieval Cosmopolitanism and Images of Islam

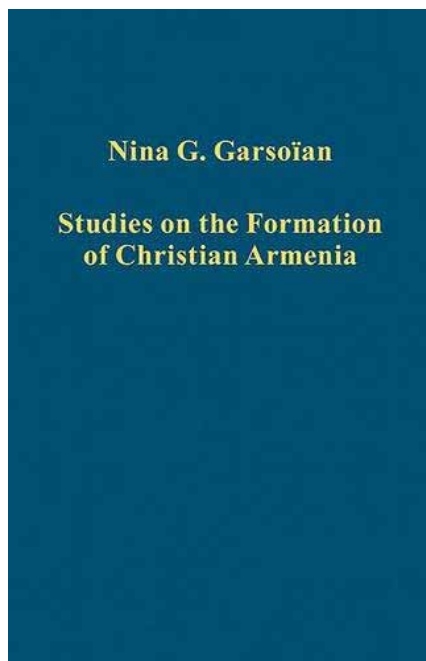
by Seta B Dadoyan
Transaction Publishers 2012



“They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else”:

A History of the Armenian Genocide

by Ronald Grigor Suny
Princeton University Press
2015



Church and Culture in Early Medieval Armenia

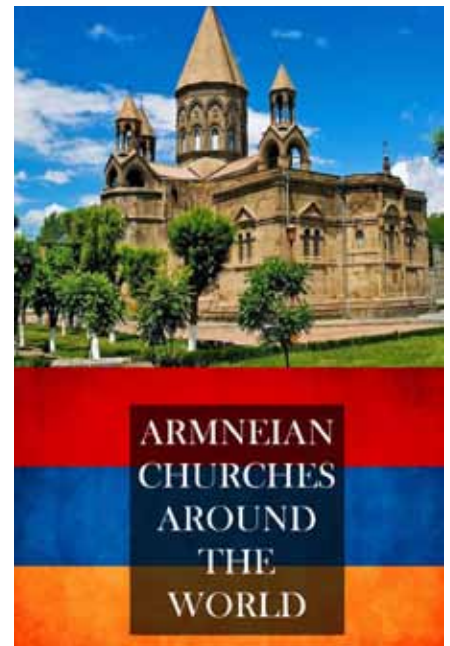
by Nina G. Garsoïan
Ashgate 1999

Armenian Churches

Around The World

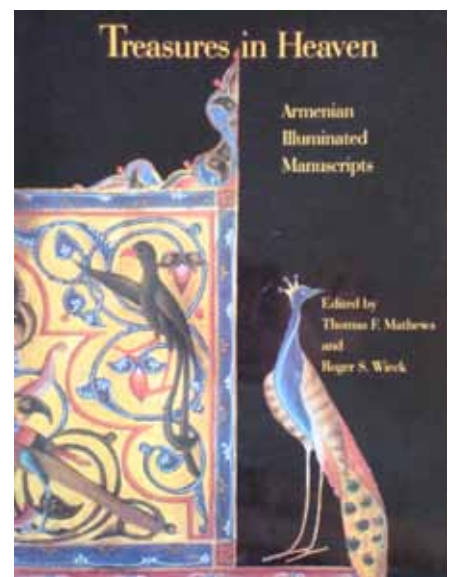
Nver Antonyan (Author),
Arman Antonyan (Editor)
Kindle Edition of a Google
translated self-published
guidebook from Armenia.

Treasures in Heaven:



Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts

by Thomas F. Mathews
Princeton University Press
1994





Chessmen Returns to the Isle of Lewis

The Lewis Chessmen from the 12th century are among some of the most iconic images of both the Isle of Lewis and the Norse heritage of the British Isles. This summer, six of them will find a new home, near the sand dunes, where they were hidden more than 800 years ago.

The Lewis Chessmen were found in 1831, probably in a small stone chamber or – box, built for safekeeping in the sand

dunes at Uig. Until now the collection has been split between the British Museum and the National Museum of Scotland.

With 82 pieces in the British Museum and only 11 in Edinburgh feelings do sometimes run high. Many Scots is of the opinion they should be repatriated!

Now, however, six of them will go on a long-term loan to the Isle of Lewis as a



token of the will to boost the important tourism economy in the Outer Hebrides.

New Museum

Come summer a new museum and archive will open on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides to house the returning 'Vikings'. Located in a modern purpose built extension to the restored Lews Castle, the future museum in Stornoway will open in the summer of 2015. The museum is planned to include exciting new galleries, which will look at the stories of the Islands and Islanders. Visitors will be able to

- discover how the distinctiveness of the Outer Hebrides is shaped by a unique combination of land, sea and people
- hear details about different people's lives; the diversity of experience, opinion and perception of living life on an Island.
- examine how people have lived and

worked from the earliest times to the present day, how their culture is expressed through the Gaelic language, religion and community life.

The plan is to create a 21st Century museum and archive with activity and event spaces, and better facilities for schools. A dedicated research space will invite visitors to study the collections and archive records, while a shop and café plus 600 acres of beautiful Castle Grounds will provide the setting for a great day out for all the family.

The Lews Castle Hotel

At the same time plans have been underway to turn the restored Lews castle into a luxury hotel. However, the response from the market has been tepid and a year ago it was announced that the castle (from the 19th century) will instead be turned into a series of units for self-catering.



The Vikings on The Isle of Lewis

The history of the Vikings in Lewis is an amazing story of how a Pictish life-world changed when Norse immigrants arrived

Until the 9th century The Isle of Lewis was inhabited by Scots and Picts, who brought their language – Gaelic – to the island at the beginning of the first millennium. However, in the period between the 8th and 9th centuries Norse Vikings arrived, literally changing the material culture and presumably also the general way of life and life-world in the island.[1]

One of the places, where this have been demonstrated vividly is Bostadh on the north western tip of the Great Bernera Island, which is only linked to Lewis by a small bridge. ‘Bostadh’ is of course a Viking name, and when archaeologists began digging in 1993 after a storm had

laid some dunes bare, it was expected they would find the remains of a Norse settlement. However, it was what lay underneath, which really helped to make the place famous.

Beneath the Norse settlement they found the remains of eight Pictish, or Iron Age houses from AD 500 -700, built in the traditional ‘jelly bean’ or eight-shaped form. As seen from above such a structure would consist of a large circular structure linked to a smaller circular projection by an internal doorway. It is believed that the larger area was for living, while the smaller area was for storage.

What made these houses so spectacular were that the contents of the huts had been perfectly preserved in the sand making it possible to reconstruct the reality of their daily life. It appeared that their pri-

mary nourishment had come from cattle and very young lambs plus large amounts of shell-fish and saithe, a fish, which can be found close to the shore, particularly in rocky areas. To this should be added the occasional hunted prey and some grain. Apart from that a number of artefacts were discovered in the hubris, like bone pins, antler Combs. Today an Iron Age house has been constructed on site.

The Norse

The map shows the location of Bostadh and - perhaps - its importance for Viking Ships to be able to stock up with victuals somewhere on the isle of Lewis if taking the outer route around Scotland

What really makes the place so astounding, though, is the combination of these finds with those on top, dated from the Norse Period (ca. 800 - 900). On top of the iron-age huts were the remains of a short-lived rectilinear house – a Norse

Sheep from bernara. It has been estimated that the raising of sheep grew to disproportionate heights in Viking Norway. The Vikings needed enormous amounts of wool for sails.



The map shows the location of Bostadh and - perhaps - its importance for Viking Ships to be able to stock up with victuals somewhere on the Isle of Lewis if taking the outer route around Scotland

Long-House - similar to those excavated elsewhere on Viking age Scandinavia. The large midden hid fragments of Norwegian soapstone bowls as well as domestic waste witnessing to a changed lifestyle.

At that time people in Bostadh began to live off the catch from a new kind of deep-see fishing, obviously carried out from boats. Not only bones from cod and hake but also heering were found. It is speculated that part of these catches must have been dried and perhaps even bartered or traded. Fishing from ashore you rarely catch more than the meal of the day. Fishing off-shore and with nets you might land huge catches. It must have taken considerable energy and labour to process such amounts of fish (hanging, drying, salting). It has been speculated that Bostedh in the early Viking period was a convenient harbour and trading-post for Viking ships passing by on their way to Ireland. Here

they might be supplied with dry cod, beef jerk and perhaps oat- or barley biscuits on their way down South. A delicatessen might even be deer-jerk produced from the large finds of red deer carcasses, which were mixed into the midden. Careful analysis of the remains of red deer have shown surplus hindquarters at Bostadh signalling that trade with parts of red deer took place on the Great Bernara Island. It has even been proposed that the Vikings erected a barrier between the Bernara Island and the rest of Lewis in order to prohibit the deer to swim across the shallow sound, making it possible to manage the population. [2]

Further we know that the agricultural production at the farm became both more intensive and characterised by the introduction of new crops. Not only barley and oats were cultivated now, but also rye and flax.

To this should be added large herds of cattle, goats and sheep, with calves being killed off at a young age. Apparently dairy played an important part (hence the import of Norwegian soap-stone bowls). Further, lambs, were no longer killed as sucklings, but allowed to mature in order to produce fleeces and wool. Studies of place-names have also demonstrated that in all likelihood some kind of seasonal

The traditional form of houses on the Isle of Lewis are blackhouses built of stones or stacked peat. The same type of building can be found in Iceland, The Faroes and the Northern Isles. It is generally believed - though not proven - that the blackhouses are descendant of the viking building traditions. Na Gearrannan, Black House Village in the western part of the Isle of Lewis



movement to summer shielings was practised at this time.

All this was probably part of the overall change in the orientation towards the sea. Long-distance ships need sails, and Viking-sails ate up enormous amounts of wool and/or flax. It is often speculated that flax was grown to produce linen or linseed oil. However, it is more probable that it played a significant role in the making of sails.

By carefully piecing together the information from Bostadh with results from other excavations (Loch na Beirgh) on Lewis, and reading it all in the light of the stories told about Hebrideans in the Norse sagas and poetry, the outline of a new world emerges characterised by an arable economy geared to sheep-rearing, paired with a deep dependence upon the sea. No wonder, boats, ships, and sails fostered a combined set of important cultural icons in this new world, which was obviously geared towards sea-faring and deep-sea fishing in a way, which the Iron-age Scots and Picts had never been.

It is unfortunate that Bostadh only offers a reconstruction of the iron-age huts but not the later Viking house(s). It would be nice to “see” the difference in the landscape.

NOTES:

[1] An Ethnic Enigma - Norse, Pict and Gael in the Western Isles

By Andrew Jennings and Arne Kruse

In: In: Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic. Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress, Tórshavn, 19-30 July 2001. Ed. Andras Mortensen and Símun V. Arge. *Annales Societatis Scientiarum Færoensis Supplementum XLIV*. Tórshavn 2005, p. 284 - 96

[2] Aspects of economy and environment of north west Lewis in the first millennium AD : the non-marine faunal evidence from Bostadh and Beirgh considered within the framework of north Atlantic Scotland

By Jennifer E. Thoms

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD at the Department of Archaeology, University of Edinburgh 2003



READ MORE:

Languages, Myths and Finds

“The Vikings in Lewis” is vol. 2 of a series produced by a project at Nottingham University, dedicated to explore Viking heritage in historically significant areas of the British Isles and Ireland and inspire to “translate” Norse and Viking cultures into modern day. The booklet on The Vikings in Lewis is intended to act as background for the new museum. The booklets can be downloaded or bought at www.languagesmythsfinds.ac.uk

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Ed. by Brittany Schorn and Judy Quinn

Series: Languages, Myths and Finds, Vol. 2.

Centre for the Study of the Viking Age, University of Nottingham 2014

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The Lordship of the Isles

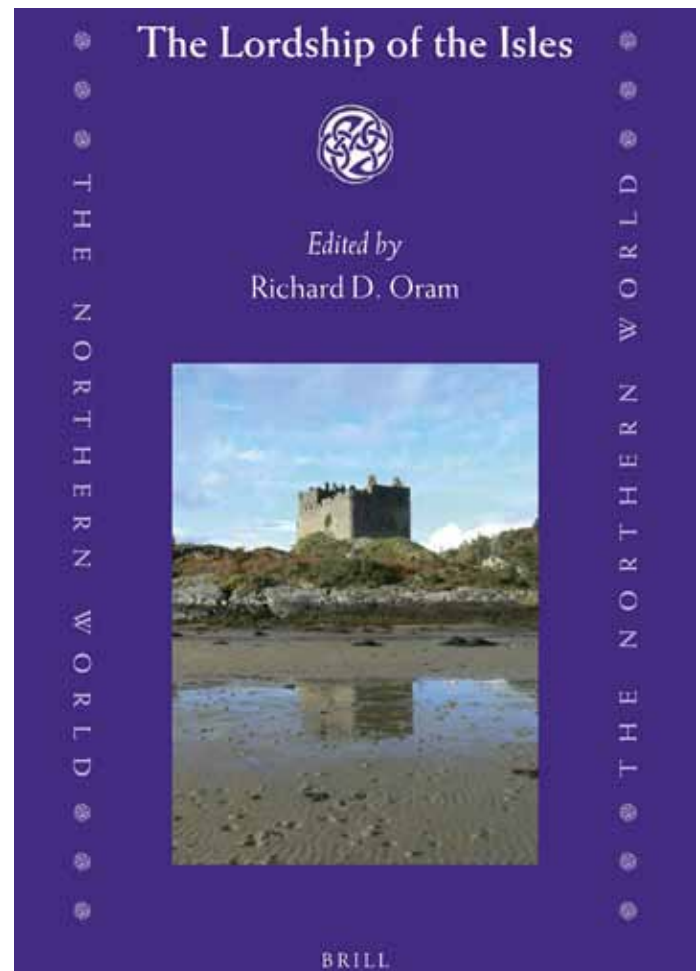
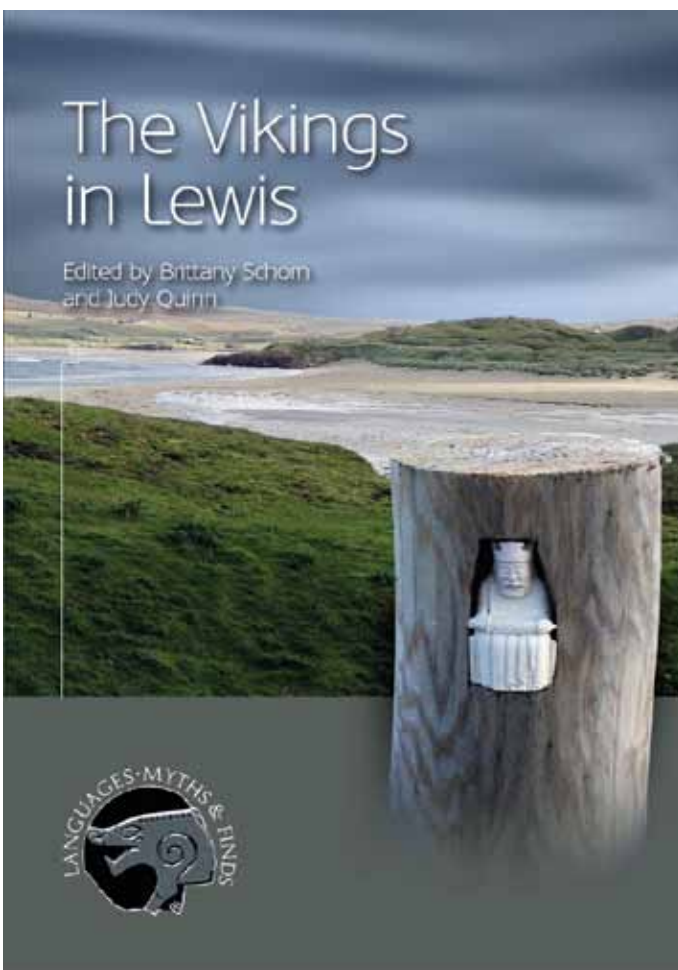
(Northern World)

by Richard D. Oram (Editor)

Brill 2014

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BOOK REVIEW:

The Lewis Chessmen. New Perspectives

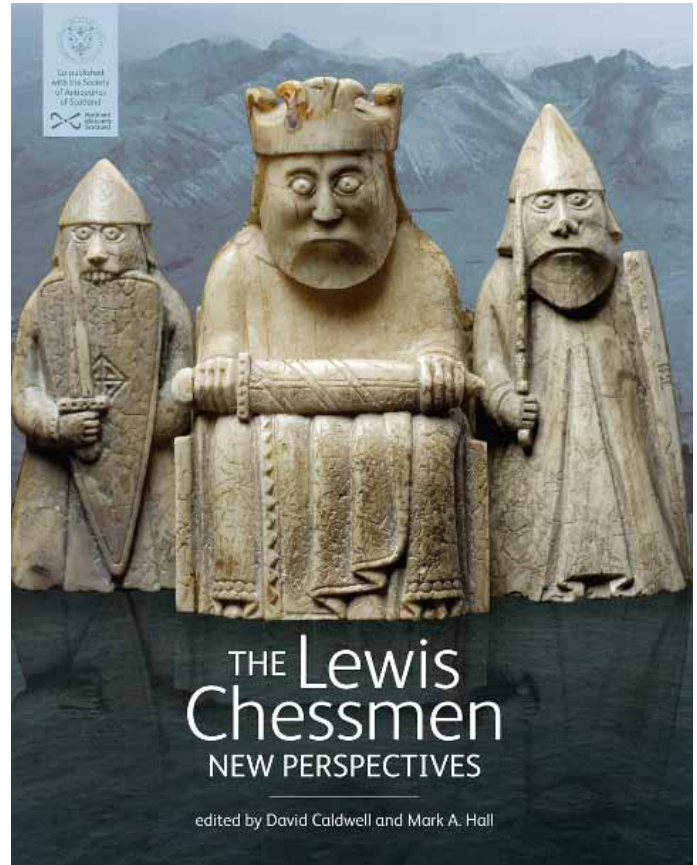
The Lewis Chessmen. New Perspectives
Ed. By David H. Caldwell and Mark A. Hall
National Museum of Scotland 2014
ISBN: 9781905267859

The Lewis Chessmen belong to a group of archaeological objects, which nearly everyone knows and can identify by sight. 78 pieces in all, they were miraculously found in 1831 on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. A later report tells that they were found hidden in a shallow stone built box in a sand dune right off the coast together with 14 tablemen and a belt buckle. A study of the style reveals that they were probably carved sometime between 1150-1200.

We know them of course so well because they are used in every single publication about Vikings, we can think of. In a sense they have defined our idea of what vikings looked like – kings, queens, thrones, crowns, shields, berserkers, bishops and warders. It seems we cannot stop looking at these little marvels!

It stands to reason that the Lewis Chessmen since they were found have been studied from all angles and published in very many contexts. However, apart from pamphlets no major book has until now been devoted to the tiny figures. However, a recent book published by The National Museum of Scotland in conjunction with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland amends this.

The book is a collection of articles stem-



ming from a conference held at the national Museum in Scotland in 2010 in connection with the exhibition there of the total collection (some pieces are held at the British Museum and were on loan for the occasion). However, this is not a mere collection of articles. It is in fact a very well-edited presentation of the Chessmen and their material, artistic and historical context.

In the first section we get a very detailed presentation of the chess pieces and their physical appearance. By studying for instance their visual expressions it is possible to determine that at least five artists might have been involved. But we also get details about the fact that the chess-pieces

were probably partly painted. And we get information about aspects of the life-world, in which the chessmen were understood – where did the idea of the berserkers stem from and what might we learn from the pieces about queens and their roles. Not least the question is raised, how we should understand the different gestures of the figurative pieces.

The second section is devoted to recovering the political and geographical context: the Kingdom of the Isles, Manx, Norway, Iceland and the sea world of the chessmen in which they were made. Along the way, we also get a fine introduction to Walrus hunting and the ivory trade in the North Atlantic. Not least the enigmatic nature of the Kingdom of the Isles and the life-world of the chessmen is explored. An understanding of both the hoard and the Kingdom seems to be inextricably interlinked, writes Hall and Caldwell in the introduction.

The third section touches more specifically on the context of gaming. What was the cultural value of such chessmen, who might have bought them (or had them gifted), how was the game of chess played, how does it relate to the 'hnefattafl' (the Icelandic game) and finally what role did games play in Old Norse-Icelandic fiction and cultural context. In a particularly rewarding essay Heather Pulliam makes the point that the Lewis Chessmen figuratively makes it very easy for the player to identify with the figure in question. Compared to the Chess-pieces of Charlemagne, where

the king is wrapped in his castle and with flanking attendants, the thrones of the Lewis kings are nearly invisible, exposing them as 'persons' more than 'incumbents of royal offices'.

This is a splendid collection. It invites the reader to delve into the laboratory of the learned archaeologists and historians, trying to wring as much information out of every detail as possible. And the devil really lies in the detail here. But it also presents us with sketches to a better understanding of the context, in which the Lewis Men were meant to be paraded, admired and played with.

Although the published volume does not present us with a fully-rounded presentation of the Lewis men, it does present us with a collection of articles, which as bits and pieces bring our knowledge of the chessmen singularly forward. This is really a worth-while read.

Karen Schousboe

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David H Caldwell was formerly Keeper of two departments in National Museums Scotland – Scotland and Europe, and Archaeology.

Mark A Hall is History Officer for Perth Museum and Art Gallery, where he is principally responsible for the curation of the archaeology collections.





Going Berserkr

We all know what a Viking is: a bare-breasted colossal man of Nordic descent with long flaxen hair, plaited beard and suffering from hirsutism. Added to this should be his filed teeth, perhaps coloured blue, which he bares in a ferocious grin, while banging his mighty sword on his round red-painted shield decorated with fiery dragons. Oh, yes and we nearly forgot his helmet with its horns...

Free fantasy, most scholars will claim! And they are right: we don't actually know what a typical Viking looked like, when he jumped from his ship in the 10th century, perhaps ready to pillage and conquer a peaceful English countryside.

Physical stature

But we do in fact know something about a group of Vikings, which were executed en

masse in the beginning of the first millennium near Ridgeway Hill [1]. And step-by-step we are getting closer to an actual physical sense of these people.

The men, representing up to 54 individuals, had been summarily executed between AD 970 -1025 by their captors, using swords to hack off their heads. Often this had been done in a messy way, and de-

A Boatload of Vikings executed at Ridgeway Hill



fence wounds were found in a number of instances. One man had probably tried to catch the sword with his hands, which had been cut off. Perhaps the men were naked, when executed. At least no remains of clothing, jewellery or weapons were found in the grave, into which they had been brutally slung soon after their execution.

Chemical analysis of their teeth later suggested that none of the men were from Britain, but originated in the Arctic or sub-arctic regions of Scandinavia [1].

Examinations of the bones indicated that most men were 18 to 25 years old, with the youngest in his mid-teens, while the oldest man was over 50. Curiously enough, many of the individuals had suffered from infections and physical impairments; at the same time, there were not many signs of prior war wounds on the skeletons. One man, in particular, must have suffered ex-

cessive pain due to osteomyelitis, a chronic bone infection – involving his thighbone. This bone was twice the size of a normal thighbone and had openings, which would have oozed smelly pus during his life.

Other individuals had suspected brucellosis, a highly contagious infectious disease that is passed from animals to humans, either by the ingestion of unsterilised milk or meat or by coming into close contact with secretions from infected animals. This may cause a series of chronic symptoms associated with chronic diarrhea, arthralgia and myalgia, but also impaired vision, arthritis and anemia. It can be highly debilitating. All this pointed to the group of men being no more than peasants.

However, several of the individuals had had their teeth filed in order to be able to parade a groovy grin with painted rills, definitely associated with adult males

Filed teeth of a Viking. Perhaps the nickname of Harold Bluetooth referred to such a wellgroomed look. (Although the epithet 'Bluetooth' is mentioned in a late source from 1140, nearly 200 years after his death. Photo: Historiska Museet i Stockholm





Victims of the massacre of St. Brice's Day? Mass-grave in Oxford.

identified as Viking warriors. More than 90 similar filings have been found on Scandinavian skeletons in the last decade, dating from 750 – 1100 [2]. All stemmed from adult men, some of which were associated with weapons and violence. However, the later examples from the city of Sigtuna were found in cemeteries with less prestigious burials. (Might this be the result of a fashion petering out at this late stage amongst the peasants?)

Viking Mass Grave in Oxford

The remains of the men from Ridgeway were exhibited in London at the British Museum as part of the Viking exhibition last year. Here they were presented as Viking warriors, perhaps executed in Dorset after an unsuccessful raid. However, were they really warriors? Or just a sorry bunch

of Scandinavian immigrants caught up in the ethnic cleansing on St. Brice's Day in 1002?

This has been claimed as the most likely explanation behind the execution or brutal slaughter of another group of skeletons found in 2008 at St. Johns College in Oxford [3].

This burial contained the remains of up to 37 males, 16 – 25 years old plus two undetermined youngsters. These skeletons carried a lot of perimortem wounds many consistent with having been inflicted to the back, possibly during flight. Some of the bones had been charred by fire. This caused the archaeologists to (tentatively) identify the dead individuals as victims of the St. Brice's Massacre 13th November 1002, known from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and a charter dated to the 7th of December 1004 in which King Aethelred the Unready granted means for the rebuilding of St. Frideswide's church in Oxford, which had been destroyed in the uprising. In the charter it says:

'For it is fully agreed that to all dwelling in this country it will be known that, since a decree was sent out by me with the counsel of my leading men and magnates, to the effect that all the Danes who had sprung up in this island, sprouting like cockle amongst the wheat, were to be destroyed by most just extermination, and thus this decree was put into effect even as far as death, those Danes who dwelt in the aforementioned town, striving to escape death, entered the sanctuary of Christ, having broken by force the doors and bolts, and resolved to make refuge and defence for themselves therein against the people of the town and the suburbs; but when all the people in pursuit strove, forced by necessity, to drive them out, and could not,

they set fire to the planks and burnt, as it seems, this church with its ornaments and its books. Afterwards, with God's aid, it was renewed by me'. (Anglo-Saxon Charter S909 as quoted in [4] p. 83 – 84)

As well as the group from Ridgeway, the skeletons found at St. Johns were submitted to a detailed isotopic analysis of the bones as well as the dental enamel. However, the results of these studies were more ambiguous. The diet seems to have been more "Scandinavian" (more fish) and the dental enamel might indicate childhoods spent in Scandinavia. But only just so! Added to this should be the radiocarbon determination, which indicates a date somewhat earlier than the events in 1002 pointing to an earlier event for the massacre. However, this is counterbalanced by the "fish-diet", which the skeletons witnessed to and which tends to shift the radiocarbon-dating somewhat back in time. Anyway, anyone who has worked with this technique, knows its limitations, when it comes to exact dating. The scientists publishing the results are careful not to conclude more than tentatively.

However, there is more evidence: these men were carrying healed wounds inflicted upon them at an earlier time; further they were robust and taller than average.

Hence – probably – real "Vikings" were found at St. John's College. And, yes: the people from the mass-grave in St. Johns may indeed have been (some of) the victims of the massacre of St. Brice's.

Wild and Ferocious Berserkr

Bare-breasted and suffering from hirsutism? Most scholars believe this myth was fostered by the legend of the berserkr-



Mask on Runic Stone from Aarhus, Denmark. The inscription translates like this: "Gunulv and Øgot and Aslak and Rolf raised this stone after their brother in arms, Ful. He found death... when kings were fighting" (GunnulfR ok Ógotr/Óðgotr ok ĀslākR ok RōlfR rēsþu stēn þannsi æftiR Fūl, fēlaga sinn, eR varð ... dǫðr, þā kunungaR barðusk.) Dated to ca. 970 - 1020. DK nr.: Mjy 77. Source: www.runer.dk

ers as documented in skaldic verses, art and other texts.

The central text here is of course the description of the berserkr in Haraldskvæði, a skaldic poem believed to be composed in the late 9th century in honour of Harold Finehair by the Norwegian skald, Þorbjörn

Hornklofi. Berserkir are mentioned three times in the poem.

Here are verses 20 – 21: [5]

At berserkja reiðu vilk spyrja,
bergir hræsævar,
hversu es fengit
þeims í folk vaða
vígðjörfum verum?

Ulfheðnar heita,
þeirs í orrostum
blóðgar randir bera;
vigrar rjóða,
es til vígs koma;
þeim's þar sýst saman;
áræðismönnum einum
hykk þar undir felisk
skyli sá enn skilvísi,
þeim's í skjöld hoggva

A translation might go something like this:

I'll ask of the berserks, you tasters of blood,

Those intrepid heroes, how are they treated,
Those who wade out into battle?
Wolf-skinned they are called. In battle
They bear bloody shields.
Red with blood are their spears when they
come to fight.
They form a closed group.
The prince in his wisdom puts trust in
such men
Who hack through enemy shields

Of special interest in this connection is of course the etymology of the word berserks – ON berserkr. Did it refer to men fighting naked [berr] or dressed in the skin of a bear [*ber-]?

According to Snorri Sturluson (writing 300 years later) they fought naked, but scholarly disputes have raged since the 1860s as to whether they were rather dressed in the skins of animals (bears and wolfs, hence wolf-skinned or Ulfheðnar). Whatever their dress, it seems they were

The Toroslunda matrices made of bronze were found in Björnhovda, Öland. It is believed they date from 7th century. The understanding of the myths retold in the matrices is of course very complex. Some have identified the naked man to the left with Tyr tying up Fenris. Photo: Wikipedia





These two matrices from Toroslunda have been identified. Laserinvestigations of the first, has shown that the man is oneeyed. This is obviously a birdhorned Odin, corresponding to the same figure seen on the press-blich on the helmet from Sutton-Hoo. Which correspond to the helmet the two warriors on the second matrice are wearing. Photo: Wikipedia

bent on what even today is considered going berserkr, fara berserkir, a wild, uncontrollable act of violence perhaps induced by drugs and often described as a state of mind, where the man is possessed by a wild animal; hence the connection between being a beserkr and being shape-shifted.

In a recent magisterial dissertation, Vincent Samsom, has presented a state-of-the-art overview of “Les Berserkir”, which he (with Dumézil) calls Les Guerriers-Fauves (the feral fighters). In this work he does not limit himself to an analysis of the well-known texts from the Icelandic corpus. He also presents the archaeological and art-historical evidence – metal objects, animal masques and runic epigraphy.

His conclusion is that the berserkr’s were known from early migration period, from the 5th to the 7th century, as witnessed by the metallic matrixes from Toroslunda on Öland, the plates from the helmet from Sutton Hoo and Valsgårde, a relief from a scabbard from Gutenstein and the proces-

sion shown on the tapestry from Oseberg. . Added to this should be the archaeological finds of filtered masks from the harbour of Haithabau.

Torslunda from Öland ca 600 AD

Or perhaps, as is described in the story about the battle at Stiklestad in 1030, where Snorri tells us about a certain þórir hundr (Thorir the dog) who led an army of largely pagan peasants. Amongst these, þórir chose eleven companions, who were outfitted in magical coats of reindeer-skin, making them invincible to all weapons. Samsom considers this the last stand of the berserks. Further it is his conclusion that the phenomena can only be understood as part of the elite culture connected to the concept of comitatus (Tacitus), trustis (Merovingian) or gefolgschaft (Germanic).

Horns

The observant reader has already detected

one more interesting feature about the dancing Berserkr in the die from Torslunda: he is wearing a helmet with horns.

There is no doubt that Vikings carried helmets, but only three have so far been found. And only one of these is less than fragmentary: the Gjermundbu helmet from Norway, which was found in a chieftain's grave and which has been dated to AD 970. This helmet is one of the absolute highlights in the present Viking-exhibition in British Museum 2014. It was found together with 85 fragments of a chain mail shirt, a sword decorated in Jelling-style, two spearheads, two axes, fragments of four shield bosses, two stirrups, two spurs, five bridles, eight arrowheads, other riding gear plus a rattle, fish hooks, a pair of shears, knives a tinder-box and metal buckles from a belt. The artefacts in the

grave were found packed in an iron kettle next to the cremated remnants.

This unique find of a helmet has made most archaeologists speculate that the helmets of the Vikings were probably more often than not made of leather; thus they may have perished in the excavated Viking-burials. Another explanation, however, might be that helmets were precious heirlooms and passed on to the descendants of the dead warrior. Whatever the explanation, nearly half of all illustrations on picture-stones do show Vikings with helmets. However, only very early depictions of Northmen, show them with horns attached, as is the case on the Torslunda matrix from 600 AD

However there is one illustration of impeccable Viking-pedigree, which shows a

Oseberg Tapestry - the drawing made at the time of the excavation. The Oseberg ship has been dendro-chronologically dated to 834 AD. The man with the helmet can be seen on the upper left corner.





*The Gjermundby helmet from AD 970, Norway.
Soruce; Wikipedia*

horned helmet: The Oseberg tapestry from around AD 834 of which fragments were found in the famous boat-grave, now exhibited at Bygdøy in Oslo. These fragments are believed to show a religious ceremonial procession. One of the participants, dressed in a tight-fitting tunic and baggy trousers is holding a sword in his left hand and carries a horned helmet!

Normally this man is interpreted as a shaman leading a religious procession, but who really knows? Perhaps he really was a Viking going berserk? Perhaps Vikings occasionally did wear helmets with horns?

Fascination

Without doubt there is a lot we shall never know about the Northmen who played such a dominant role in 9th – 11th century Europe. However, little by little careful exploration of old evidence and archaeological excavations of new sites grant us a better understanding of the life and legends of these enigmatic people, who succeeded in carving out a new world for themselves in the Northern hemisphere.

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[6] *Les Berserkir. Les guerriers-fauves dans la Scandinavie ancienne, de l'Âge de Vendel aux Vikings (Vie – Xie siècle)*.

By Vincent Samson

Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2011.

NEW RESEARCH:



People demonstrating against the crisis in Marquês da Fronteira Avenue. In 2013 the 'Association to Combat Job Insecurity' and the 'Inflexible Precarious Workers' associations called on a group of artists to decorate the city with murals. Perhaps the recent crisis in Portugal is nothing but a very long term consequence of the lack of male heirs of the Portuguese kings in the 16th century?

Lack of Medieval Male Heirs has Modern Impact

Medieval State Building and Contemporary European Development

By Avidit Acharya and Alexander Lee
Stanford University 2015
Unpublished Paper

In the Middle Ages a shortage of male heirs led to conflict and instability which led to persistently weaker institutions as well as persistently weaker development outcomes. The amazing discovery is, that such medieval periods of instability are reflected in modern GDP. One such example

is Portugal, where the House of Avis failed to produce any male heirs in the period after 1500. This led to Portugal's annexation by the King of Spain (the female-line-heir). Afterwards followed a long period of absentee rule (1580 – 1640), which is generally associated with the beginning of the Portuguese decline; the results of which can still be seen today (in comparison to Spain).

The amazing result of the work of Avidit Acharya and Alexander Lee is, that this

case is not singular. In fact, hard-core statistics show that such “events” are reflected in modern-day economic performance in several European regions.

ABSTRACT:

In 1578 the king of Portugal died without male issue, and his uncle, a cardinal with the name of Henry - was the last of the House of Aviz. He tried to be allowed to renounce his clerical status to sire an heir, but the Pope - inspired by the Spanish King Ferdinand II - opposed the plan. The result was a kingdom ruled in absentia, sowing the seed for a long-term decline of the economy of Portugal. He was later called ‘Henry the Chaste’.

The development of modern state institutions is a major legacy of the medieval period in Europe. Following existing arguments about the importance of the state for development, Avidit Acharya and Alexander Lee have conjectured a link between the success or failure of medieval state building projects and contemporary development.

To substantiate this conjecture in the face of empirical challenges, they have developed a theory that identifies an important source of variation in medieval state building. During the Middle Ages, most European polities operated under a norm that gave only the close male relatives of a deceased monarch a clear place in the line of succession. When no such heirs were available, succession disputes were more likely, with more distant relatives and female(-line) heirs laying competing claims to the throne. These disputes often produced violent conflicts that destroyed existing state institutions and stunted the subsequent development of the state.



In 1578 the king of Portugal died without male issue, and his uncle, a cardinal with the name of Henry – was the last of the House of Aviz. He tried to be allowed to renounce his clerical status to sire an heir, but the Pope – inspired by the Spanish King Ferdinand II – opposed the plan. The result was a kingdom ruled in absentia, sowing the seed for a long-term decline of the economy of Portugal. He was later called ‘Henry the Chaste’.

The theory can be schematically summarized as follows:

- shortage of male heirs ->
- conflict and instability ->
- persistently weaker state institutions ->
- persistently weaker development outcomes

The hypothesis is that the unavailability of male heirs to Europe’s monarchies in the Middle Ages have had a corresponding deleterious effect on contemporary development levels across European regions.

The findings of Acharya and Lee show that the state building processes that

were underway in medieval Europe had profound consequences for the development of the continent. In regions where chance allowed for a series of uncontested leadership transitions, rulers were able to build up a set of state institutions that supported economic development. In areas burdened with more potential succession disputes, and thus more politically instability, the path to economic prosperity was much more arduous. These results reinforce other findings in the literature documenting the negative effect of violent conflict, and the importance of political institutions for development.

“Besides emphasizing the importance of state building in general, their results also show how the pre-1500 period was an important period in the political development of the modern world, and that within Europe the political trajectories of regions diverged much earlier than is sometimes argued. The emergence of the first modern states in this period was so important, and the states themselves so fragile, that even small disruptions could have long-term consequences—consequences they have shown are measurable even after centu-

ries of revolution, industrialization, war and institutional growth”, they write in the conclusion, adding:

“The findings also illustrate the remarkable effect of chance and other contingent factors on political development. Far from being determined by natural resources, disease environments, pre-existing political institutions, or even the plans of their rulers, the fortunes of regions like Naples and France were influenced by accidents of biology. The results provide a rejoinder to a focus on large structural predictors of social scientific phenomena, and remind us of the glorious chaos of politics in an unpredictable world”, they conclude. Highly interesting...

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Avidit Acharya is Assistant Professor of Political Science, Stanford University, Encina Hall West, Stanford, CA 94305.

Alexander Lee is Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Rochester, Harkness Hall, Rochester, NY 14627.

Deadline For Leeds 2015 - 14th of May

The International Medieval Congress 2015 takes place from the 6 - 9th July.

Please note that the registration deadline is Thursday 14 May 2015!

Any registrations received after this deadline are subject to a 'late fee' surcharge and are accepted at the discretion of the Congress administration.





Bayeux tapestry Scene 19: William gives arms to Harold as appreciation of his valour. Source: Wikipedia

The Knighting Ritual and Arm Delivery in the 11th century

The roots of the knighting ritual can be found in the 11th century. The evidence points to a set of rituals developed in the triangle of Normandy, Flandern and France and dedicated to mark the coming of age of young men brought up in the households of mighty lords.

We think we know how a knight came to be and what elaborate religiously inspired ritual, he had to undergo in the process. We also think we know that knights per definition were noble and members of a select brotherhood. And we believe we know that a special ethos came to characterise medieval knights as the idea of chivalry developed in the 12th century.

Nevertheless, medievalists have long tried to explain how the reality behind this ideal-type myth and the accompanying stories was much more complex and full of nuances than generally believed. As of now

there is a considerable literature trying to come to grips with what chivalry really meant in different contexts and at different times. It seems, all that was solid has melted into thin air in the last 40 years.

William the Conqueror's seal. Note that he is carrying a standard fitted to a spear and not a sword



However, a better understanding of how this institution came about has until now been more sketchy. One reason is that it is not that easy to cover a field, where historical research is not enough. To grapple with the question of how chivalry came about and what it might mean, demands more of a scholar than mere text-plodding. You need to be well-versed in philology, text-analysis, literary theory, and historical anthropology as well. One challenge is simply that knightings – however we should understand them – went on for centuries and were described in a very wide variety of texts and languages. But if we could get a firmer grasp on when and how it all came about, we might get a clearer understating of the phenomena than post-modernity seems to have been able to present to us.

In a number of recent articles, Max Lieberman from Bern University, aims to do exactly that. In his work he demonstrates his ability to juggle these different theoretical approaches and succeeds in shedding new light on how it all came about.

In his latest article he examines six very early texts about “knighting” and by asking two sets of questions, the first of which focus on what really went on in these six texts (more of those below). The second goal is to explore to what extent these early cases of “dubbing” might be considered necessary rituals, that is performative ritualised “speech-acts” designed to assign a new status to the “knight”. Behind this lingers of course the question of whether a knight was primarily a “heavy cavalryman”, a member of a landed stratum below barons, but more exalted than ordinary freemen, or “a specially ordained person”, ritually set apart from friends and foes not so dubbed.

The six texts are [1]:

- AD 1040 – 45 William the Conqueror took arms (*arma militaria sumit*) according to William of Poitiers writing 1071 – 77. A later text by William of Malmesbury after 1126 says that William the Conqueror accepted military insignia from the French King (*militia insignia a rege Francorum iccipiens*)
- AD 1060 Fulk IV Le Réchin of Anjou was made a “miles” by his uncle Geoffrey Martel at Angers (*nepotem suum ornavit in militem*) From: fragment of family chronicle of Fulk le Réchin † 1109.)
- AD 1064 William of Normandy gave arms to Harold (*Hic: Willem: dedit: Haroldo: Arma*) From: Bayeux Tapestry, scene 19
- AD 1060 – 70 Philip, son of Henri I of France, was distinguished with arms by Baldwin VI, Count of Flanders (*regalis militiae armis*) Quoted in charter given by Baldwin II.
- AD 1086 Henry, son of William was “dubbed... to ridere” (at Westminster (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)
- AD 1098 Louis (the son of the French king and the future Louis VI) was decorated and honoured with “*arma militaria*” and promoted and ordained to “*militia (debeo Ludovicum regis filium armis militaribus adornare et honorare, et ad militium promovere et ordinare)*”. From a letter by Guy de Pontieu – who is to do the act – inviting the bishop of Arras to come to Abbeville to “come and honour that same Louis”.

By working carefully through these texts, Lieberman is able to conclude that the evidence suggests that “symbolic deliveries of arms” apparently did take place in courtly settings as early as the 11th century and that they were designed to mark



Henry I's great seal. Note that he is carrying a sword as opposed to his father

a young man's entry into manhood. He further argues, that it is highly likely that the arms consisted of a full set of weapons fitting the young man out as a mounted cavalryman. The text from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle may suggest this. However, unspecified arms might also just be given as gifts like those Harold was gifted with in the scene in the tapestry (it is highly unlikely to understand this scene as part of a process whereby William takes Harold as a vassal. He is obviously fitting Harold with a helmet, not slapping him).

A much more complicated question is, though, what status these young men acquired, when they received their "arms". "Miles" was a "polysemic and richly evocative" expression already before 1100, writes Lieberman. However, in his opinion the six bits of text does suggest that what took place were indeed constitutive knightings – "that it was possible to be knighted, even before 1100".

But was it constitutive knighting – in the sense that the young men became "knights" as the result of a performative ritual? Yes, answers Lieberman: There was a type of arms-gift and this was linked to the creation of knights out of young persons, who grew up in the household of a lord.

In all likelihood, he writes, knighting in a developed sense took place before 1100. Through this ritual, young men recruited from the elite were lifted into a distinct brotherhood of fighters on horseback. Thus, it does not make sense to argue that "the knights" rose over the course of the 12th century. Perhaps even the chivalric ethos was already widely accepted as early as the 11th century.

[1] See article for links to the relevant sources and the full texts with their translation.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Max Lieberman is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Berne, Switzerland



Conference:

Rural settlements in the Early Middle Ages in France

The theme for the 36th International Conference on Merovingian Archaeology is dedicated to new research into the rural settlements of Early Medieval France. The conference is organised by AFAM – the French Association for the study of Merovingian Archaeology (Association française d'archéologie mérovingienne)

In 1993, the French association of Merovingian Archaeology organized a conference devoted to Rural settlements and housing in the High Middle Ages in France, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK. At that time the archaeology of rural settlements in the early Middle Ages was developing gradually in France, and inspired the whole field of “rescue archaeology” developing at that time.

Originally, the ambition was to uncover the genesis and formation of villages in Early Medieval France. Since then, however, ambitions have widened to explore regional variations in the organisation of different forms of social space. In the same period excavations have multiplied, collective research projects have emerged, and many monographs and regional reports have been published. Today, the field has changed completely. The upcoming conference aims explore what all this new knowledge might mean for our general idea of rural settlements and society in the Early Middle Ages.

The 36th international conference will be organized in three sessions that will be devoted respectively to the main theme nationally, to South-West France, and to general news from the field of Merovin-

gian archaeology.

WHEN AND WHERE:

Rural settlements in the Early Middle Ages in France (5th – 11th centuries). Dynamics of population, forms, functions and status of institutions (L'habitat rural du haut Moyen Âge en France (Ve-XIe s.). Dynamiques du peuplement, formes, fonctions et statuts des établissements)

Montpellier (Hérault)
01.10.2015 – 03.10.2015

CALL FOR PAPERS:

Deadline 15th of May: mail should be addressed to afammontpellier@gmail.com

Excavations in Bruch in South Western France uncovered a series of Merovingian tombs 2014



Conference:

Æthelred II and Cnut the Great 1016

In May 1016 King Cnut, leader of the Scandinavian forces in England, reached London with his fleet of 160 ships, anchoring up by Greenwich. After this a long ditch was dug on the South Bank, and the ships were dragged upstream of London bridge; after which a second ditch was presumably dug around the city on the North Bank, so “that no man could go in or out”. London was under siege. Even though the siege was later lifted, war continued to be waged and in the next few years Cnut succeeded in taking hold of all England. This feat was

finalized in 1018 when the Danes and the English reached an agreement at Oxford. As is well known, the price was hefty: a huge tribute from the English of £72.000 was agreed upon. London had to pay an additional £10.500.

Without doubt 2016 will witness a long list of millennial commemorations and events around the country, while a number of books are probably right now in the crucible.

Roskilde 6 is the largest wreck of a viking boat ever found. Dendrochronologically dated to the time of Cnut, it is believed to represent the type of ships, Cnut used to transport his army to England. 160 such ships must have look frighteningly. © Paul Raftery



This week invitations to a special conference was sent out:

Æthelred II and Cnut the Great: Millennial Conference to Commemorate the Siege of London in 1016.

06.07.2016 - 09.07.2016

CALL FOR PAPERS

London a thousand years ago: a lively port, the centre of trade, cross-roads for armies going north and south, seat of political government and dispute, all against the backdrop of a war between Æthelred II and Cnut with its culmination in the Siege of London of 1016. In just over a year the academics and interested public of London will commemorate this siege and its times with a three-day international conference. There will be other Cnutonica for this year but none other in the city where the war came to an end. This conference will begin with a welcome on the afternoon of Wednesday 6 July 2016. Lectures will be scheduled to begin on the following day in Senate House, Birkbeck College and UCL in single session. A day-long excursion to Winchester is planned as part of the conference. There will be four plenaries, by

- Prof Simon Keynes of the University of Cambridge in the area of Anglo-Scandinavian history;
- Prof Andrew Reynolds of the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, on the archaeology of London relating to the Vikings and the siege of 1016;
- Prof Andy Orchard of the University of Oxford, on the contemporary Beowulf manuscript, BL MS Cotton Vitellius A.XV and Old English literature;
- and Prof Emerita Roberta Frank of Yale University on Skaldic poetry and the Norse literary achievement.

Papers are invited in the fields of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature, history and archaeology in and around the Siege of London in 1016.

Possible subjects might include, but are not limited to:

- Old English literature of the Benedictine Reform
- Old English poetry (including Beowulf)
- Anglo-Saxon palaeography of the tenth and eleventh centuries
- Skaldic poetry at the court of Cnut
- Æthelred II and the Danish Wars
- Cnut and early medieval historiography
- Material culture in the later Viking Age
- Cnut and coinage of the British Isles
- The archaeology of London
- Anglo-Scandinavian cultural exchange
- Knýtlinga saga and Icelandic and Norwegian sagas
- The Danish empire
- Cnut and the Baltic
- Cnut and Rome
- Queens Emma and Ælfgifu
- Cnut's Laws
- The Beowulf manuscript in the context of Cnut's reign

Please send abstracts of about 300 words to Richard North (richard.north@ucl.ac.uk). All papers will be considered on the understanding that speakers have a maximum of half an hour. We plan to arrange a manuscript exhibition, to be able to reserve student accommodation for attendees, and to invite speakers and other contributors to submit papers for a volume of Conference Proceedings for publication in the following year.

NEW BOOK:

Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England

Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England
by Cynthia Turner Camp
Boydell & Brewer 2015
ISBN-10: 1843844028
ISBN-13: 978-1843844020

ABSTRACT:

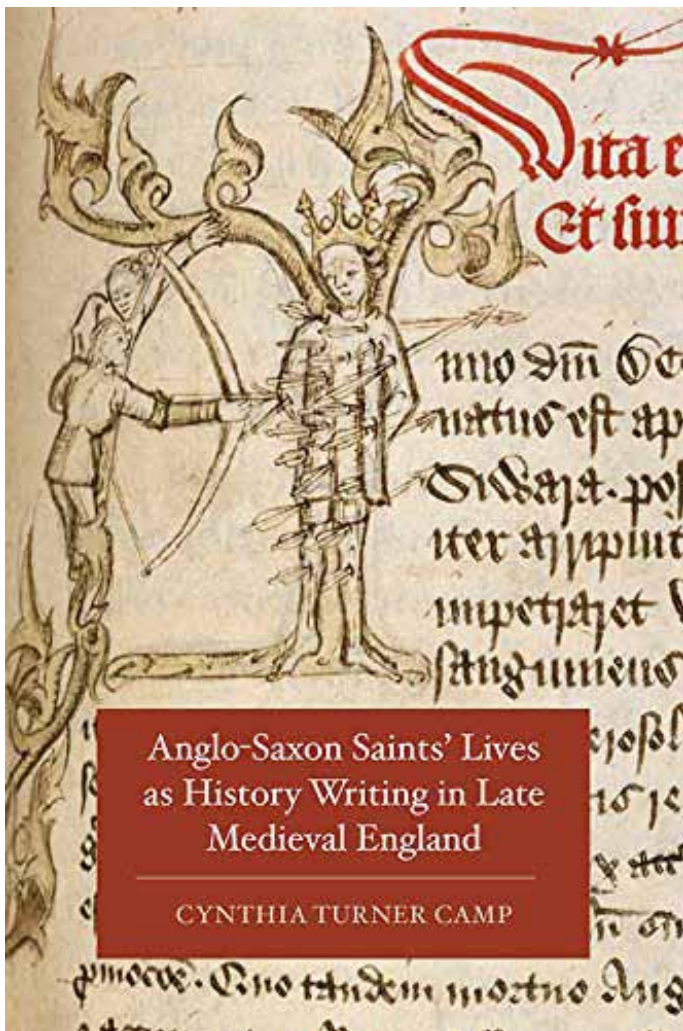
Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England Late medieval thinkers and writers weren't interested in their island's Anglo-Saxon past; it would be up to early modern antiquarians and reformation polemicists to "rediscover" pre-Conquest history. Or so the received

narrative tells us. Turning to visual art, royal ceremony, and monastic tradition, however, we can see a widespread fascination in late fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth-century England with English religious history before the Norman Conquest.

The past was simply very much present in later medieval England, as secular and religious institutions worked to recover (or create) ordinary narratives that could guarantee, they hoped, their political and spiritual legitimacy. Anglo-Saxon England, in particular, was imagined as a spiritual "golden age" and a rich source of prec-

Book of Hours, Use of Sarum ('The Taymouth Hours'), 2nd quarter of the 14th century. british Library: Yates Thompson 13, Folio 192. The Martyrdom of St. Edmund





edent, for kings and for the monasteries that housed early English saints' remains. This book examines the vernacular hagiography produced in a monastic context, demonstrating how writers, illuminators, and policy-makers used English saints (including St Edmund) to re-envision the bonds between ancient spiritual purity and contemporary conditions. Treating history and ethical practice as inseparable, poets such as Osbern Bokenham, Henry Bradshaw, and John Lydgate reconfigured England's history through its saints, engaging with contemporary concerns about institutional identity, authority, and ethics.

Central to this project is the question of ways, not only ends, of imagining the distant past. That is, *Saints' Lives* is as concerned with different narrative and non-narrative modes of commemorating pre-Conquest England as it is with the re-

invention of the Anglo-Saxon past. Particular attention is paid to these texts' formal poetics, the structure of manuscripts, the interplay of text and image, and the intersection of writing and corporality. Approaching these texts via both narrativist historiography and the stasis of image and relic, *Holy Histories* theorizes the ways diachronic and acronic depictions of time establish distinct transtemporal relations between the late medieval present and the distant past. By paying particular attention to the genre's distinctive features, *Saints' Lives* demonstrates how hagiography is able to forge connections unavailable to other historical genres or within other media, making saints the ideal conduits through which the past's glories can be made available to the present.

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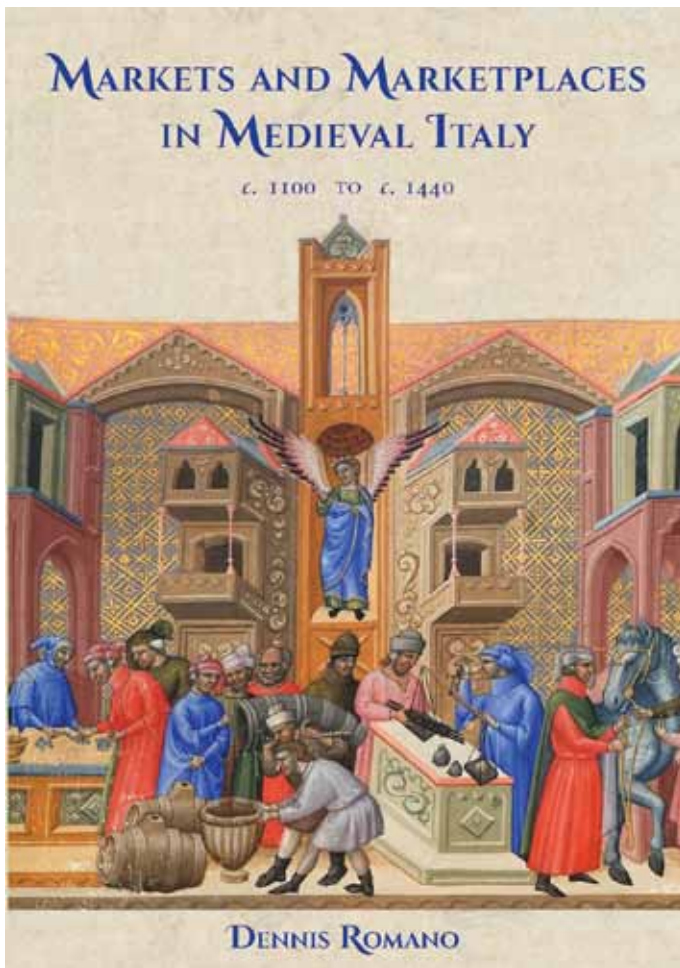
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- 5 The Limits of Narrative History in the Written and Pictorial Lives of Edward the Confessor
- 6 The Limits of Poetic History in Lydgate's Edmund and Fremund and the Harley 2278 Pictorial Cycle
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cynthia Turner Camp is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Georgia.

NEW BOOK:

Markets and Marketplaces in Medieval Italy, c. 1100 to c. 1440



Markets and Marketplaces in Medieval Italy, c. 1100 to c. 1440

by Dennis Romano

Yale University Press 2015

ISBN-10: 0300169078

ISBN-13: 978-0300169072

Cathedrals and civic palaces stand to this day as symbols of the dynamism and creativity of the city-states that flourished in

Italy during the Middle Ages. *Markets and Marketplaces in Medieval Italy* argues that the bustling yet impermanent sites of markets played an equally significant role, not only in the economic life of the Italian communes, but in their political, social, and cultural life as well.

Drawing on a range of evidence from cities and towns across northern and central Italy, Dennis Romano explores the significance of the marketplace as the symbolic embodiment of the common good; its regulation and organization; the ethics of economic exchange; and how governments and guilds sought to promote market values.

With a special focus on the spatial, architectural, and artistic elements of the marketplace, Romano adds new dimensions to our understanding of the evolution of the market economy and the origins of commercial capitalism and Renaissance individualism.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dennis Romano is the Dr. Walter G. Montgomery and Marian Gruber Professor of History and a professor in the Department of Art and Music Histories at Syracuse University.