

2015 September - No. 17

# Medieval Histories

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NEW BOOK:  
Must We Divide History Into Periods?

## Quote of the Week...

# The Neverending Story of Arthur the Brave



Every fortnight **The Society of Antiquaries in London** founded in 1717 send out a free newsletter with all sorts of interesting tidbits about society-affairs and news from the heritage sector. In the latest issue, no. 348, there is a charming commentary on the never-ending story of who Arthur was and where he lived (if he did indeed live at all). We quote:

“In March Andrew Breeze FSA suggested that two early Christian martyrs, Aaron and Julius, were buried in Leicester. ‘Scholars have always known of three martyrs from Roman Britain because their names were mentioned in the 8th century by the Venerable Bede,’ he told the Leicester Mercury. ‘There is no real problem with St Alban, beheaded at what is now St Albans. According to Bede, Aaron and Julius died at “The City of the Legions”. Some writers claim that it was Caerleon, in South Wales.’

But David Dumville recently translated Gildas as saying the tombs were in a part of Britain conquered by Anglo-Saxons. ‘That would rule out Caerleon,’ said Breeze. ‘The only place which fits the description is Leicester.’

Breeze had another historical theory based on a reading of Gildas’s *The History of the Britons*, that also caught the media’s attention in March: having moved the martyrs from Wales to England, he put Arthur in Glasgow. ‘Dr Andrew Breeze of the University of Navarre in Pamplona, Spain,’ said *The National*, ‘is to present a paper in Glasgow in July in which he claims he will show his new research into place names of ancient battles proves Arthur was a warrior king defending Strathclyde from invaders – “he could have been a Glaswegian, possibly from Govan”, as the philologist and Celticist put it.’

Thomas Owen Clancy, Ollamh na Ceiltis (Professor of Celtic) at Glasgow University, would have none of it...”

Read the **full hilarious story** in the Society’s **newsletter**, send in a subscription, visit the **two museums** and check out the state of the art website, which is really beautiful. Definitely worthwhile...

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### Medieval Histories

- read about new exhibitions, books, research and much more

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### Photo (frontpage):

Somalia Wild Asses in Basel Zoo  
Source: Wikipedia

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*Somali Wild Asses in the Zoo in Basel. Source: Wikipedia*

## The Medieval Zebro - an Enigma Solved?

In the Early Middle Ages a peculiar animal named the Zebro ran wild in Iberia. Was it a Zebra? A wild ass? A wild horse? Or a horse, which had run wild?

In 1145 the municipality in Coimbra in Portugal listed a series of artifacts on sale in their city and named their prices. On this list were shoes made of cowhide and skin from rams and calf plus gilted goat-skin from Cordoba. But listed were also shoes made of skin from an animal called a "Zebro" (or Zevro in Portuguese) - "Zapatos zebrunos et bezerrunos untados pro X denarios" [1].

The question is of course whether these shoes were made from the hide of an African Zebra as has often been claimed?

The answer is definitely no. Already in mid 20th century philologists tried to trace the etymology of the word (e)zebro, (e)cebro or (e)zevro. They found that it was derived from *equus ferus* (lit: "wild horse") and that it was only later - after it had been applied by the Portuguese to the real African Zebras in the Early Modern period - that the myth was fostered that the two beasts were related. The last part is definitely true.

However, this cannot really solve the mystery of what this beast in fact was, which

– according to toponymic data – seemed to roam the wilderness of North Western Iberia in the Early Middle Ages until the 14th century. At the end of the 16th century it was de facto extinct, having slowly receded into the last wild habitats in Southern Spain. Since then people have debated hotly what kind of animal it really was.

Recently a group of scientists published an overview of the evidence; and even if their conclusion is still tentative, the history seems to read as a case of how to combine philological, toponymic and archaeological evidence in this quest for an elusive animal.

## What did it look like?

Two medieval descriptions of the animal exist.

*The Sorraia Breed from Portugal, which some believe is the descendant of the Przewalski horse and the Zebro. Photo: [www.sorraia.org](http://www.sorraia.org)*

In 1265 Brunetto Latini in his encyclopedia wrote (in Italian) that “Zebros are a kind of animals living in parts of Spain in the Old Castille and which are larger than red deer. And they have very long ears. And they have a dorsal stripe in their skin as does a mule. And they have slender hooves [the text says cleaved hooves but this is probably a misreading]. And their meat is very good to eat. And they are so fast that men cannot make friends of them [domesticate them].”

In another description from 1576 it says the animals looked like ash-greyish mares, with a coat similar to that of rats, and with a slightly blackish muzzle (perhaps meaning “sulky nature”).

Apart from the toponymic evidence – 155 instances, which gives us an overview of



the prevalence of the animal - there exists a rather extensive list of clauses in the form of the "Forais" – local Portuguese laws from the 12th and 13th centuries.

These outlined the privileges of settlers in the newly conquered land. According to these, the hides of zebras were used as leather and the meat was eaten. The interesting thing here is of course that the zebras were considered on par with deer and roe – and not as wild horses (in which case eating might have been forbidden). It appears from these "Forais" that they were hunted with either traps or from horse-back with bow and arrows or spears. It is generally believed that their extinction came as a result of avid hunting induced by the fact that they were considered an agricultural pest once forests – their natural habitat – gave way to cultivation.



Out hunting in the "Cantigas de Santa Maria" © the Escorial "codice princeps" (principal codex, signature j.b.2 fol 65

Zebra in "Cantigas de Santa Maria" from the 13th century. It seems obvious Alfonso el Sabio knew quite well, what a real zebra looked like. The Animals were a gift from the Egyptian King Alvan-dexavir © the Escorial "codice princeps" (principal codex, signature j.b.2)



## Taxonomy

But what were the origins of the Zebra? Was it a

- descendant of the European Wild Ass, the Equus Hydruntus? (otherwise thought to have become extinct in the Holocene)
- hemione or Asiatic wild ass introduced to Iberia by the Muslims?
- Sorraia Mustang (which later became the American Mustang)? And as such a descendant of the Przewalski horse?
- feral equid? That is the descendant of horses or asses, which had escaped humans to live in the wild?

## Wild Asses

The authors of the latest zoological overview conclude that the last option is probably the most likely. However, it is also obvious they believe it was probably a kind of wild horse and not a wild ass.



*A tiger has just brought a wild ass down and is proudly showing off before commencing its feast. AD 3d century. Villa Nennig in Saarland, Germany. Source: Wikipedia*

However, there is bit of evidence, which the scientists have seemingly overlooked and which perhaps might bring us nearer a solution. In a very sympathetic way the group of scientists point out the fact that the wild ass, which is mentioned several times in the bible, consistently is translated as Onoager (Latin) and Zebro (in vernacular Spanish).

A rather famous example from the “General Estoria” of Alfonso X (el Sabio) from the 13th century even claims that the Onager is in fact "what we in our language call a mountain ass or a “enzebro”. About the same Alfonso we are told that he liked to hunt in the newly conquered Southern Spain, especially for boars and zebros.

The reason, however, why the scientists disregard this specific identification of the Zebro with ass, is that it does not fit with the etymology of the word, which they subscribe to: from equus ferus to (e) zebro, (e)cebro or (e)zero (see above). It appears a wild horse cannot be a wild ass. However, the challenge remains that we cannot really understand why people in

Medieval Iberia - who must have been well acquainted with both horses and asses of all sorts - should not place this animal securely in the correct category? And hence, refrain from eating it. Especially since that is exactly what they seem to have tried to be allowed to do by defining it as an ass.

One source of confusion is obviously also that the scientist do not discuss the most obvious option, which is that the Zebro is a descendant not of the Otranto ass (the ancient European Ass, which presumably died out in the Holocene) but in fact the wild asses, which the Romans imported from Northern Africa and which they in all probability also introduced to Iberia.

The Iberian Zebro may thus very well be descendant of either the Atlas Wild Ass, which the Romans hunted to extinction in Algeria in the 4th century or the Somali Wild Ass, which is nearly extinct. Both these animals were common guests in the Roman Arenas and had and have those striped legs, which might later have induced the Portuguese seafarers exploring Africa to name the zebras they met as zebros.

This is further substantiated by the fact that recent philological investigation into the etymology of the word does not point to it having Latin roots. Contrary to this a group of philologists from São Paulo have argued that the etymological roots are in fact Suebic.

Their argument runs as follows

proto-idg. \*dibhro- ≈ \*dībhro- > germânico \*tibra- > suevo \*[tseβra] → suevo \*[ən'tseβra] > iberorromânico do noroeste \*on[ts]evra ≈ \*on[dz]evra galego-português \*enzevra > \*ezevra ~ \*ezevro > azebra ~ azebro > zebra (“equino extinto ibérico” >> “equino de origem africana”) [hip. nova]. [2]

With the original meaning of Germanic “\*tibra” as “offer” (gift or oblation) it is highly likely that the – probably partly pagan - Germanic settlers in the 5th century found an attractive wild horse-like creature, which might be hunted, sacrificed and eaten. However, it is also highly unlikely that they would have called the animal something different than “ros” if it had in fact been a horse. Later the animals were classified by the Christian descendants of the Germanic invaders as “deer”, which made it acceptable to continue hunting and eating them.

One option is thus that the Iberian Zebro was in fact not just a descendent of some wild feral equine, but in fact the precise descendant of some of the asses, which must have been imported to Iberia and used in arenas or domesticated as donkeys. And which in all probability did abscond from time to time and run wild.

Perhaps one day, a lucky find of the archaeological remains of some medieval dinner might give us the answer via DNA.

## Notes:

[1] **Portugaliae monumenta historica: a saeculo octavo post Christum usque ad quintumdecimum.** Vol I. f. V., p. 743.

By Alexandre Herculano

Published by: Academiae Scientiarum Olisiponensis edita. - Olisipone : typis Academicis, 1856-1977

[2] **O “Zebro”: Consideações Historicas, sua identificação e distribuição geográfica, origem da palavra “zebra” e considerações sobre etimologia**

By Nelson Papaveo and Mário Eduardo Viaro

In: Arquivos do NEHiLP Vol 6: 1, pp. 1 - 198. Here quoted from p. 164  
FFLCH/USP, São Paulo 2014

SOURCE:

**The Iberian Zebro: what kind of a beast was it?**

By Carlos Noresa, Arturo Morales Muñizb, Laura Llorente Rodríguezc, E. Andrew Bennettd and Eva-María Geigle

In: *Anthropozoologica* 50(1):21-32. 2015

*Prancing Ass.*

© Bodleian Library, MS. Ashmole 1462, Folio 53v





## The Crypt at Boulogne-sur-Mer

The Basilica at Boulogne-sur-Mer was built in the 19th century on top of a medieval church. Beneath is one of the largest crypts in Europe. After years of archaeological excavations and restoration it shines once more.

For several years archaeologists have been excavating the vast crypt beneath the basilica in Boulogne-sur-Mer in Northern France in the department of Pas-de-Calais.

The history behind began with the rediscovery of the Romanesque crypt in 1827, when the construction of the present church commenced on top of the ruins of the medieval basilica, the foundation of which may perhaps be dated to the 7th century.

### Boulogne-sur-Mer

The city has Roman roots and was originally called Gesoriacum. It has sometimes

been conflated with Caesar's Portus Itius. However, from AD 43, when Claudius invaded England it formed the major port connecting the Roman Empire to Britain. Until 286 it was the chief base of the Roman Britannic fleet. At some point the name of the city changed to Bononia. At the end of the 4th century, Zosimus called it Germanorum or "German-speaking" signalling its role as stepping-stone for the Anglo-Saxon mercenaries, who were the initial bridgehead of the later immigration of Germanic-speaking people into England.

Since the 1970's extensive archaeological excavations have succeeded in locating



the Roman military camp, which covered about 12 hectares. The medieval walls of the city from the 13<sup>th</sup> century still mark this area.

The present Basilica is located in the corner, where the ancient barracks were situated. Built in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, they were in constant use until AD 260. During excavations in the crypt a piece of Roman road, probably one of the internal streets in the camp, has been found. Another find seems to be the remains of the earlier camp erected by Claudius.

Another result of the excavations have been the location of part of a medieval cemetery and an ossuary of bones from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries enabling a study of where people living in the city at that time came from and their general health.

## Crypt Reopened

In June 2015 the crypt reopened showing off its spectacular medieval murals as well as a new museum presenting the treasury of the Cathedral: sculptures, reliquaries etc.

## Reliquary

One of the more prominent pieces is a reliquary of the Holy Blood from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which has been attributed to Guillaume Julien, the Goldsmith of Philippe IV



*Reliquary of the Holy Blood from 1308 Treasury of Basilica of Boulogne-sur-mer*  
*Reliquary of the Holy Blood from 1308. Source: Treasury of Basilica of Boulogne-sur-mer*

(Phillippe de Bel) at the occasion of the marriage between his daughter, Isabelle de France, with Edward II of England, celebrated at Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1308. It measures 7.5 cm in diameter and is made with cloisonné enamel, pierced by an oculus through which the holy blood might have been glimpsed.

## VISIT:

**La Crypte. 2000 ans d'histoire**

## SEE MORE:

**Boulogne-sur-Mer: de la Classis Britannica aux Temps modernes.**

## READ MORE:

**Du culte des reliques à celui du Précieux Sang.** (From the worship of Relics to the Cult of Precious Blood)  
By André Vauchez.

In: Tabularia "Études", No. 8, 2008, p. 81 – 88.Ca



Battle of Assandun, showing Edmund Ironside (left) and Cnut the Great.  
 By Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS. 26, fol. 80v. Source: Wikipedia

# Cnut the Great 1016 - 2016

From AD 980 the Scandinavians began a systematic pillage of England, which continued with ever more ferocity until 1013, when Sweyn Forkbeard and his son Cnut struck with a fleet aimed at invasion and conquest. In 1014 they succeeded. However, Sweyn died before he had been pronounced king at a *witenagemot* in York, Cnut fled with his army and Æthelred returned from his exile in Normandy. one year later, in 1016, Cnut was back with a mighty fleet with which he conquered England. From 1016 - 1035 he ruled a vast North-Sea "empire" consisting of Denmark, Norway, England and parts of Sweden.

2015 - 2016 marks these events with a generous spat of conferences, an exhibition in Winchester and - perhaps - books.

We bring you a list of the conferences.

**Winchester cathedral** is currently restoring the bonecaskets, which traditionally are said to hold the bones of Cnut, queen Emma and their son, Hardecnut. The restoration will be finished at the end of 2015 and an exhibition is planned in connection with the millenium of Cnut's conquest.

# Conquest: 1016 and 1066. Anniversary Conference in Oxford

Location: Ioannou Centre and TORCH, Oxford

21.07.1016 – 24.07.2016

Deadline for paper proposals is 31.10.2015

Sessions will run in parallel for 90 minutes each. Paper proposals in the general call should be for 20 minute papers, which will be scheduled in sessions of 3 papers each; if groups of people wish to propose a session in a different format, they are welcome to submit linked proposals.

Session and paper proposers are asked to nominate one or more of the thematic strands in which their session/paper would fit:

- The Church; monasticism, clerical reform, theology, religious experience
- Literature, authors, and patronage
- Language and multilingualism, language contact
- Institutions and governance; lordship; kingship
- Warfare, battles, conduct in war, fighting men
- Art and material culture; music; court life
- Society and peoples
- Trade and commerce
- Space, movement, contact, networks; England and Europe, England and Scandinavia
- Historiography

Planned session (but other proposals are warmly invited)

- Economies of Power
- The English Language in the Long Twelfth Century
- Domesday Debated
- The Norman Conquest and its Myth
- Representing Gender and Conquest
- Rewriting the Narrative: Archaeological methods and evidence
- Women and the Conquests 8. Women and the Legitimization of Succession Revisited
- Neither 1016 nor 1066? Key moments in England's eleventh-century conquests
- Conquest 911 – The (proto-)Norman Conquest of Neustria Reconsidered
- Stories of migration in a century of conquest

Download the [CALL FOR PAPERS \(PDF\)](#)



# 1015, Scandinavia and the Wider World

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic at Cambridge University, has organised a series of three interrelated conferences of commemoration under the general theme of, 'Writing History: Battles and the Shaping of the North Atlantic World'. The first conference 'Ireland and the Wider World' took place in December 2014. The last conference will take place in September

The second conference in the series will focus on Scandinavia and the Wider World, marking the accession of St Olaf, king of Norway, and of Cnut's invasion of England in the late summer of 1015. Speakers will include Judith Jesch and Niels Lund, as well as Haki Antonsson, Clare Downham, Paul Gazzoli and Rory Naismith. Continuing the modern dimension established in the first conference, Professor Brendan Simms will speak on writing history in the context of the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, 1815

## 1015, Scandinavia and the Wider World Cambridge

18.09.2015 - 19.09.2015

### Programme

- Professor Judith Jesch, Writing Cnut in Scandinavia
- Dr Rory Naismith, King's College, London, Thesauri Britannici: English Silver and the Northern Lands in the Age of Cnut
- Dr Paul Gazzoli, ASNC, University of Cambridge, Cnut's Rule between Scandinavia and the Continent
- Dr Haki Antonsson, University College London, King Cnut and King Sveinn Úlfsson in Old Norse Literature: a Comparison
- Dr Clare Downham, Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool, A Tale of Two Conquerors: Cnut and William in Medieval Historiography
- Professor Emeritus, University of Copenhagen, Niels Lund, From Maldon to Ashingdon
- Communication and Cultural Contacts in the North Atlantic World: Dr Colmán Etchingham, Department of History, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ASNC, University of Cambridge, Dr Alex Woolf, Department of Medieval History, University of St Andrew's, Professor Jón Víðar Sigurdsson, School of History and Archaeology, University of Oslo and Dr Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, ASNC, University of Cambridge
- Professor Brendan Simms, University of Cambridge, Writing History, a Modern Perspective: the Battle of Waterloo as a European Victory



# Æthelred II and Cnut the Great



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

06.07.2016 - 09.07.2016

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. 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. Conference Proceedings will be published in the following year.

one & Cum glo  
recolimus triumph



Lō  
uū  
leat  
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nam quinq; pan  
ordea ceorum: pre  
apostolus uo frao  
ta i  
rmas in hōno

The Crown of Thorns as depicted in the  
“Royal Breviary of Saint Louis de Poissy.”  
Photo: © Christie’s - Anna Buklovska

# Royal Breviary of Saint Louis up for Sale

Classified as “National Treasure” in 2014, BnF is trying to raise the funds to buy the Royal Breviary of Saint-Louis from Poissy

This breviary was presented to the Abbey at Poissy by the French King, Philippe the IV of France (Philippe le Bel), who had it made in honour of his grandfather, Saint Louis. Written and illuminated between 1310 – 1315, it was a present to Marie de Clermont-Bourbon, another of the saint’s grandchildren, who lived at the priory from the age of four.

The breviary was designed to promote the cult of Saint Louis and contains the texts appropriate for the celebrations of the royal saint. Thus it contains the liturgy to the feast of Saint Louis on the 25th of August.

The breviary consists of 600 sheets of parchment. The binding is from the 16th century. It measures 176 x 115 mm and



is illustrated by Richard de Verdun (also known as the Maître de Jean Papealu). Among his extant works are a historical Bible (Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal) and five bibles preserved in Paris (BnF), Berlin (Deutsche Staatsbibliothek), London (British Library), Harvard (Houghton Library) and at Lisbon (Fondation Goulbekian). He was a disciple of Maître Honoré.



The breviary testifies to the importance of Poissy as the centre of the cult of the Capetians and their royal saint, Saint Louis. It belongs to a group of other important manuscripts from the same milieu: the Breviary of Phillippe IV made by Maître Honoré and the Belleville Breviary painted by Jean Purcelle between 1323 – 26, both kept at BnF. Part of the picture-program in the Royal Breviary of Saint-Louis from Poissy is echoed in the Belleville-breviary, which is later. The importance for BnF of the present manuscript is the way in which it can be used to trace the relationship and artistic collaboration in the royal workshop of Phillippe IV.

Some of the illuminations record the events of the life of Saint Louis (Saint-Louis feeds a leper, as a prisoner of the Muslims etc.); thus it also preserves one of the very earliest illustrations of the relics, which Saint Louis acquired for Sainte-Chapelle, among which was the Crown of Thorns. Another story-line is the establishment of the cult of Saint-Louis and the translation of his relics to Saint-Denis and elsewhere.

It is possible to donate funds to BnF until the 27.11.2015. Frenchmen, who donate, will receive a tax reduction of 66%. The price is set at € 1 mill. It is currently in private possession.

## SOURCE:

**Le bréviaire royal de Saint-Louis de Poissy**

PHOTOS: © Christie's - Anna Buklovska



## Poissy in Île-de-France

Poissy was the birthplace of Louis IX, who was sanctified as Saint Louis. One centre of his cult was at Poissy.

Poissy is a small town situated north-west of Paris on the left bank of the Seine. The east borders on the royal forest of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and to the west is the French countryside. Today it is famous for its very large Peugeot factory. But the area is also dotted with golf-courses pointing to its favourable location.

During the Early Middle Ages it was known as Pinciacum and housed a royal residence since the 5th century. This was enlarged by Robert the II of France (Robert le Pieux AD 972 - 1031). His second wife, Bertha of Burgundy (Berthe de Bourgogne c 952 – 1016 or 1035) founded an Augustinian convent, which later in the





14th century became the nucleus of the Royal Abbey. At that point there existed two castles in Poissy, the old and the new. The old one was reminiscent of the old Merovingian hunting lodge, while the new one was built in the 12th century. In 1188 Philippe-Auguste presented the village with privileges of a town and began to fortify the place. In 1200 he presented Poissy to his son at his marriage to Blanche de la Castille. Until the 19th century the medieval ramparts were still in existence. Now only vestiges may be seen in the boulevard Louis-Lemelle. The ancient bridge across the Seine was also part of this. The fortifications had seven ports.

From the 12th century Poissy became a favourite place for the French Royal Family to stay. Here Saint-Louis was born and baptized and here the centre of the cult

of his sainthood was established. Not much of the medieval heritage has been preserved, but the town itself is a friendly small Parisian suburb and it is worthwhile to take a walk inside the former Abbey (The Nuns Walk). Many of the names of the streets reminds us of the importance of the town as provider of meat to the Parisian markets (rue de la Triperie, rue des Moutons etc.) Another sight is the remains of the old bridge from the 14th century, which burned in the mid of the 19th century. A pleasant walk along the side of the river pays off.

### The Priory of Poissy

In the beginning of the 14th century most of the new castle was erased to the ground to make way for the Dominican Priory at Poissy, erected in honour of Saint Louis,



*Isabelle de France ca 1300 in Poissy.*

*Source: Wikipedia/poschadel*

who had been canonized in 1297. It was generously endowed and soon became one of the more wealthy abbeys in France. Here a number of royal descendants of Saint-Louis lived as Dominican sisters involved in the liturgical celebration of this royal cult. Although not much of its treasury is preserved, a couple of medieval manuscripts - eg. *Le bréviaire royal de Saint-Louis de Poissy* - witness to its former glory

The area of the priory (sometimes erroneously called an "abbey") covered more than 48 ha with 14 ha covered in buildings and could house between 120 - 200 Dominican sisters. Apart from the Church and the convent there were royal quarters built on to the Abbey, where the king might stay when in the neighborhood. The church was 95 m x 45 m and 30 m high. In the aisle were statues of Saint Louis and

his wife Marguerite de Province and their six children. Only one of these statues still exists and may be found in the Collégiale Notre Dame de Poissy (see below).

There exists a very charming poem by Christine de Pizan - Dit de Poissy - from around 1400, describing her visit to her daughter, who was living there as part of the entourage of princess Marie, daughter of Charles VI. She had entered the community in 1397 and it is believed that Christine de Pizan's daughter was endowed by the king at that time. In her poem Christine describes how she and some friends rode from Paris and arrived in the afternoon where a sumptuous meal had been prepared by the Prioress. She also gives a long and detailed description of all the wonders - the buildings, the chapel, the gardens and the fountains. Christine de Pizan likened the place to Paradise.

*Baptismal font of Saint Louis from Poissy.*

*Source: Wikipedia/Chatsam*



Nothing is left of the Priory except the Porters Lodge (la Porterie), which is currently used as the locale for a small museum of toys. But walking through the port, the visitors enter the former grounds of the Abbey, which miraculously has been preserved as a park. This is still enclosed by the former wall of the priory.

## Collégiale Notre Dame de Poissy

Baptismal font of Saint Louis from Poissy.

Source: wikipedia/Chatsam

Baptismal font of Saint Louis from Poissy.

Source: wikipedia/Chatsam

The most important medieval building still standing in Poissy is the collegiate church of Our Lady, which was founded in 1016 by Robert the II of France (Robert le Pieux AD 972 - 1031). However, apart from the portal of the church tower, the present church is the result of a reconstruction from the 19th century of the church, which was basically built in the 12th century. Its architecture is Romanesque but with distinct Gothic elements. A number of carved capillaries may be seen; especially no. 6, sporting vile medieval monsters is worth studying in detail.

Between the 13th century and the Revolution, it was entrusted to a college of Canons. The main interest adheres to the fact that Saint-Louis was baptized there (April 1214) and that the font may still be seen. As a relic it is unfortunately no longer used, but instead kept behind a very solid iron grille. Local children have to be satisfied with being dipped in a dark and unprepossessing corner of the church

Inside the church are some statues from the dismantled Priory church worth noticing, especially a statue of Isabelle of France, the daughter of Saint Louis, originally from the Priory Church. It is the work of one of Philip the Fair's (ca. 1300) sculptors (worth a detour)

### VISIT:

Poissy, Yvelines department, Île-de-France  
- 23.8 km from Paris

### Tourist Office at Poissy



NEW BOOK:

# Must We Divide History Into Periods?

## **Must We Divide History Into Periods?**

By Jacques Le Goff. Translated by Malcolm DeBevoise

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## **ABSTRACT:**

We have long thought of the Renaissance as a luminous era that marked a decisive break with the past, but the idea of the Renaissance as a distinct period arose only during the nineteenth century. Though the view of the Middle Ages as a dark age of unreason has softened somewhat, we still locate the advent of modern rationality in the Italian thought and culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Jacques Le Goff pleads for a strikingly different view. In this, his last book, he argues persuasively that many of the innovations we associate with the Renaissance have medieval roots, and that many of the most deplorable aspects of medieval society continued to flourish during the Renaissance. We should instead view Western civilization as undergoing several "renaissances" following the fall of Rome, over the course of a long Middle Ages that lasted until the mid-eighteenth century.

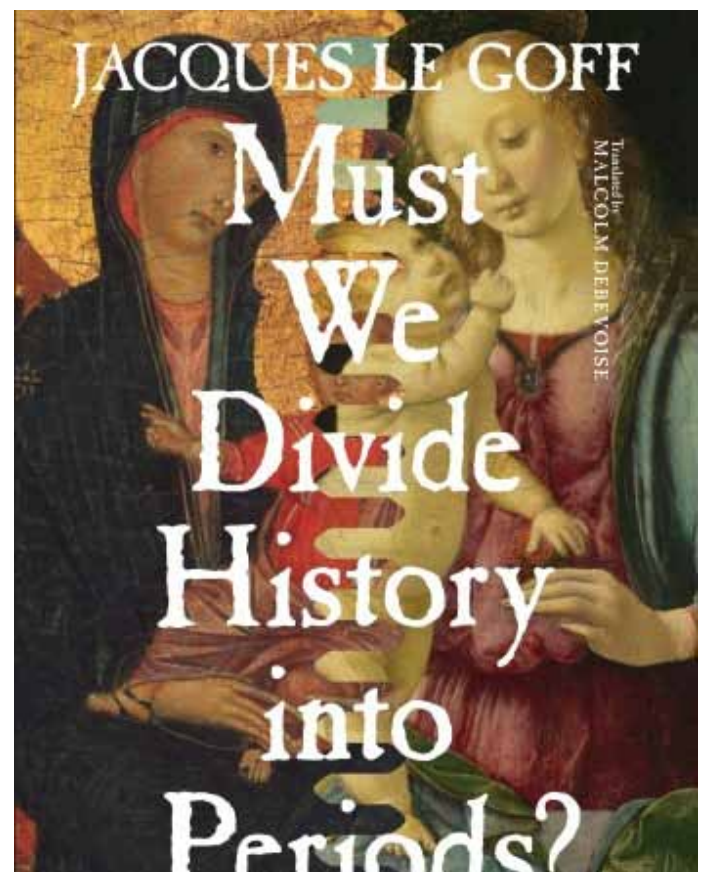
While it is indeed necessary to divide history into periods, Le Goff maintains, the meaningful continuities of human development only become clear when historians adopt a long perspective. Genuine revolu-

tions--the shifts that signal the end of one period and the beginning of the next--are much rarer than we think.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014), for many years director of studies at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, was a highly influential member of the Annales School. Among his other works are *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* and *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*.

M. B. DeBevoise translates from the French and Italian in every branch of scholarship.





## MEDIEVAL HERITAGE:

# Saxon Fortified Churches Threatened

Romanian officials are busy destroying their unique heritage – its Saxon fortified churches from the 13th – 16th century, says local watchdogs

Romania prides itself of a treasure of more than 200 Saxon fortified churches built from the 13th – 16th century. Seven of these churches were even registered as UNESCO world heritage in 1993. During the last five years EU has granted more than €20 million to preserve and restore this unique European heritage. However conservationists are in uproar over the so-called restoration, which they claim is more of a “brutal revamp”.

According to Luke Dale-Harris from Deutsche Welle conservationists are reporting on the same issues. “They de-

scribe how traditional plaster has been hacked off with power drills and replaced with cement, traditional wooden beams have been sawed through with chainsaws and ancient engraved tiles deliberately smashed to make way for new, bright red factory-made tiles. Archaeological surveys have either been missed out completely or carried out quickly and inadequately”, he writes.

## The Churches in Criț and Archita

Especially the treatment of the church in Criț has raised the hackles of the interna-



*Archita before restoration. Photo: Wikipedia*

*Archita after restoration. Photo by Vince Michael*

tional conservationist-community led by Prince Charles and his Trust Foundation. Prince Charles from England is known as an avid admirer of the Transylvanian countryside and is heavily engaged in preserving both nature and heritage in the nearby village of Viscri.

The church in Criș is attested in the year 1270, but the fortifications stem from the 16th century. The church itself was rebuilt between 1810 - 1813. The interior is heavily classicised.

As is usual in Romania local interests have been quick to notice the many millions floating around. More specifically it has been claimed that one particular company, **Tondach România**, has succeeded in securing the enterprise of repairing the

roofs. The result has been a total change of the old handmade tiles with new, industrially produced tiles of a particularly flamboyant red color, says restoration specialists.

The result of this heavy-handed restoration seems evident, when looking at photos from “before” and “after” of the Church in Archita (Arkedden), which was built in its present form in the 18th century (only a small part of the church stems from a former Romanesque basilica.)

## The Evangelical Lutheran Church

In charge of the restoration campaign is **The Coordination Office for Fortified Churches**, run by the Evangelical Church





*Fortified church in Cinsor/Kleinscheck. Photo: Wikipedia*

A.C (Biserica Evanghelică C.A). The German President, Joachim Gauck, and the current President of Romania, Klaus Werner Iohannis, are patrons for the institution.

Klaus Werner Iohannis, is the former mayor of Sibiu and a German-speaking Saxon. He is said to be able to trace his roots 850 years back. He was active in 2007, when Sibiu was declared European Cultural Capital and has close relations to the European Commission. It is believed he has been a keen supporter of the quest for generous EU-funding for the general restoration of the Transylvanian heritage. He is also known for his negative stance towards the exploitation of the gold-mine in Rosia Montana.

It is the administration of the Church Office and its relationship with local entrepreneurs, which have caught the eye of

some watchdogs from **Neuer Weg**. But this is a rejuvenated Communist media, which for political reasons may be critical of the fact that it is the local church authorities, which have been administering the restoration effort. As might be expected two sets of interests may have clashed here – the need to have pleasant and workable housing for a modern congregation as opposed to a more romantic search for authenticity.

It is perhaps also probable that political conflicts over the criminal investigation against the Social Democratic Prime Minister, Victor Ponta, alleging forgery, complicity in tax evasion and money laundering, plays a role. In June 2015 National Liberal “Saxon” Iohannis called on the Social Democrat “Albanian” Ponta to resign. Currently legal proceedings are underway. In a Romanian context the matter of the churches might also be considered an “ethnic” con-



*Dilapidated window in the fortified church in Cinso/Kleinscheck. Photo: Wikipedia*

flict concerning which part of the Romanian heritage should be restored by the EU.

According to **Deutsche Welle** the European Commission is currently planning a seminar to explore the type of restoration of the 18 churches, which has so far taken place.

## Saxon Churches

The history behind the Fortified Saxon churches is the immigration of a large contingent of Saxons in the 12th and 13th centuries. Encouraged by the Hungarian kings they settled on the plateau surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains, where they enjoyed special privileges. During the period of Ottoman rule the communities fortified

their churches and erected storehouses within the enclosures that they might withstand long sieges.

In German Transylvania was referred to as Siebenbürgen, in Romanian as Transylvania. Before WW2 there were around 300,000 German-speaking Saxons; however, today, they number around 15,000. Part of this is explained by the Romanian persecution during the administration of Ceaușescu, who used to extract money from Germany in order to let the Saxons immigrate. However, the main city in the area, Sibiu or Hermannstadt, is still bilingual and there is a thriving – if poor – Lutheran congregation there. The number of Evangelical Lutherans in the town is 42%, but it is obvious the community is struggling financially; their church is the one crumbling.

## FEATURED PHOTO:

Fortified Church in Alma Vii - in need of repair

## SOURCE:

**The Coordination Office for Fortified Churches**

**EU funds spent on 'brutal revamp' of Romania's Saxon churches**

## SEE MORE:

**Download app about the fortified churches**

**Criș - A Fortified Church near Brasov in Romania**



# Medievalism Galore!

- films, games, books and other medieval fun



## Agincourt 1415 - 2015

Over the course of 2015 there will be many events to commemorate the battle at Agincourt in October 1415. A dedicated website helps to locate official commemo-

rations, local reenactments as well as academic conferences. It also posts reports and photographs of events and guide you through the anniversary...**Check it all out**

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## Secrets of the Castle out on dvd

**Secrets of the Castle with Ruth, Peter and Tom** was first broadcast on BBC Two November 2014. The series starred archaeologists Peter Ginn and Tom Pinfold, and historian Ruth Goodman.

In the series, the team takes part in the medieval construction project at Guédelon Castle in France. During their stay there, they reveal what kind of skills and crafts were needed to build a castle in the 13th century. This is a must for all reencators...

**Now out on DVD**



## Watch out for:

### The Bastard Executioner

**The Bastard Executioner** is a forthcoming historical fiction drama television series, created by American Kurt Sutter for FX. The series will premiere on September 15, 2015

Set in the early 14th century, a knight in King Edward I's army is broken by the horrors of war and vows to lay down his weapon. But when violence finds him again, he is forced to pick up the bloodiest sword of all: an executioner's sword.

Part of the plot will deal with fallout from the Madog ap Llywelyn Welsh rebellion. The series will film in Wales, United Kingdom, and feature a mostly British cast.



### The Last Kingdom

**The Last Kingdom** is an adaptation of Bernard Cornwell's Saxon Warlord Chronicles.

The books follow Uhtred of Bebbanburg from a boy taken from his birthright and

raised by Vikings, later fighting for King Alfred the Great and his son Edward. Shield walls, blood, revenge and the forging of many Kingdoms into one nation, a dream of Alfred's called England.

Premiere October 2015