The Archive

Classics
Lore
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Legacy

ISSUE 1: *Antiquity*

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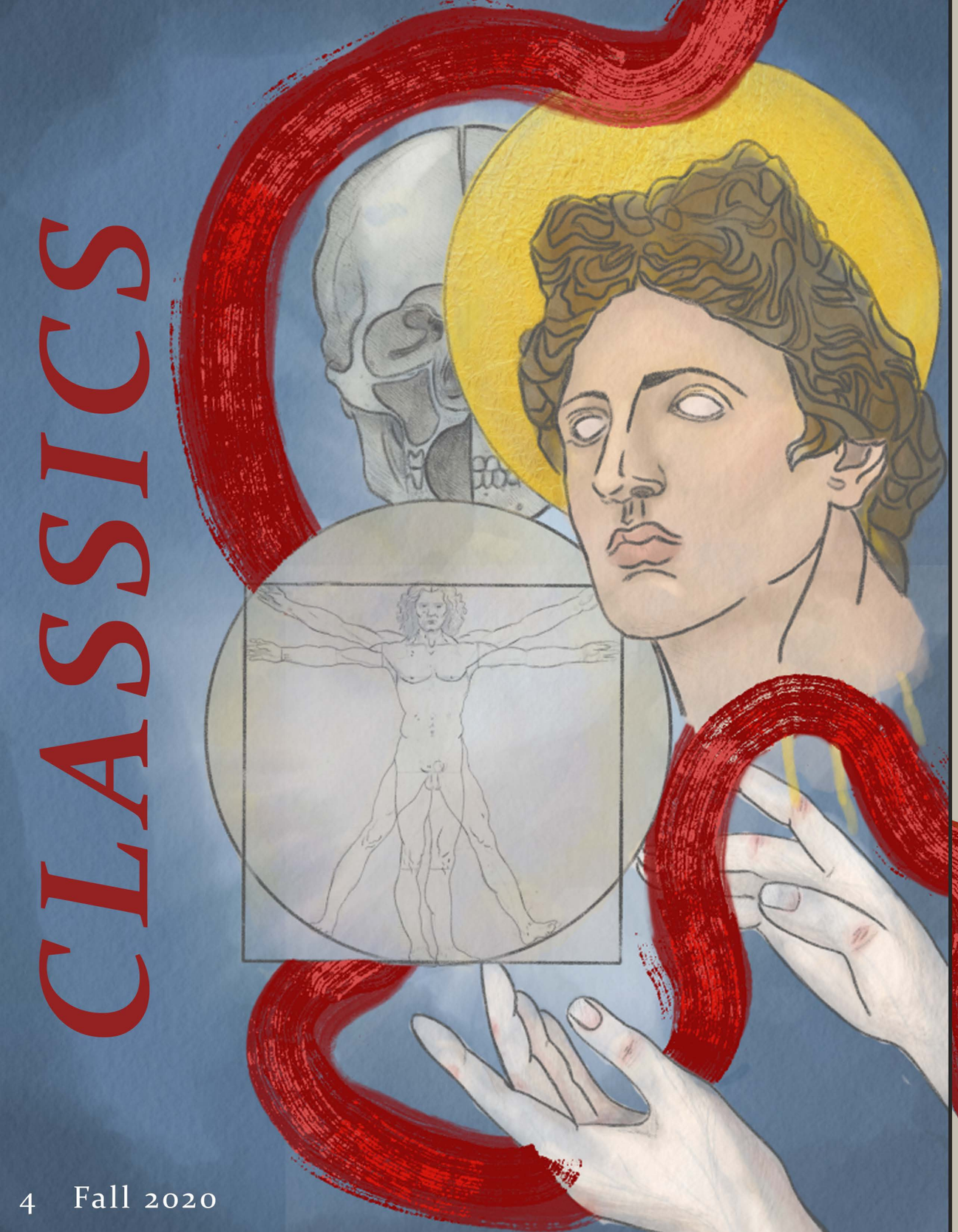
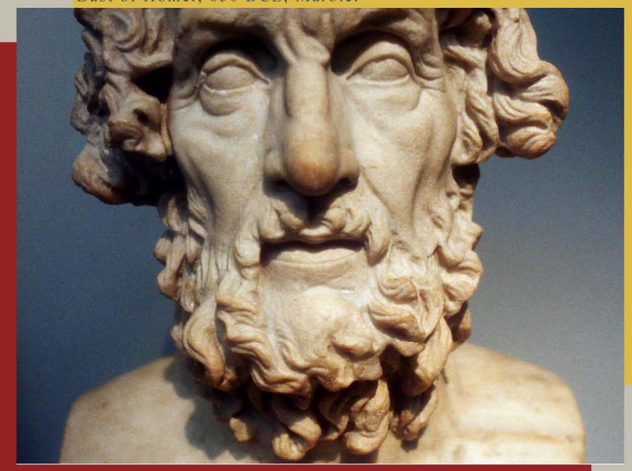


What's Up with Homer?

Celine Rajoulh

Oh, Homer. To college freshmen, he's the bane of their existence, the reason why they're up until 2 AM writing papers on the intricacies of Ancient Greek hierarchies and dreading upper-level literature courses. However, to Classics aficionados, he's a father of poetry and a man of legend. The two epics usually attributed to him, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, have had an enormous influence on Western culture in the millennia that followed their inception. But despite Homer's vast legacy, very little is known about the man himself. In fact, his very existence has been the subject of debate for centuries.This, my friends, boils down to what is known as the Homeric Question: was Homer a real person? And if so, was he the sole author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*?

Bust of Homer, 650 BCE, Marble.



Let us consider, for instance, the possibility of Homer's existence. From the outset, one issue immediately arises: there is little consensus as to when Homer was even born! Current estimates range from 750 BC to as early as 1200 BC.[1] These estimates are largely based on the relative timeframe of the Trojan War; there has not been academic consensus on whether the author of the Iliad actually lived during the events of this period or if they are merely telling stories of the distant past. Much of this uncertainty arises from the fact that a chronological dating system was not established when Homer was born — how can we estimate a relative birth date when he was, quite literally, born before a calendar even existed?

Similar arguments are also made about Homer's exact location, physical characteristics, and personality traits. It is hypothesized that Homer was a native of Ionia, a small region along the coast of modern-day Turkey.[2] There is evidence to support this: the Iliad and the Odyssey are predominantly written in an Ionnian dialect. Additionally, a local group of bards calling themselves the Homeridae, or children of Homer, emerged the region by the 6th century BC.[3] Most of the information that can be gleaned about Homer's nature, however, draws almost entirely from poetry made by his contemporaries or by later pseudohistorians. Most notably, the poet is often described as a blind bard who orated a series of poems (denoted the Homerica) and died after failing to solve a riddle set by a fisherman. Even in the *Odyssey*, there appears to be a Homeric cameo in the poet Demodocus: a blind, sage poet who sings for the court of Alcinous.[4]

Suffice it to say, the evidence surrounding Homer's existence is weak at best. Firstly, if we're placing faith in pieces of poetry, we are inherently giving voice to an unreliable narrator. Whether it be for fame, for inspiration, or just for art itself, the poets who claimed to have known him or met with his descendants have no need to substantiate their claims. A similar argument arises for using Homer's own poetry as a primary source of evidence for his existence. While establishing that the poems have consistent dialect does suggest a relative location for the author, it does not mean that the author was Homer himself; it could be a conglomerate of oral traditions in the region that eventually coalesced into one tale. Furthermore, the poet Demodocus could be just that: a character of an intricately-conceived epic.

This brings us, then, to the argument that Homer never existed to begin with. Instead of being a man, he's a cultural symbol for the multitude of bards sharing the story of the Trojan War. We must remember that the Iliad and the Odyssey were pieces of oral tradition and not the written prose we are so accustomed to seeing. As such, there are scenes and specific phrases in these poems that are seemingly-disjointed from their counterparts. These differences are especially apparent when comparing the Iliad and the Odyssey to each other. Even in the days of antiquity, there were doubts that these two poems were made by the same author; while one epic emphasized heroism and fate, the other is much more fantastical in nature. Genres aside, there are even subtle differences in storytelling and vocabulary.[5] While both pieces still maintain an Ionnian dialect, the tone and style in which they discuss their events vary. Although these differences could be due to distortions in the oral tradition over the centuries, they highlight a key flaw in the "one author" argument: it is highly unlikely for one man to vary his orating style that significantly over the course of his life.

It is much more likely, as with any oral tradition, for these large pieces to change over repeated renditions until they are stabilized on paper.

So, where does this leave us? As of now, it appears that the poet known as Homer may not have been a man to begin with. However, that is not to say that the Iliad and the Odyssey hold any less significance in their impact on Western literature and culture. If anything, it makes their legacy even more profound. Bards have passed on these tales from generation to generation for millennia before they were finally penned on paper. For these epics to still hold significance in our modern-day society is a testament to how well the stories described and critiqued the human condition — and for that, even "Homer" himself should be proud. ■

Homer Singing with His Lyre, Felix Boisselier, ca. 19th century

Roman mosaic of Odysseus, 200 CE.

Notes:

1. Kirk, G. S. *Homer*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Homer-Greek-poet
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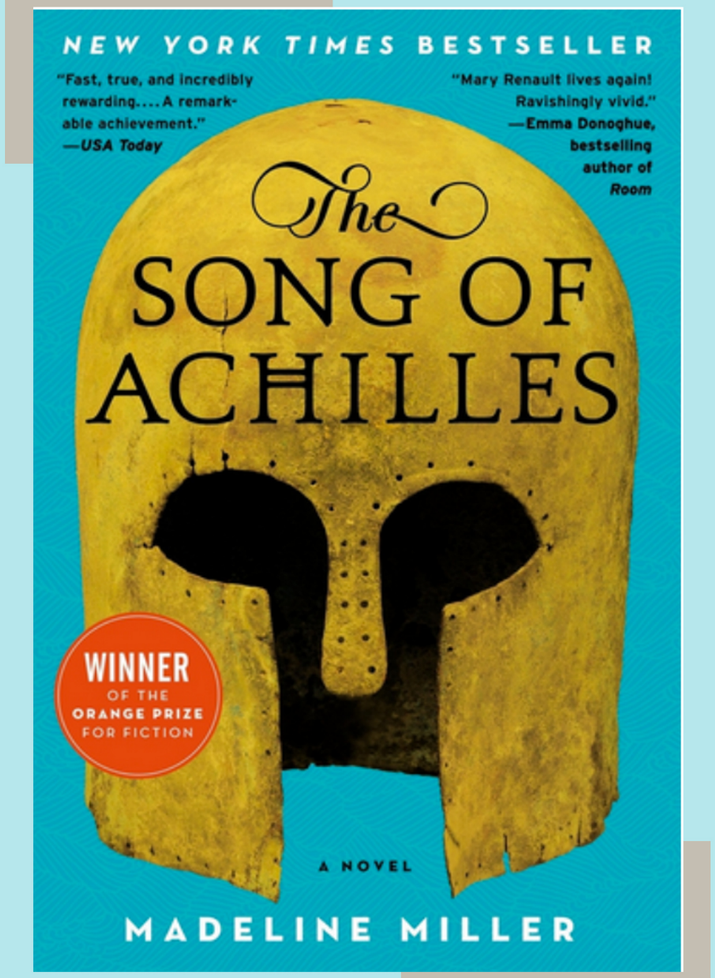
SINGING THE PRAISES OF:

The Song of Achilles

William McClelland

In the world of queer literature, you would be hard-pressed to find a recommended book list that doesn't include *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller. The book has become something of a staple of the young adult LGBTQ literary genre; if you happen to be on LGBTQ classics TikTok like me, then you know it's nearly impossible to go more than three minutes without seeing some reference to the story. But, this is fairly unsurprising. *The Song of Achilles* is a beautifully writen romantic tragedy based on Achilles and Patroclus, arguably the most famous of the gay ancient Greeks. The book is written from the perspective of Patroclus, the companion/lover to Achilles, the greatest of the mythological Greek warriors that fought in the Trojan War and the subject of Homer's *Iliad.* The timeline in *The Song of Achilles* goes from Patroclus' exile from his homeland to when his name is included on the tombstone marking his and Achilles' shared grave (which I argue is not technically a spoiler, since the story is approximately 3000 years old). Even though the tale of the Trojan War as told in the *Iliad* is ancient, Madeline Miller was able to create something entirely new out of the source material, making *The Song of Achilles* - her first novel - a New York Times bestseller following its release in 2012.



The book begins with a simple statement from Patroclus: "My father was a king and the son of kings." From the first line of the novel, Madeline Miller lets you know exactly who her narrator is. Since we now know that he is a prince, we know that Patroclus is a boy under pressure. He goes on to tell the reader about his inadequacies in the eyes of his father, about his lack of athletic or musical prowess, about his simple-minded mother for whom he seems to feel both a mixture of love and shame. But from that very first line, we can see Patroclus' whole life stretched out before him: he will be a son, then a king, then a father, and then one day, he will pass on his kingdom to his son, hopefully after having lived a full - albeit unremarkable - life. However, when he accidentally murders the son of a nobleman, he is forced into exile at Phthia, where he will meet Achilles and see his life go in an entirely different direction. With this abrupt change in course, the reader's expectations are disrupted just as Patroclus' are.

It is her potent, thoughtful writing that has convinced me of Madeline Miller's genius. If she wants you to feel or react a certain way to the story, she knows exactly what she needs to say in order to elicit that response. Every scene is vividly recounted, every word precisely chosen, every character thoroughly researched and explored. Her writing sticks in your brain, and lines like, "I am made of memories" and "I could recognize him by touch alone, by smell; I would know him blind, by the way his breaths came and his feet struck the earth. I would know him in death, at the end of the world" will leave you speechless. With The Song of Achilles, Miller gives new life to one of the oldest stories in human history, turning it into a deeply personal account of love, memory, and sacrifice as told by a character who had been given almost no voice by Homer. Her ability to stay true to the ancient Greek source material is similarly impressive, and her success at producing a fresh interpretation of the events mentioned in the Iliad, the Aeneid, and her other sources speaks volumes to what can be done with the Greco-Roman classics when groups who have previously been excluded or alienated from the discipline - like women and POC - are able to join the conversation.[1]

However, as much as I love this book, I must admit that it has its issues. For example, the horrors of Greek sex slavery are obscured to

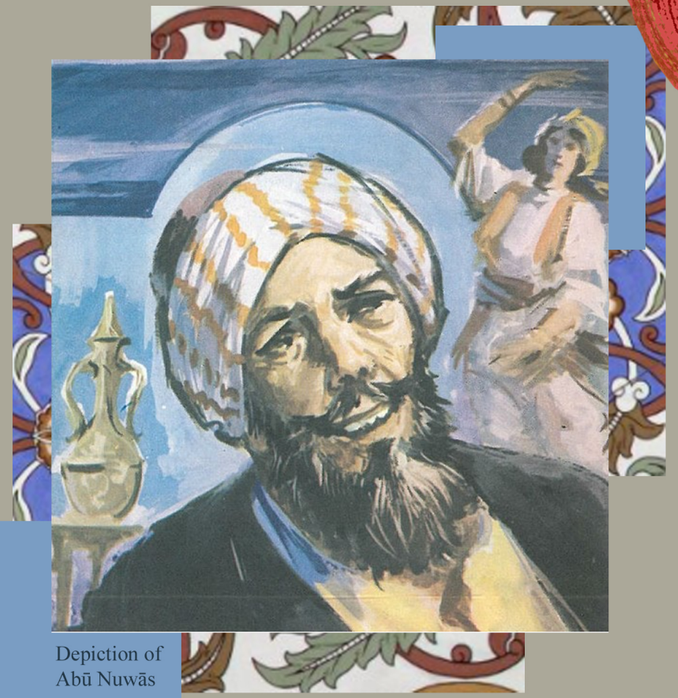
some degree in the portrayal of Briseis - a Trojan slave given to Achilles as a war prize whose theft by Agamemnon is a major cause for the plot of the *Iliad* - and the other prisoner-slaves. While Miller does not shy away from acknowledging the ugliness of the Greek practice of capturing and distributing Trojan women as "prizes," she does give the benefit of the doubt to Achilles and Patroclus in describing how they treated the women they "saved." She uses their relationship to insinuate that the two men never took advantage of Briseis because of their sexuality, despite the fact that the *Iliad* is much more ambiguous about how they treated her. Ancient Greeks did not think of sexuality as something with a rigidly defined label in the same way that many people do today, and misogyny also ran rampant, so unfortunately, Miller's view of the Achilles/Briseis/Patroclus dynamic is probably one seen through rose-colored glasses. This is important to note because, as much as fans of the book may want to romanticize the friendship formed between these characters, we have to be conscious of the less palatable aspects of Bronze Age Greece if we are to understand the greater historical context.

There are a few other choices in *TSOA* that are a bit irksome. For example, Achilles' mother - the sea nymph Thetis - hates Patroclus to an extent that doesn't seem to be backed up by the myths, and I have some personal qualms with the portrayal of Odysseus as a devoted husband because of how he acts with Calypso and Circe in the Odyssey. Overall, though, it is truly astonishing how well Miller is able to translate such an old story into one that appeals so widely to a modern audience. Any reader can fully enjoy *The Song of Achilles* even without any former experience with the classics, though after reading it, you may feel inspired to pick up a copy of the *Iliad* to see what all the fuss is about. But, however you feel about the classics, if you want to read something that will make you stare at a wall and think about your entire life for three days, *The Song of Achilles* is the book for you. It might break your heart, but trust me - it's worth it. ■

Notes:
1. Miller's sources included the *Iliad*, the Aeneid, Statius' unfinished *Achilleid*, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Apollodorus, Ovid, and others.

HISTORY UNCOVERED:
Homoerotic Arabic Love Poetry

Willa Hart



Depiction of Abū Nuwās

If I asked you to pick the gayest pre-modern society, what would you pick? My bet's on Ancient Greece.

There's the myth of Achilles and Patroclus, for one — pretty gay even before Madelline Miller popularized it as a same-sex love story — and, more practically, the well-known Ancient Greek practice of pederasty. Pederasty was a mentor-like relationship between an older man and a teenage boy, which usually, though not always, included sex.[1] Nowadays, we would consider a practice like this to be immoral. At the time, though, pederasty was an expected and even encouraged part of a young man's life. It was often seen as the masculine equivalent of marriage: just as young, teenage girls were courted and wed, so were teenage boys courted by older men.[2]

But though the Ancient Greeks were perhaps the best-known homoerotic society, they were not the only ones to openly accept relationships between two men. The Samurai in Japan had a similar system of mentorship[3]; so did the Ancient Romans.[4] And, in a slightly different form, so did the Medieval Arabs. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence indicating that there was widespread acceptance of homoerotic relationships in the medieval Arab world. In particular, a great canon of homoerotic Arabic poetry exists, which can offer insight into the particular social norms around same-sex relationships in medeival Arabic countries.[5]

Arabic love poetry was first written in the seventh century, following the creation of Islam. Called *ghazal*, love poetry reached widespread popularity in the mid-700s, and thereafter became a key staple in Arabic literature.[6] These poems were written almost exclusively by adult men: poetry was not seen as a fitting pursuit for women, and their work was rarely published.[7]

Not long after the advent of *ghazal*, homoerotic love poems began to be published. One poet, Abū Nuwās, can be given the most credit for popularizing homoerotic verse: his poems, published from the late-eighth to early-ninth centuries, featured subjects of both genders.[8] As an acclaimed writer, Nuwās had influence, and soon other poets began to write love poems about men as well. Eventually, it became standard practice for

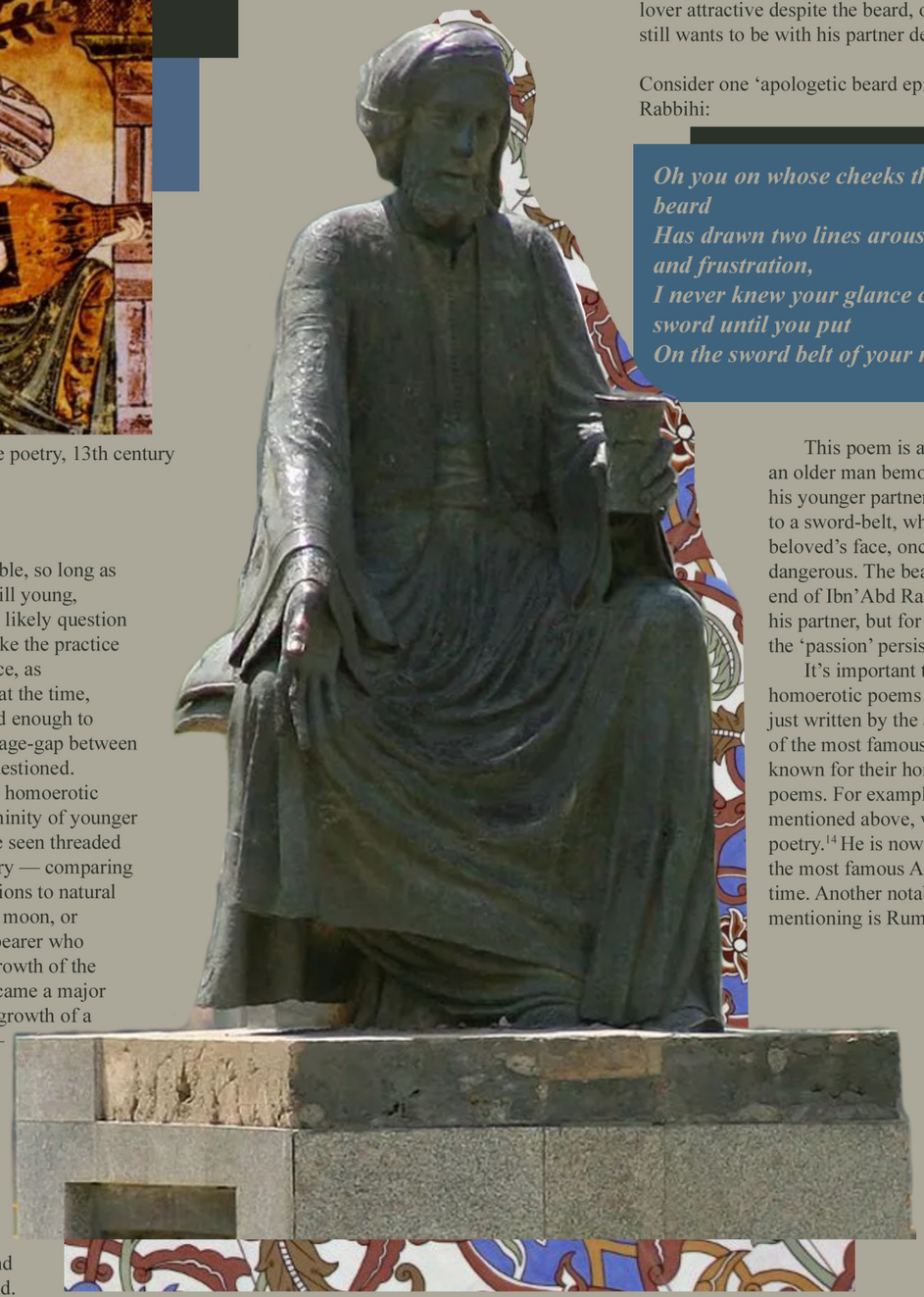
Art depicting scenes from Arabic love poetry, 13th century

poets to write romantically about both genders, with many of them writing two-part volumes of poetry: one for male subjects and one for women.[9] It's worth recognizing that modern-day concepts of queerness as an identity didn't exist in medieval times: sex acts were seen simply as acts, not identities. A man who wrote love poetry about, had sex with, other men would not necessarily be seen as having a distinct identity, but merely as someone who chose to engage in certain acts.

Of course, homoerotic Arabic love poetry is rather different from modern queer love poetry, as relationships were conceptualized very differently then as compared to today. As in Ancient Greece, relationships were generally seen as having an active and a passive participant. These could be called the 'lover' (*muḥibb*) and the 'beloved' (*maḥbūb*) respectively. It was a key feature of masculinity that an adult man must only occupy the role of the lover; to act as the beloved would be to emasculate himself.[10]

However, only adult men were held to this standard. Men who had not yet reached full adulthood — marked by the growth of a beard — could still occupy a relationship's passive role.As such, a relationship between two men was seen as acceptable, so long as one of the participants was still young, usually a teenager. We would likely question this practice now, seeing it, like the practice of pederasty in Ancient Greece, as fundamentally immoral. But at the time, teenage boys were seen as old enough to engage in these acts, and the age-gap between two male partners was not questioned.

In poetry, this meant that homoerotic poems often reflected the feminity of younger men. Common images can be seen threaded through much of Arabic poetry — comparing the object of the poet's affections to natural images such as a sapling or a moon, or casting them as a young cupbearer who serves the poet wine.[11] The growth of the younger man's beard also became a major focus of poetry. Because the growth of a beard was hard to measure — is the first growth of hair on the chin sufficient to signify adulthood? Or must there be a full, thick beard? There was often a period of ambiguity at the end of a male-male relationship, when it became clear the younger partner was aging and the relationship must soon end.



For many poets, who had fallen in love with their partners for reasons beyond their appearance, this was a tragic event. It spawned a genre of poem that scholar Thomas Bauer calls 'apologetic beard epigrams' — pieces wherein the poet apologizes for still finding his lover attractive despite the beard, or confesses that he still wants to be with his partner despite his age.[12]

Consider one 'apologetic beard epigram' by Ibn'Abd Rabbihi:

> ***Oh you on whose cheeks the sprouting beard***
> ***Has drawn two lines arousing passion and frustration,***
> ***I never knew your glance could be a sword until you put***
> ***On the sword belt of your new beard.***[13]

This poem is a classic example of an older man bemoaning the growth of his younger partner's beard: he likens it to a sword-belt, which makes his beloved's face, once only lovely, now dangerous. The beard should mark the end of Ibn'Abd Rabbihi's attraction to his partner, but for him, it is not so — the 'passion' persists.

It's important to note that homoerotic poems of all types weren't just written by the average poet: many of the most famous Arabic poets were known for their homoerotic love poems. For example, Abū Nuwās, mentioned above, wrote homoerotic poetry.[14] He is now considered one of the most famous Arabic poets of all time. Another notable writer worth mentioning is Rumi.

Though he wrote most of his poems in Persian, some were written in Arabic; he, too, was known for his love poems, which included several potentially written for his longtime companion Shams.[15]

Unfortunately, the tradition of writing homoerotic Arabic poetry does not persist into modern times. In the nineteenth century, Western imperialism led to the importation of homophobia in many Arab states;[16] subsequently, the writing of homoerotic poetry swiftly declined. The disdain for homoerotic poetry has persisted in recent years, with some governments even going so far as to try to cover up the evidence of past works. For instance, in 2001, the Egyptian Ministry of Culture burned over six thousand copies of Abū Nuwās' poetry in an effort to hide his homoerotic work.[17]

Still, copies of Nuwas's work, and the work of other medieval Arab poets, are held in safekeeping around the world. Scholars continue to study many of these pieces, and new articles are regularly published exploring their themes and implications. Great new works may yet be discovered in the coming years — works which have the power to change how we conceptualize not only Arabic love poets, but the very validity of the heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy in our society. ■

Notes:

1. Cavanaugh, Mariah. "Ancient Greek Pederasty: Education or Exploitation?" StMU History Media. StMU History Media, December 3, 2017.
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3. Koichi. "The Gay of the Samurai." Tofugu. Tofugu, September 30, 2015.
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7. Bauer & Tuhkanen.
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Adapted from Wellcome Images

Scotland's Descent into Darkness

Claire Brady

Many in America have heard all about the Salem witch trials, about the women condemned to die and the paranoia and fear that overtook the small Massachusetts town. However, an even larger witch hunt occurred much earlier and across the Atlantic. This is the story of the nationwide witch hunts in Scotland.

Scotland's dark descent into the perils of witch hunting began with King James VI, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots and the King of Scotland. On a trip to Denmark to receive his new bride, King James started to think that he had become the victim of witchcraft. He believed that storms that occurred while he was traveling to Denmark was the result of witches from North Berwick, Scotland, who intended for the King to die in the storm.[1] Once King James reached Denmark, he witnessed the witch trials happening there, which only served to grow his suspicion of witches.

King James's obsession with witches grew upon his return to Scotland. He frequently attended the trials of accused witches and even had 70 accused women gathered up to be punished for the storm he experienced. His obsession grew to a point where he wrote a book about witchcraft, titled Daemonologie. The purpose of this book was to not only convict people of the existence of witchcraft but also to inspire those to hunt them down. As a devout Christian, he described witchcraft as

"high treason against God".[2]

The publication of this book would act as the match to the flame in Scotland, a flame that would grow into the The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1597.

This was actually the second national witch hunt to occur in Scotland, and three more would follow up until 1661. In all of these hunts the victims were normally older women who were said to practice witchcraft and speak to the devil. These accusations could come from things as mundane as healing a sick person, having red hair, being left-handed, or having a strange birthmark.[3] Women that were considered to nag their husbands too much could also be accused. There were no bounds to what was considered the makings of a witch, which current studies now see as a tool to repress women of that day. When these women were taken and awaiting trial, they were often subjected to torture to determine if they were witches or to extract a confession, which included methods such as 'breast-ripping' or muzzles over the mouth and head.[4] Many women died as a result of this before the trial ever happened.

Currently, some suggest that King James's beliefs may have had more to do with his hatred of women, than a hatred of witchcraft.[5] Most men of the time viewed women as the naturally weaker and inferior of the sexes, but James particularly felt stronger about this than seemed normal. He wrote in Daemonologie,

"As that sex is frailer than man is, so is it easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil,"

and,

"as was overwell proved to be true by the Serpent's deceiving of Eve at the beginning which makes him the friendlier with that sex since then."

Today, some argue that this hatred of women may actually have been because he was secretly gay,[6] and for this reason, did not like women. He even commissioned a new version of the Bible in which all references to witches were rewritten in the female gender. This is the King James Bible, which is very popular and still in wide use today.

It is estimated that between four and six thousand witch trials took place in Scotland during these national hunts, and about 4,000 people were burned alive at the stake.[7] Scotland had less than a quarter of England's population at the time but had three times the number of witch trials as in

King James

Suspected witches kneeling before King James (1597)

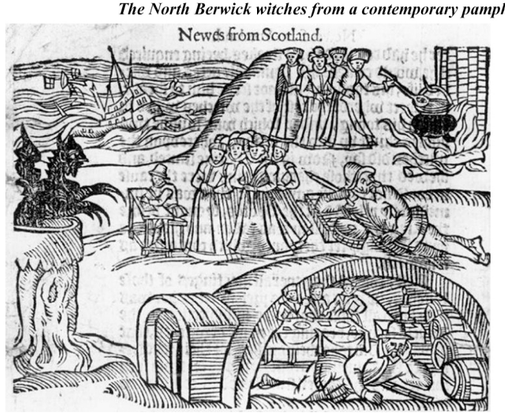
Daemonologie

England. This statistic shows just how intense this frenzy of fear was, and how strongly it held Scotland in its clutches. The witch trials happening in Scotland and the crusade by King James even inspired one writer of the time, William Shakespeare.[8] During this period Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, the famous play about a Scottish general. This play features three witches who conjure a storm--an interesting parallel to what King James experienced.

The reason for this high number of trials may be tied to the fascination that the Scottish had with the supernatural. Until the Enlightenment of the 18th century, and even beyond, ordinary people everywhere believed in devils, imps, fairies, goblins and ghosts, as well as other creatures such as vampires, werewolves and unicorns.[9] One example of this interest in the spiritual world can be seen in the islands of Orkney. While accused women were tried and executed as witches on these islands, sailors also visited 'spae-wives' to buy favorable winds for their voyages at sea.[10] These 'spae-wives' were valued members of the community, but as the fervor for witch hunting grew, more and more of these once-treasured women were sent to die. Further, many Scottish people practiced ancient Celtic traditions that embraced the supernatural, such as leaving offerings at certain places, like Clootie Wells, in the hopes of receiving healing powers.[11] Much like the spae-wives, these pre-Christian Celtic practices were outlawed by Parliament and the Church due to the new fear of witchcraft.

Witch trials fell out of favor with the emergence of the Scottish Enlightenment. This new academic wave brought in philosophical discussion and writings about the supernatural, which made the topic less serious in the public's eye, and with that witch trials popularity waned. By 1735, the Parliament of Great Britain passed the Witchcraft Act which officially made it a crime to accuse another person of practicing witchcraft. The Act also abolished the hunting and executions of witches in Scotland.

The North Berwick witches from a contemporary pamphlet

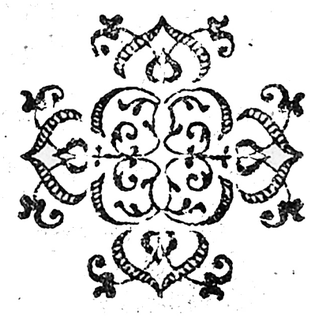


However repressed Scotland's deep-rooted dealings with the supernatural world used to be, more recently there had been a revival of those very traditions that were once outlawed. More Scottish people are practicing old pagan rituals, ancient traditions, and natural healings methods.

The remaining Clootie Wells are used, and people attend popular classes on foraging. The Beltrane Fire Society even puts on festivals in Edinburgh based on the old Celtic lunar calendar fire festivals.[12]

The evidence of the witch hunts of Scotland can still be witnessed all over the country. You don't need to go to a festival or find locals to really understand what once happened in this dark period of time, all over the famous city of Edinburgh there are sites dedicated to the fallen witches. Places like Calton Hill, Castle Hill, and the Princes Street Gardens were all once spots used to burn witches at the stake, and many now have small memorials you can visit and read.[13] Some ghost tours through Edinburgh will even take you into a vault that was transformed into a so-called witches' temple. Many of these sites are featured in the Starz series Outlander, which is all about Medieval Scotland. All over the country, from the islands of Orkney to North Berwick and Aberdeenshire, there is evidence of the Great Witch Hunts. With all of this witchy history, it's not a surprise that Edinburgh served as the primary location of the writing of the wizarding world of Harry Potter. [14]

No matter how celebrated the world of the supernatural is now in Scotland, and all over the globe, it is important to always remember what happened to all those executed on suspicion of witchcraft. The women that died were innocent, and were often accused because of their intelligence and talents. They may not be as talked about in history, but these women were a part of the long struggle for women's rights, even if they didn't know it at the time. ■



Notes:

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Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Celts, and Then Some

Will McClelland

If someone asked you what's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word "Celtic," how would you respond?

Maybe you would think of four leaf clovers, bagpipes, or the hills of Ireland. Maybe you would recall the 2012 Disney movie, Brave, with its strange magic and spooky rock formations. If you're a sports fan, maybe you'd immediately think of leprechauns and Boston basketball. While none of these things aren't related to the Celts (except maybe basketball), they don't exactly paint a full picture of what it means to be Celtic.

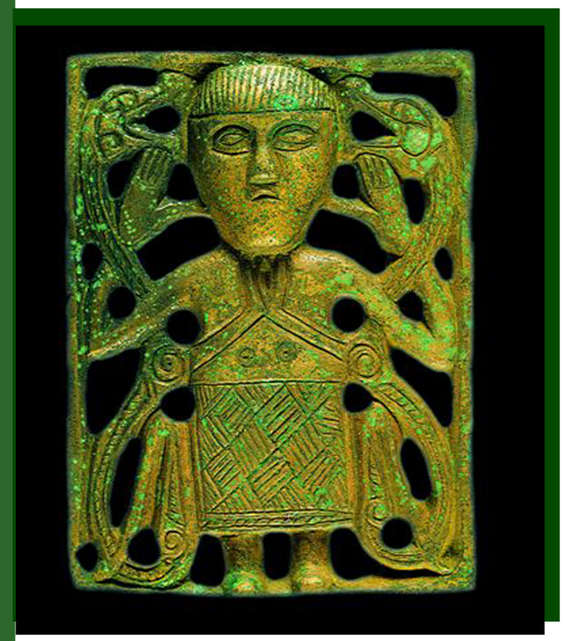
First, let's establish some basic terminology: "Celtic" isn't a noun, and it's pronounced with a hard "C" - sorry, Boston. In most contexts, it's an adjective that describes the culture of a wide array of people located across central/western Europe and the British Isles. Historians have noted that many of the ancient Danube tribes shared a similar material culture and artistic traditions, and for this reason those peoples are united under the term "Celt," though the existence of trade networks may mean that not all of those tribes shared all aspects of their cultures.[1] So, when referring to the central European tribal people, many simply call them by terms that denote eras defined by evolution of a common material culture, such as the "Urnfield people," the "Hallstatt culture," or the "La Tène culture" so as to avoid generalizing these very diverse groups.[2]

The term "Celtic" is still used, but it more commonly describes the medieval/early modern languages, myths, legends, and other traditions that evolved from the cultures of the ancient tribes from central Europe.[3] For the sake of simplicity, many still choose to use "Celt" to refer to both the central and western European people of the late Bronze and Iron Ages and the later medieval cultures of the British Isles, and because it's easier to do so, that's what I'm going to do in this article. It's important to note, however, that there is ongoing debate about what to call these groups of people. Enough linguistics, though; let's go back to the beginning of the story of the Celts.

The Celts began as a collection of tribes known as the "Urnfield people" who lived around the Upper Danube region in central Europe. But, sometime in the late Bronze Age - around 1200 B.C.E - these tribes began to evolve and spread out further across the continent.[4] Following the era of the Urnfield people, the Iron Age central Europeans went through two unifying cultural stages, the first being the Hallstatt culture sometime around 800 B.C.E. The name comes from the settlement of Hallstatt in what is now southern Austria, and the spread of this material culture - characterized by the trade of salt and iron as well as by elaborate burial sites for chieftains - reached across much of central Europe. It didn't extend to France or the British Isles in the west until sometime around between 650 and 400 B.C.E., though, by which point, the Hallstatt culture had begun to decline due to either political tensions, economic difficulties, or some other reason - no one is 100% sure.[5]

To replace Hallstatt came La Tène culture, a new material culture that emerged from a settlement in what is now Switzerland and would last from approximately 500 B.C.E. until the era of Christianization.[6] It was during the era of La Tène culture that the term "Κελτοι" ("Keltoi") was first used by the Greeks to refer to the central Europeans, and it was also during this period that the Romans first encountered these tribes. However, they would call them "Gauls."[7] (Note: for the sake of clarity, I'll only use the term "Gauls" when I'm referring to the specific tribe of Celts located in what is now central/southern France.) These terms were generally used only to refer to the La Tène people on the European continent; writers from antiquity didn't really use "Celt" or "Gaul" to refer to the people living in Britain and Ireland at the time, but due to migrations and linguistic patterns, these people would eventually be termed Celtic.[8]

The early Celts had a reputation for being intense, long-haired warriors as well as skilled horsemen/charioteers; apparently, their battle prowess was enough to make Greeks give the title "Σοτερ" - savior - to Hellenistic kings who were able to defeat them.[9] There are a number of recorded instances of Celtic tribes attacking cities in the Mediterranean, such as the sack of Rome in 390 B.C.E. by a Gallic king named Brennus and the looting of Delphi by Brennus' successor in 279 B.C.E. Violence between the Celts and the Romans wasn't only one-sided, though. One of the major causes of Celtic migration was a Roman military campaign waged against the tribes in Gaul during the 1st century B.C.E. led by none other than everybody's favorite Roman, Julius Caesar.[10] Attacks by Germanic tribes from the north and east of Europe also led many Celts to flee to Iberia/the British Isles in the west and Galatia/Asia Minor in the east, and by roughly the 5th century C.E., the Celts would no longer control central Europe.[11]



But, that's enough general history - let's talk a bit about Celtic art and culture. Early Celtic art was very geometric, and it often contained spiral patterns.[12] These patterns may have been early inspiration for Celtic knots, which emerged sometime around 450 C.E. in Ireland but were probably also influenced heavily by art from Christian missionaries.[13] Celtic art rarely shows living beings, but when it did, the animals were often stylized with those spirals.[14] Much of this early art came in the form of jewelry, statuary, beads, carvings, metalwork, and tableware, and is fairly common in the archaeological records of the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures. Celtic artistic style experienced many changes over time due to external influences, but ironically, it diverged most drastically in Ireland due to the island's insularity (which I'll explain soon). While keeping the chains, loops, and geometry of pre-Roman designs, Irish Celtic art began to adapt to using Christian imagery as monasteries began to pop up in the area during the early medieval period.[15] For example, while the Celts used crosses in pre-Christian religious art, the use of crosses greatly increased post-Christianization and the Celtic cross became a symbol of Christian Irish pride.[16] It is from this change that we get the Book of Kells, a Christian Gospel illuminated manuscript from around 800 C.E. known for its detailed designs and portraits of evangelists.[17]

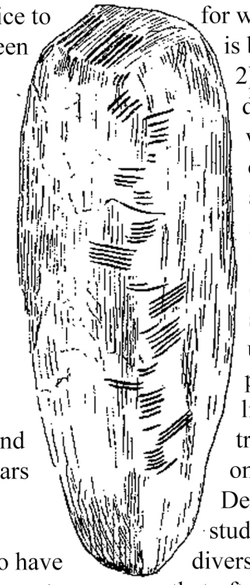
Much like how early Celtic art lasted longer in Ireland than in central Europe, Celtic languages also found something of a safe haven on the island. The reason for this is simple: Ireland was never conquered by Rome, so Celtic language and culture could remain unchanged until the European medieval period. Celtic languages are thus categorized into Insular Celtic and Continental Celtic. Insular Celtic languages consist of British/Brythonic languages like Breton, Cornish, Cumbrian, and Welsh, as well as Goidelic (Gaelic) languages like Scots Gaelic, Manx, and Irish.[18] Unfortunately, Continental Celtic languages such as Gaulish died out after the Roman imperial period and are only really documented in classical Mediterranean writing and graffiti.[19] The Brythonic languages were spoken throughout Britain and northwestern France, and of the Brythonic languages listed, only Breton and Welsh survive (though there have been some recent efforts to revive Cornish).[20] As for the Goidelic languages, the most commonly spoken of these today is Irish. But, Scots Gaelic and Manx are also still spoken by some in Scotland and the Isle of Man, respectively.[21]

This isolation also allowed Celtic religion to survive longer in Ireland than in central Europe or Britain. But, we only know so much about Celtic religion since most of our sources come from external/Christian accounts and archaeology. As far as we can tell, there wasn't really a universal Celtic pantheon of deities; rather, people tended to worship local gods since settlements were so far apart.[22] For instance, when interacting with Gauls in the 1st century B.C.E., Caesar recorded that there were a wide variety of Celtic deities that fell into certain categories like hunters, healers, warriors, etc. rather than a single pantheon like in Rome.[23] There are, however, some records of a pantheon in Ireland known as the Tuatha Dé Danann (pronounced TOO-hah day DAH-nan), which translates to "the people of the goddess Danu."[24] But, they may have actually only been worshipped as a pantheon by either people who traveled around a lot or religious elites, since they would've interacted with more people than the average peasant.[25]

Illustration by Angus McBride

Who are these religious elites? That's a great question. They were a group of people called "druids" - a familiar term, if you've ever played D&D or watched BBC Merlin. In a nutshell, druids were Celtic priests; they conducted ritual sacrifices, studied astronomical phenomena, ate acorns to gain prophetic powers, and had the ability to curse their enemies - you know, just your average priest-y stuff.[26] They were responsible for coordinating religious practices in different areas, which is why they were able to travel and why there were still some common traditions amongst the various groups of Celts.[27]

These common traditions included some pretty interesting ritual practices that archaeologists have discovered evidence for in Celt-occupied areas. For instance, it's very likely that rivers, bogs, and pools were important to many Celts, which we know about partially thanks to water hoards. Water hoards are pretty much exactly what they sound like - basically, people would dump a bunch of fancy stuff in a body of water as a sacrifice to supernatural beings.[28] These hoards have been found throughout Britain and Ireland, indicating that there were some commonalities between the Celtic communities in those regions before Romanization.



One particularly interesting practice was the use of Ogham stones. Part art, part linguistic development, part religious symbol, Ogham stones are a fascinating element of Irish Celtic life. Ogham (pronounced Oh-am) was an alphabet developed around the 4th and 5th century and used to write Old Irish, and visually it appears as a bunch of straight lines and notches.[29] Ogham stones were stones with Ogham inscriptions (shocking, I know) suspected to have been used as grave markers, astronomical calendars, land markers, and more.[30] Some people also think they may have been used for ritual ceremonies, since some Ogham stones have been found in curious rows - most of which point towards hills or gaps between hills - and circles.[31]

Mysterious objects like Ogham stones and curious people like the druids have made it so that in popular culture, we often see Celtic people represented in terms of their religion (ex. Netflix's Cursed, BBC Merlin, the Wicker Man, etc). This is probably because we really don't know a ton of information about Celtic people. Since there really isn't much in terms of documentation of Celtic life, that lack of knowledge has led to their mystification by the media. It's much more dramatic to write about strange people who practiced nature magic deep in the wild lands of Ireland than to write about settlements of farmers and hunters that were simply living their lives and were no more magical than any other culture in the ancient and medieval world.

When all is said and done, the main reasons for why it's so hard to learn about Celtic history is because 1) there isn't a lot to go off of, and 2) the Celts just didn't exist as a single, definitive entity. When studying the Celts, we have to put a lot of trust in external observations from people like the Romans and the medieval Christians as well as the archaeological record, the former of which isn't always truthful and the latter of which can only tell us so much about societal structure and individual lives. So, we end up lumping together a wide variety of people who may have lived very different lives from one another, and we assign them traits based on limited evidence that we can only assume may have been standard. Despite this, we can still learn a lot from studying Celtic people; there's a much more diverse, fascinating history of ancient Europe that often gets ignored in schools, but is definitely worth exploring. It just takes a little bit more digging - metaphorical and physical - to find it.■

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[21] *These have also been subject to revival campaigns; during the period of English colonialism in the 19th century, Celtic languages struggled to survive, so modern attempts to reclaim national identity and cultures has led to reinvigorated efforts to preserve these languages.*

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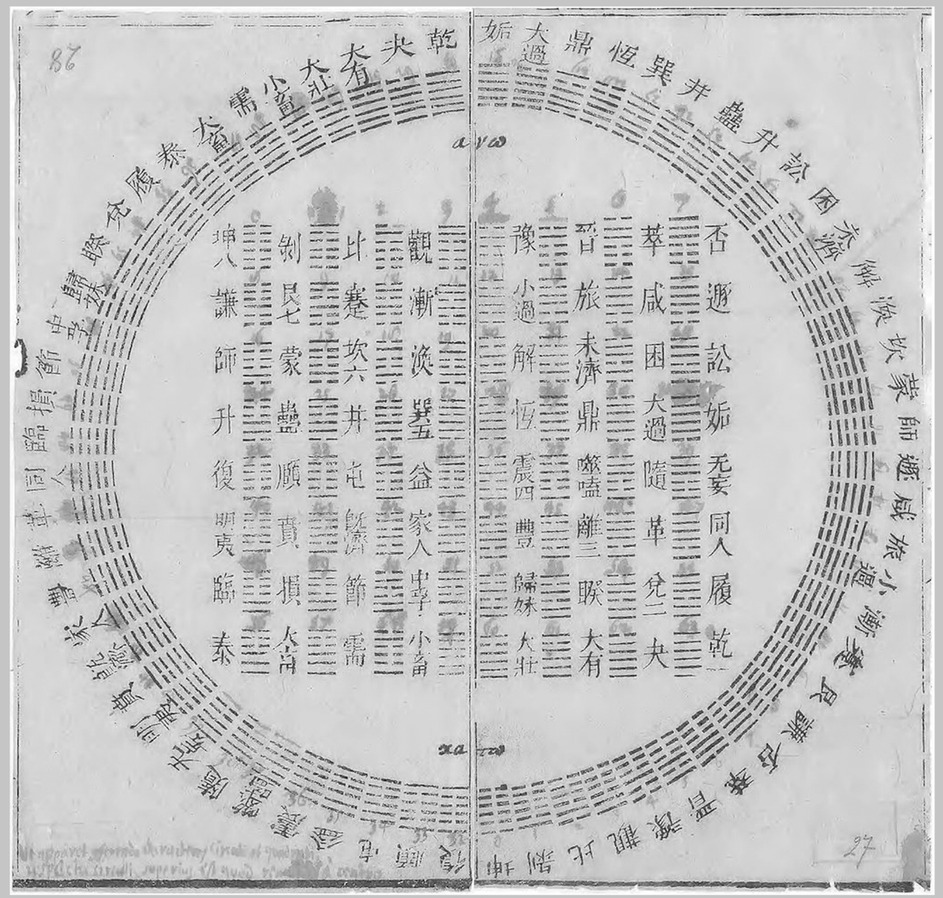

The Changing Future of Yijing

Liana Lau

In uncertain times, divination brings forth inspiration. From here, a plan of action is developed, and one can begin to move forward and fulfill their goals. The *Yijing* is one such method of ancient divination that has been used to provide guidance in times of change. The divination text and Chinese classic can be divided into three parts, also known as layers. The first layer consists of eight unique trigrams made out of broken and unbroken lines, representing yin and yang respectively.[1] These trigrams could then be paired together to form the 64 hexagrams that made up the second layer. These hexagrams provide the user with insight into the universe by reading the combinations of yin-yang lines from bottom to top.[2] Each line in the hexagram holds a unique meaning: the bottom two lines represent the Earth, the middle two lines represent humanity, and the top two lines represent heaven. This relationship between Earth, humans, and heaven forms another trigram, which shows how all forces of nature and humanity co-exist together. These two layers were believed to have been written during the 11th century BCE while the third layer was written later around the 5th to 2nd century BCE. The third layer consists of seven different texts that can be divided into ten documents called the "Ten Wings."[3] These commentaries show how the hexagrams can be used to provide insight into the complex relationship between nature and humanity.[4]

During the Zhou dynasty, around 800 BCE, meanings for the trigrams and hexagrams were mostly solidified, although there were still regional and temporal differences.[5] However, it wasn't until the Han dynasty, which lasted from 206 BCE to 220 CE, that the *Yijing* was used in such a widespread manner. Han rulers sought to use the *Yijing* to support their absolutist empire: they began to change the meaning of the hexagrams to demonstrate the concept of correlative cosmology, the interconnectedness of heaven and humanity. Under this framework, the emperor would serve as the bridge between the natural and human worlds. Because Han commentators changed how the hexagrams were interpreted, they gave themselves the freedom of flexibility: hexagrams could hold multiple meanings if their trigrams were reoriented.[6]

After the collapse of the Han dynasty, *Yijing* scholars began to move away from the correlative cosmology framework as humanity was far too unpredictable to apply a cosmic understanding to. Instead, the *Yijing* was focused more on the actions of humanity. This movement was spearheaded by Wang Bi, who had grown up after 226 CE with the fear and anxiety that came from the collapse of the Han dynasty and the division of China.[7] Wang sought to simplify the Han interpretation and remove all the nuanced astrological interpretations of the hexagrams by writing his own commentary. His commentary called the *Zhouyi zhu* defined a hexagram as a pointer that told someone what they could or could not do to make the right decision. It was a method to understand change and one's uncertain situation.[8] Wang's interpretation of the hexagrams became part of the civil service examinations of the Tang (618-907) and Song dynasty (960-1126), showing a complete divergence from a cosmic-oriented dynasty to one of human-based initiative.[9]

During the Song dynasty, philosophical scholarship around the *Yijing* grew immensely.[10] At this time, philosopher and scholar Zhu Xi sought to highlight a more simplistic and realistic interpretation of the hexagrams.[11] In doing so, he sought to highlight how divination was an individualistic journey and not one that required asking for guidance from a higher being. Each line held ambiguous meanings, which could help the user decipher the uncertainties of their own lives by requiring them to think deeper and become aware of their fears and anxieties.[12] However, like his predecessors, Zhu's interpretation also fell under criticism with other philosophical interpretations competing for acceptance.[13]

Ultimately, the diviniational prowess of the *Yijing* has come to hold a considerable influence within Asian culture, which have assimilated its meanings into the heart of significant cultural practices like tea ceremonies and flower arrangements.[14] The true meaning of the *Yijing* is still debated today as scholars try to uncover insights into the past interpretations of the text: aesthetic, religious, cosmologic, etc.[15] Nevertheless, the conflicting interpretations of the *Yijing* seek to answer one question and one question only: how do we advance forward in times of uncertainty? ■

Notes:

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[10, 15] Kern, Martin. "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings through Western Han." The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature, edited by Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 1–115.

A DESCENT INTO HELL:

ORPHISM, DIONYSUS, AND ANSWERING THE ZAGREUS QUESTION

William McClelland

Over the past few months, I've become a gamer. My roommate plays a lot of video games, and after watching her play Legend of Zelda for hours on end, I've started to absorb her love for Nintendo-brand escapism. I'm also a big Greek mythology nerd, so for months, I'd been hoping to find a mythology-based game that would scratch that itch in my brain that craves Hellenistic content. Luckily for me, a friend of mine recently told me about *Hades*, a game centered around Greek Underworld mythology. Naturally, I bought it on impulse and have been playing it practically non-stop ever since.

The goal of *Hades* is simple: escape the Underworld. I'm not going to go into any more detail about gameplay, but the important information is that the player character in *Hades* is Zagreus, who is (spoiler alert!) the son of Hades and Persephone. When I started playing the game, I assumed that the game developers invented Zagreus as a way to avoid attaching the game's story to a pre-existing figure from mythology, since using a well-known character as the main player character would probably invite criticism of how they interpreted that mythological figure. However, I googled Zagreus out of curiosity, and I found a LOT more information about him than I expected.

Zagreus is, in fact, a "real" mythological figure.

Zagreus, the main character in Hades, and Dionysus. Artwork by Jen Zee of Supergiant Games.

However, when it comes to just exactly *who* he is, things get a bit more complicated. In one of his plays (of which we only have fragments), Aeschylus, an ancient Greek tragedian, claims that Zagreus is the son of Hades and Persephone, which is the version of the myth that the developers over at Supergiant Games decided to use. However, in another play, he suggests that Zagreus is actually just another name for Hades. Fragments of a lost Theban-cycle epic, the *Alcmeonis*, even calls Zagreus "above all other gods" and pairs him with the likes of Gaia, the earth itself.[1] However, the most oft-repeated claim in scholarly work on Zagreus seems to be that he is actually the son of Zeus and Persephone and that he's connected to the Orphic Dionysus. While there aren't any ancient sources that tell us comprehensively who Zagreus is, this theory seems to have the most support from what we *do* have.[2]

While not much is known about the true beliefs of the cult of Orphism, a small Greek religious sect centered around writings attributed to the mythical poet Orpheus, Dionysus seems to play a pretty important role. In the Orphic belief system, the creation of man was considered to be a direct result of the Titans eating Dionysus-Zagreus, who is the son of Zeus and Persephone in this version of the myth. Allow me to tell you the story.

A long time ago in a land far, far away, the gods lived alongside the Titans, an evil race of powerful beings who liked to eat little baby gods for breakfast. One day, a young god named Dionysus-Zagreus was playing in the cave where he lived with his nymph caretakers. Young Zagreus was unfortunate enough to be an illegitimate son of Zeus and Persephone, meaning that Hera - Zeus' wife - wasn't the most excited about his annoying habit of being alive. Hera, ever the pacifist, enlisted the help of the Titans in getting her revenge, and thus the Titans lured the young Zagreus away from his caretakers using a mirror and some toys. Once Zagreus had been successfully lured, the Titans tore him limb from limb before eating him, which is why we must always remain vigilant about Stranger-Danger.[3] When Zeus discovered what they had done, he became understandably miffed, so he struck them

Supergiant Games

down with his lightning bolts in a fit of rage. From the ashes of the Titans, the human race was born; however, since our pal Zagreus had been consumed by the Titans, every human also had some small part of his ash included in their new forms, too.[4]

In another version of the story, the Titans don't actually eat Zagreus and instead simply stop after tearing him apart (which is a real win for Zagreus; personally, I always prefer not being eaten after having all of my limbs torn off). Athena is the one to find his disembodied heart, and she saves it by putting it in a spiritual box called a cista. She then creates a humanoid figure out of gypsum - a type of chalky rock - before placing the heart inside the figure, thus reanimating Zagreus. After this, she took Zagreus' old, dismembered limbs to rest at Delphi (you know, just fun things you do with your nephew/half-brother).[5] However, this version of the Zagreus myth *also* has variations to it, with some sources claiming that Athena instead took the heart of Zagreus to Zeus, who used it to impregnate Semêle (I'm not even going to try to explain this) and thus sire Dionysus. So, according to some sources, Dionysus was simply Zagreus 2.0.[6]

From the initial version of the Zagreus myth where he is eaten by the Titans, we can see that Orphism may have actually had a concept of original sin - the evil of the Titans being a part of all humans - and it may have shaped how its followers saw death.[7] Orphics may have believed that the soul was made of the Zagreus ash, therefore making it divine and immortal, while the body was made of the ash of the Titans.

In other words, they believed we were gods trapped in meat suits, and that birth was a curse and existence was a prison.[8]

Some scholars posit that a central tenet of the Orphic belief system was that when humans died, they underwent metempsychosis, or regeneration involving the movement of the soul from one body to the next. If you've ever read Plato's *Republic*, first of all, I'm sorry and I hope you get well soon; but, you might recognize this concept from the myth in Book 10. If you *haven't* read the *Republic*, please, never change; at the end, though, Plato describes a myth about a soldier, Er, who visits heaven and observes how people select the forms they want to take after being reincarnated. Plato notes that heroes and philosophers choose wisely in order to avoid the endless cycle of suffering (Orpheus chooses a swan, though it's unclear how this is considered wise, unless an animal's wisdom is measured by how much they scare me) while everyone else is doomed to continue the cycle. Interestingly enough, this Platonic myth about the afterlife is almost identical to what is described in Orphic doctrine. The process would continue for at least 10,000 years, and every time someone returned to the Underworld, their soul would be purified for 1000 years in the Fields of Punishment, Asphodel, or Elysium according to how well they lived their life.[9] Orphic doctrine gets even more complicated, but alas, I simply do not have the time nor desire nor word count to write a full dissertation right now (you can thank me later - and yes, I *do* accept thanks in the form of Meijer gift cards).[10] But, I digress; the important thing to note here is that Dionysus-Zagreus is a principal player in this belief system. While the Titans may have doomed humans to a long cycle of regeneration, the ash of his body is what gives humanity hope for release and the potential to join the gods if they live their lives well enough and practice the Orphic rituals.

John Collier *The priestess of Bacchus (1885-1889)* *oil on canvas*

Zagreus and Dionysus are related in more contexts than just Orphism, though. Zagreus is also said to be a mythological Cretan hunter-god that captures animals, and from that myth the Dionysus-Zagreus Orphic myth may have found its origin.[11] A major piece of evidence towards this theory is the fact that the Greek word ζαγρεύς (*zagreus*) means "catcher of game," and the word *zagre* means "pit for the capture of live animals."[12] This would naturally implicate Zagreus as a hunter god. On Crete, Dionysus was believed to be the son of Zeus and Persephone and thus at times called "Chthonios" or "Zagreus," so there seems to be a fairly obvious connection between the Cretan hunter Zagreus, Dionysus, and the Underworld in that context.[13] Some Dionysian rites in Crete - known as the "mysteries of Zagreus" - involved the raw consumption of captured game, and the participants in these rites may have identified themselves as animals or beasts during their feast days; though, similar practices in other cultures as far as Morocco suggest that this actually might be a remnant of prehistoric practice rather than purely Dionysian ritual.[14] Eventually, these "mysteries of Zagreus" actually got lumped into worship of Zeus, which we can gather from fragments of Euripides' lost play, *Cretan Men*.[15] On Crete, not only was Zagreus a form of Dionysus, but he was *also* associated with Zeus himself. Zagreus is fun

Ciro Ferri, *The Triumph of Bacchus (17th century)*, *oil on canvas*

because once you think you understand him, you find one more piece of information and discover that he's even more complicated than you originally thought. I think I understand engineering majors now.

But wait, you ask, why the hell (no pun intended) is Zagreus the prince of the Underworld in *Hades*? If he's just Dionysus/the son of Zeus and Persephone/Zeus himself, then why does he show up in a video game centered around the Underworld gods at all? Well, the Orphics believed that Zeus and Hades were two sides of the same coin, so Zagreus *technically* could be considered the son of Hades in Orphism.[16]

But honestly, it all comes down, as it so often does, to Aeschylus.

The playwright referred to Zagreus twice, once in a tragedy and once in a satire, and both times, he said something different about him. In *Egyptians*, he associates Zagreus with Hades himself, but in fragments of one of his lost *Sisyphus* plays, Aeschylus calls Zagreus the son of Hades.[17] Other than Aeschylus, though, there isn't much explicit evidence for Zagreus being an Underworld god besides the references to Dionysus as "Chthonios" and the consistent claim that Persephone is his mother.

So, you might again ask, why use Zagreus as the player character for *Hades*? If he's just *sort of* an Underworld god, and his relationship to Hades and Persephone is only based on a couple of fragmentary sources from one (1) guy and the supposed duality of Zeus and Hades in a pretty small cult religion, why use this particular child of the Underworld king and queen? This question might have a surprisingly simple answer: Greg Kasavin of Supergiant just thought Aeschylus' reference to him was interesting.[18] Also - though this wasn't explicitly stated by Supergiant - when it comes to Hades and Persephone's relationship, they only had two kids, and the other was the goddess of nightmares who rolled with a bunch of ghosts.[19] Though, playing as Melinoë sounds pretty baller. Maybe I should send Supergiant a suggestion for a DLC...

Anyways, in a nutshell, the answer to the

question of "Who is Zagreus?" is that Zagreus is Dionysus is Hades is Zeus is Dionysus again. Research into this guy has really given me a new understanding of the phrase, "it's all Greek to me." After spending all this time learning more about who he is has given me a new appreciation for the developers' attention to detail and the amount of work they put into the game.[20] If you made it all the way through this article and haven't played the game, I hope this inspires you to give it a try; if you *have* played the game before, have fun playing it now with all of this lore living in your head rent-free. Give Cerberus a little pat too, while you're at it.■

Notes:

[1, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15] Carl Kerényi, "Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 83.

[2] Much of what we know about Zagreus and Orphism comes from gold tablets found in gravesites, brief literary references, and information pulled from fragmentary texts, so there really isn't much to go on in comparison to the amount of sources we have about the Olympian gods.

[3] This dismemberment is known as the sparagmos (σπαραγμός).

[4, 8, 9] George Norlin, "The Doctrines of the Orphic Mysteries, with Special Reference to the Words of Anchises in Vergil's Sixth Aeneid 724-51," The Classical Journal, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1908): 92.

[5] H. M. Belden, "The Jew's Daughter and the Myth of Zagreus," Modern Language Notes, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1924): 164.

[6] Sallust et al. "To Minerva," in Sallust on the Gods and the World: and the Pythagoric Sentences of Demophilus and Five Hymns by Proclus, trans. Thomas Taylor (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017); There are approximately a billion versions of this myth, but I'm only including the ones involving Athena since they seemed the most relevant to the discussion.

[7] The Orphic story of anthropogony is a contested topic; Radcliffe Edmonds has a very interesting article available on JSTOR that suggests much of what is believed to have been Orphic doctrine may have been fabricated by later, Christian-era scholars. However, in this article, I'm more concerned with providing the background information about Zagreus that may have influenced the game developers of Hades, even if it is contested.

[10] If you're interested in reading more about Orphism, I recommend "The Doctrines of the Orphic Mysteries" by George Norlin and "Plato, Pederasty, and the Zagreus Myth" by Sarah Burges Watson. If you want to read more on the connection between Zagreus and Dionysus in particular, Watson's article goes more in depth about how Dionysus and Orphism are related, so that would be a good place to start. The articles are free on JSTOR!

[16] Andrzej Wypustek, "Images of Eternal Beauty in Funerary Verse Inscriptions of the Hellenistic Period," (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2013), 110; This claim also seems to go against the anthropogony myth where Zeus strikes down the Titans with his thunderbolts, so it calls into question the validity of one of these beliefs. Personally, I'm inclined to believe the anthropogony myth is a Christianized fabrication like Edmonds suggests, but it's hard to say.

[17] Aeschylus, "Fragments," Edited and translated by Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 505, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aeschylus-attributed_fragments/2009/pb_LCL505.237.xml?result=1&rskey=f0foz8.

[18] Clinton Matos, "Supergiant explains how Zagreus became the protagonist of Hades," Hypertext, September 23, 2020, https://www.htxt.co.za/2020/09/23/supergiant-explains-how-zagreus-became-the-protagonist-of-hades/.

[19] Do yourself a favor and do a google search on Melinoë. You won't regret it.

[20] Since originally writing this article, I've gotten further in the game, and there is a song that Orpheus composes about Zagreus that includes a lot of the lore I've just described. The ballad includes the story of the Titans consuming Dionysus-Zagreus and the creation of man afterwards, the rebirth of Zagreus as Dionysus through Semêle, and a myth about Zagreus being born from Zeus in the form of a snake (which I didn't mention for lack of viable sources).

HOW DID THEY DIE?

People live and people die, leaving behind legacies and legends. Some you may have heard of, some that might be new. Here's your first attempt at testing your knowledge to see if you know the truth behind some of these famous deaths from the ancient world. Answers can be found on page 73!

VLADIMIR THE GREAT OF RUSSIA

a. Madness
b. Natural Causes
c. Drowned in the Dnieper River
d. STD related illness

SLAVIC PAGANISM:
THE OLD FAITH OF THE RUS'

Julia Kravchenko

When we think of polytheism, our first thought probably isn't Slavic Paganism.

If you're particularly into ancient polytheistic belief systems, it's likely you thought of the Hindu and Egyptian pantheons. Even more likely is that you thought of the Greeks and the Romans. Greek and Roman mythology has seeped into our entertainment. Zeus extends his influence in our lives (even now!) as a household name. Perhaps this is a testament to how Greek and Roman we are, perhaps far more eurocentric than the average US citizen might consider themselves to be. Yet maybe the reason we think Greek instead of Slavic is less to do with the saturation of Greek and Roman mythology and instead with the silencing of Slavic mythology. Maybe the stifling of Slavic Paganism in the modern US is a result of strict Cold War measures, where any mention of "Russian", and "Slavic", and "Communism" raises red flags. However, upon further examination it seems that there is little mention of the old gods in Russian/Ukrainian culture as well. The popular movies are translated Hollywood ones, and while some old traditions and classic movies remain, they're from the era of the Soviet Union, far from the old religiousness of Kievan Rus'. So what happened? What was Slavic Paganism, and where did it go?

Kievan Rus' (pronounced "Roos"), named after the now capital of Ukraine, Kiev, was a congregation of Slavic states encompassing the top half of modern Ukraine through Belarus, and ending on the fringes of current day Moscow. From the 9th to 13th centuries, Kievan Rus' flourished under the rule of the Rurik Dynasty. Before 988, this land was pagan, of the Old Faith, and lived and breathed with the old gods. After 988, Kievan Rus' flipped to Orthodoxy, and then phased out of religion entirely in the 1930s during Stalin's five year anti-religious campaign. As a result of such tumultuous religious history, most of the faith has been lost to time. What remains might to some be considered a great mess, but to others an incredibly knotted puzzle.

We start with a symbol. Found in handicrafts and inscribed in architecture way up into the 19th century, the six petaled rosette inside a circle, a thunder mark, is the mark of the supreme god, Rod, whose name literally translates to "birth". He encompasses all other deities and spirits, for his existence was the reason that anyone else had been born.

Rod and Rozhanitsy (2014) *oil on canvas* **Andrey Shishkin CC-BY 3.0**

From Rod spring Belobog and Chernobog. Though their names translate to “White God” and “Black God”, Belobog and Chernobog represent the concept of duality. Like Yin and Yang are separate concepts yet come together to make a whole, Belobog and Chernobog act as opposing forces. Belobog represents the heavenly and masculine spirits, and is the god of waxing light, and Chernobog represents the earthly, feminine spirits, and is the god of waning light. Together they are Rod, yet both retain their individuality.

While Belobog and Chernobog are the broad concepts of duality, Svarog-Perun and Veles are the deities that are actually worshipped. Svarog-Perun is an interesting combination, since it represents two deities at once - Svarog, and Perun. Both are occasionally thought to represent Rod, but Svarog is also Time itself, as Cronus and Saturn are in the Greek in Roman myths. Perun is Svarog’s son, and can be thought of as the Slavic counterpart to Thor

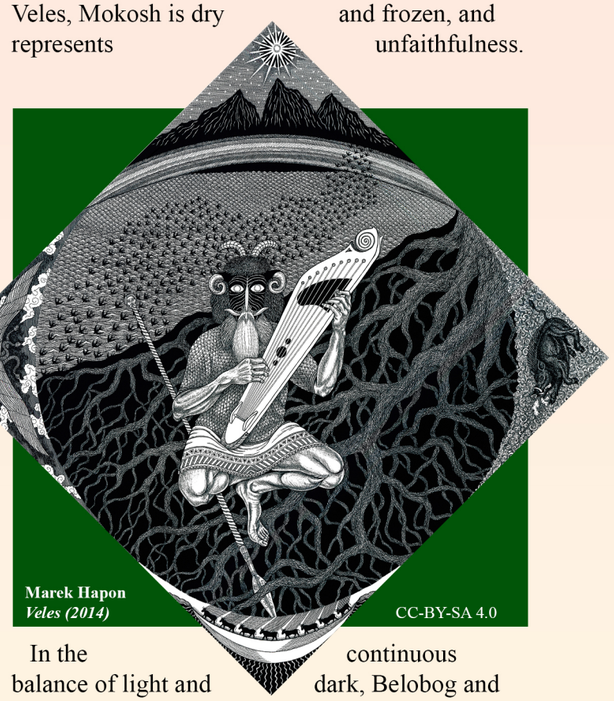
Andrey Shishkin ***Svarog (2015)*** *oil on canvas* CC-BY 3.0

Maxim Sukharev ***Creation of the Earth (2010s)*** CC-BY-SA 4.0

from the Nordic myths, since their symbols - thunder, lighting, hammers, and the oak tree - coincide. The cult of Perun had eventually gotten so widespread that he rose to such a high status in the pantheon that his mark is also the six petaled rosette. As a result, these three deities, which are all separate and yet come from each other, all represent Belobog: heaven, and the good.

Veles, on the other hand, represents Chernobog and is Perun’s counterpart. He is of the earth, the water, and the underworld. He is associated with magic and trickery, yet also with harvest and agriculture. As Perun’s tree is the strong oak, Veles’ is the watery willow.

Between the two is Mokosh, the only female in the major pantheon, representing the earth. Her name translates to “damp” in old Slavic, and as such she is the “Damp Mother Earth”, responsible for the harvest and the hearth, the women, and all those who live on land. She also plays a major role in one of the only surviving myths passed down through generations of folktales. Due to her position between heaven and underworld, she is thought to consort between Perun and Veles. When she is with Veles, Mokosh is dry and frozen, and represents unfaithfulness.



Marek Hapon ***Veles (2014)*** CC-BY-SA 4.0

In the continuous balance of light and dark, Belobog and Chernobog, Veles, the god of trickery has a duty to cause a bit of chaos. One of the easiest ways to do so was to pester Perun, who sat on the highest branches of The World Tree, a great big oak, overlooking the entire world. Veles, nesting in the roots of this tree in his serpent form, would slowly slither up to the highest branches of Perun’s domain and steal his cattle and his wife, Mokosh. He would make his quick getaway down the branches of The World Tree, and into the human domain that you and I inhabit. Perun, angered at this injustice, would turn into his eagle form and pursue Veles, bringing a violent storm into the human world. It was said that wherever lighting stuck, that was where Veles had been hidden just seconds ago. Veles would run as far as he could, shifting into various animal forms until Perun struck him with a lightning bolt and sent him back to the underworld. With his wife, Perun would return back to the high branches of The World Tree, and on and on this cycle between light and dark would continue.

And yet this is all that remains of the old folklore of the gods. Everything else has been lost to time, with only names of other gods and remnants of idols to piece together. How did this come to be?

What decimated the rich lore of dozens of gods into a single myth containing only three of the whole pantheon?

In that regard, we have Vladimir the Great to blame. Vladimir the Great, the soon-to-be Saint Vladimir was the Prince of Novgorod and the Grand Prince of Kiev. Under his rule, the Kievan Rus’ flourished; trade increased, foreign relationships improved, and the only wars were skirmishes between the tribes that made up the country. While these skirmishes between the heavily pagan Slavic tribes weren’t civil war inducing, they were still undesirable. One of the ways to rectify this was to unite the country under a single religion, which had the added benefit of increasing the legitimacy of the Kievan Rus’ in the eyes of their trade route holding neighbors, the Byzantine Empire. Despite being a devout pagan himself, erecting hundreds of statues and temples for the old Slavic gods, and amassing more than 800 concubines and 7 wives, Vladimir understood the importance of conversion. So when the situation arose, he took it. In 988, Byzantium had been struggling with civil rebellion off to the east, and needed reinforcements. Even though Vladimir the Great and Emperor Basil II, the emperor of the Byzantine empire at the time, were enemies, Basil II asked Kievan Rus’ for help. Vladimir agreed, on the condition that he could marry Basil II’s sister, Anna, and that he could convert to Eastern Orthodoxy.

Accounts from *The Primary Chronicle: the Tale of Bygone Years*, however, recite Vladimir’s

decision to convert as less political that it was. According to the text, when he spontaneously decided to convert from paganism he sent out several envoys to study the religions of the world. It's recorded in the *Primary Chronicle* that Vladimir, upon learning about the ban on alcohol and tobacco in Islam, had said:

"Drinking is the joy of all Rus'. We cannot exist without that pleasure."[1]

So it was to Eastern Orthodoxy that Vladimir was convinced to convert. The envoys had reported attending Divine Liturgy in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and thinking:

"We knew not whether we were in Heaven or on Earth… We only know that God dwells there among the people, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations."[2]

With that praise in mind, Vladimir was baptized in 988, and became as devout a Christian as he had been a pagan. He gave to the poor, erected churches and schools, and was eventually sanctified as Saint Vladimir after he converted the entire Kievan Rus'.

Doing so was not an easy task, nor was it one that was immediately accepted by the country. After his baptism, he issued a decree that all of the citizens - the elderly and the children too - should appear at the banks of the Dnieper, the river that divides the city of Kiev. If they didn't do so, they would become enemies of the prince. When everyone arrived, the pagan citizens were forced into the water, where priests along the shore converted them to Orthodoxy. The massive statues, effigies, and temples that Vladimir himself had constructed for the city were burned, and the massive statue of Perun was taken from the square and tossed into the river.

As one might think, the people weren't very happy to have their places of worship burnt to a crisp, people rarely are, but despite the rocky start,

Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov *Baptism of Saint Prince Vladimir (1890)*

Klavdy Lebedev *The Baptism of the Kievans*

Vladimir had one saving grace in the conversion. While Kievan Rus' was Christian in name and formal practice, the new traditions and feasts were linked with the old. The pagans could keep practicing their traditions as they had for centuries prior, but it would be under a new Christian name.

One such tradition is the Night of Ivana-Kupala, or Kupala Night. In the days of the Old Faith, it was a fertility festival that emphasized new and enduring love. Even though it was formally renamed as the Feast of St. John the Baptist (the name John is equivalent to the name Ivan), Kupala Night is still celebrated today. On the summer solstice, the shortest day of the year, the entire town or village gathers together at the banks of a river or pond near their village. There, a huge fire is raised while people dance and drink and barbecue. Once night falls, couples, holding hands, jump over the remaining flames. If they make it over the fire with their hands still clasped, their relationship is strengthened. If they break apart, their relationship is doomed to fail.

Young, single women will also toss elaborate flower wreaths into the pond or river come nightfall, to see if they'll be able to see the image of the one they will marry in the reflection of the water. Young, single men might take a wreath from the water to hopefully gain the affection of the one who threw it.

Couples and singles alike also enter the nearest forest come nightfall to search for the mystical blooming fern. If two single folks meet each other in the woods and find the fern in the moonlight, their love is said to blossom just like it. While incredibly romantic, and inspiring any Hozier lover to escape into the woods during the summer solstice, ferns aren't blooming plants, but who's to say that the romances that grew from this tradition are any less magical.

Another pagan tradition that was knit together with Christianity is Maslenitsa, or Butter Week. The precise week it falls on changes every year, but it is the last week before Orthodox Lent.

During Lent, for those who choose to participate, meat, meat by products, poultry, eggs, and dairy are given up in the fast as Christians reflect for forty days before Easter Sunday. Yet the week before Lent is the time to celebrate and use up all of the eggs and dairy remaining in the home. During the week of Maslenitsa, people bake and eat crepes in various forms - most popular are stuffed crepes, which contain a cottage cheese or cream cheese or any other type of sweet cheese one can think of. All week it's butter, cheese and parties as people enjoy a last bit of festivity before the somber forty days ahead. Sometimes, people also make a giant straw woman effigy and burn her in the center of the town square in celebration. In the Old Faith, this week celebrates the end of winter and Veles, for the ashes of the burnt effigy are scattered to fertilize the fields. In modern times, however, the Orthodox aspect to this pagan tradition is only now resurfacing.

There's one other notable relic that survives to this day as an example of the meld of pagan and

Orthodoxy: this particular icon of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary's likness reddened as she's surrounded by fire and flaming thunder marks. Thunder marks which are associated with Perun in the Old Faith… This icon, called "Ognyena Maria" simultaneously represents the Virgin Mary, but preserves the deity Mokosh in her noble and fiery aspect when she is wife to Perun. One can think of it as a form of rebellion by the pagans against Orthodoxy, or one can think of it as another clever way to integrate the two beliefs and smooth the transition into monotheism.

With forced conversion of Kievan Rus' to Orthodoxy and the staunch rejection of religion and atheism during the Soviet Union, pagan rituals have been largely forgotten in name. Despite the layers of history, the collective consciousness of the Slavic people retains their history even if they cannot recall the ancient roots they sprung from.■

Icon of Ognyena Maria

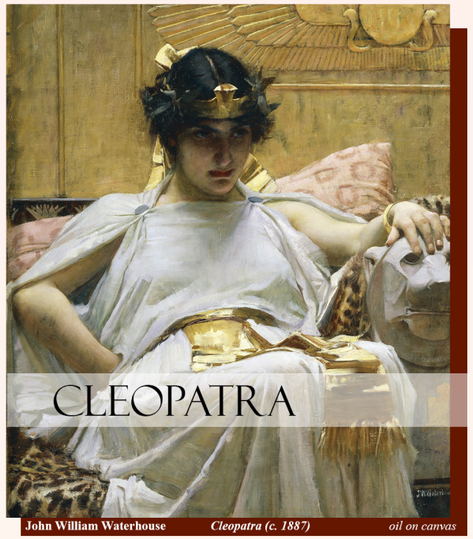
Notes:

[1, 2] Timberlake, A. (2001). Redactions of the primary chronicle. Русский язык в научном освещении, 1, 196-218.

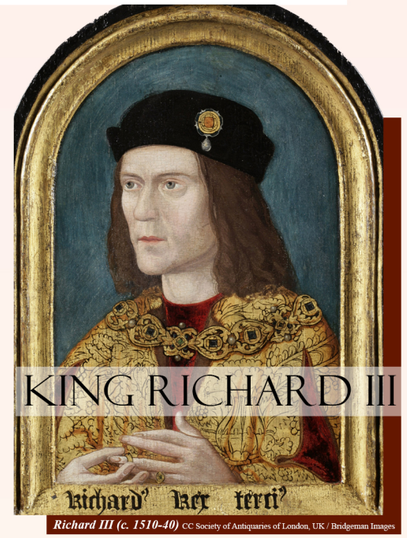
Henryk Siemiradzki ***Night on the Eve of Ivan Kupala (1892)*** *oil on canvas*

HOW DID THEY DIE?

You've answered once before, let's see if you can stand a few more questions.
Answers can be found on page 73-74!

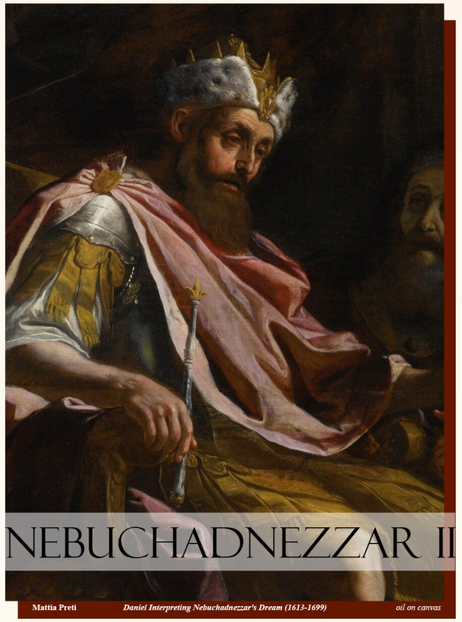


a. Snake bite (suicide)
b. Concoction of poison (suicide)
c. Assassination
d. Stabbed through the heart with a sword (suicide)



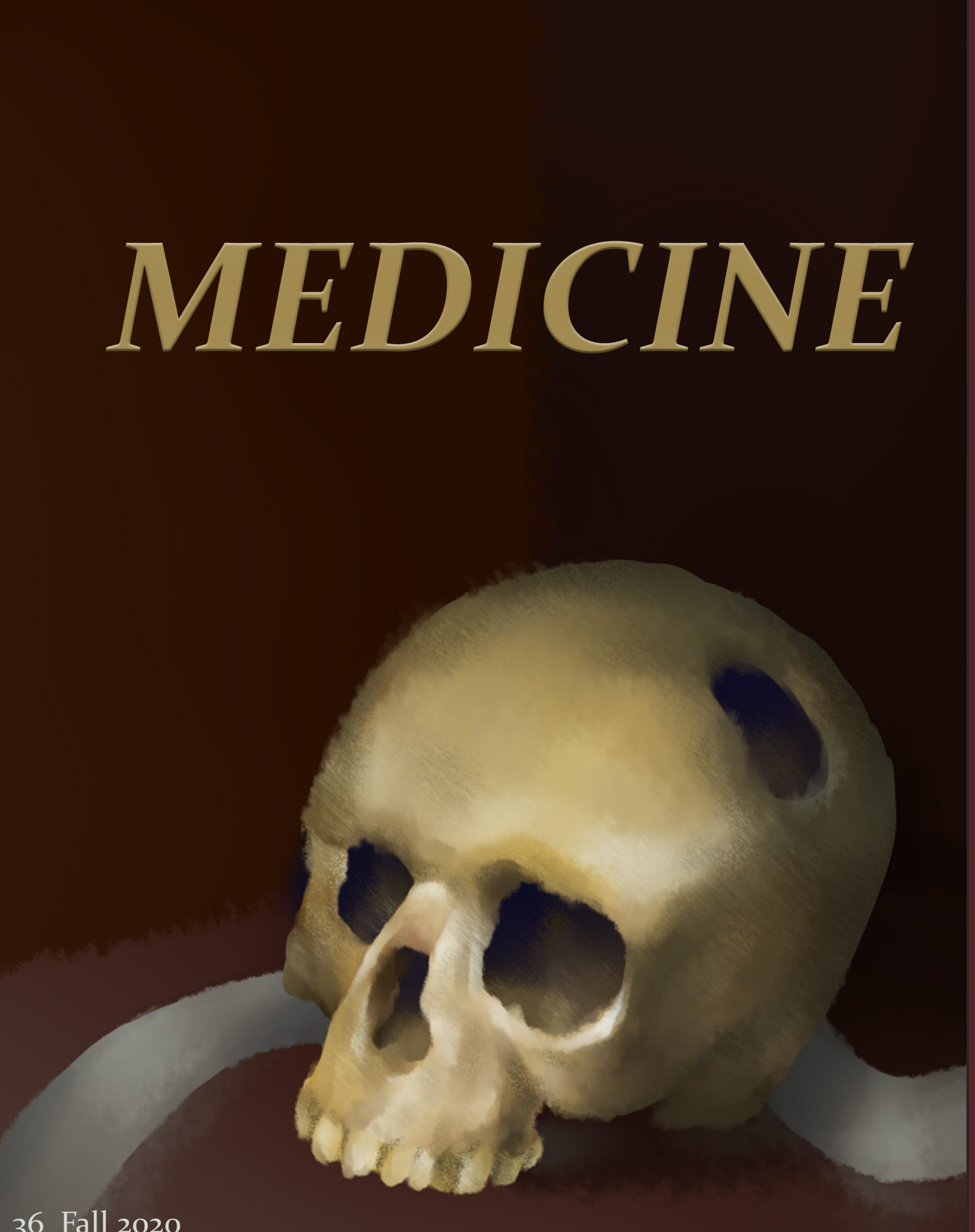
a. Plague
b. Poisoned with hemlock
c. Fatal blow to the base of the skull (amongst other injuries)
d. Natural Causes

a. Assassination
b. Starvation during exile
c. Robbed and killed during exile
d. Natural causes



a. Natural Causes
b. Madness
c. Assassination
d. Spear through the chest during battle (amongst other injuries)

MEDICINE



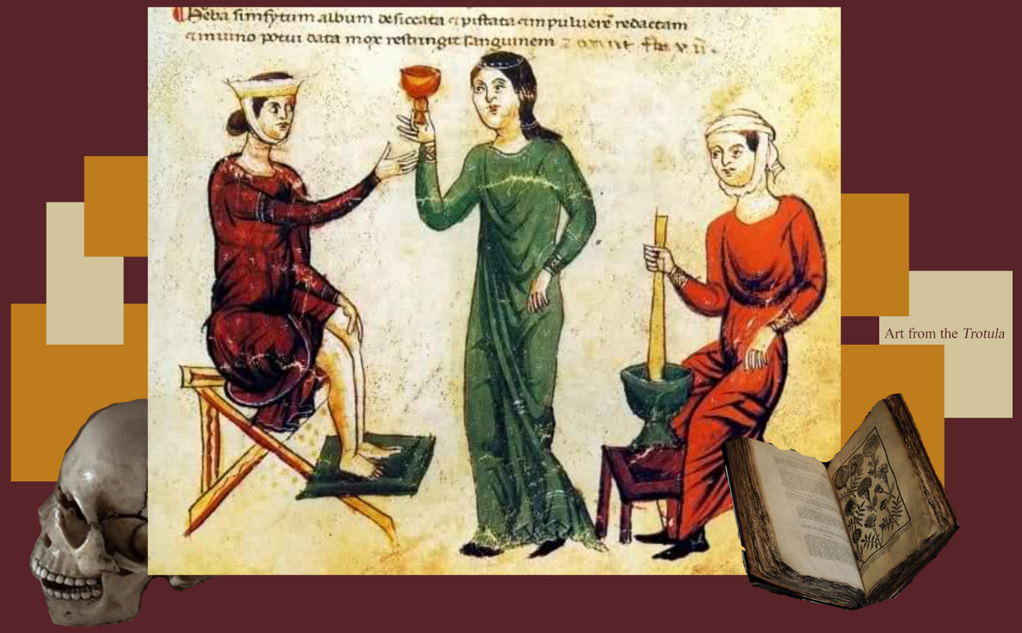
An Overview of Medical Practices in 13th-Century Italy

Celine Rajoulh

Medicine, like any other field, has definitely had its ups and downs during the history of civilization, and the medical dogmas and techniques during the Middle Ages are no exception. From the Catholic Church, there was a pervading belief that sickness was a physical embodiment of sin, which could be healed through religious and spiritual rituals. From the ancient Greeks and Romans came medical books that were first preserved in monasteries and then, eventually, in universities and hospitals. And finally, from pagan and folk traditions came herbal remedies. The intersection of all three influences is especially apparent in 13th-century Italy, a growing hub in the arts and in the pursuit of knowledge. In the decades preluding the early Renaissance, medieval Italy played a profound role in shaping the modern medical practices we use today.

Despite having many different influences in its practice and ideology, Italian medicine was generally unified in its understanding of how diseases progressed. The leading beliefs of the period dealt heavily with the humours, or principle fluids: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood.[1] When these humours were out of balance, physical and mental ailments were believed to emerge. For instance, an overproduction of phlegm is associated with lung-related conditions. Additionally, excess black bile was commonly associated with depression due to its #gloomy and #dark nature. To help restore balance to these four humours, a multitude of measures could be conducted. The most common treatments include herbal remedies and blood-letting.[2] As mentioned previously, these herbal treatments have roots in pre-Christian cultures of the region. Many local monasteries and institutions in Italy maintained herb gardens to cultivate their treatments, which often took the form of salves and drinks.[3] Medieval treatments for mental disorders, unfortunately, were much less holistic in nature. While some healers suggested specific hot teas and baths to balance the black bile, other healers conceptualized mental illness as an embodiment of sin. As such, one gruesome practice was to, for a lack of a better word, smoke the devil out of people (and yes, it is as bad as it sounds).[4]

Although medicine was not a formal practice during this period, a multitude of educational institutions emerged during this era. Italy quickly became a center for medicine during the 12th century with the



Art from the *Trotula*

establishment of the *Schola Medica Salernitana* in Salerno, the first medieval medical school of its caliber.[5] At the university, students learned the curriculum studiorum: three years of logic, five years of medicine, and one year with an experienced physician.[6] It was during this period that Greek-Latin medical traditions were merged with recently-translated Arabic texts, allowing for a deeper learning experience and greater range of medical applications. Hate to break it to you pre-meds, but it was difficult back then too.

At the Schola Medica Salernitana, students were required to participate in surgeries and autopsies. Interestingly, surgery was not considered to be a legitimate medical practice in Europe until this period due to the Catholic Church's belief in the sanctity of the human body. Students and practitioners drew from the works of Al-Zahrawi, an Islamic physician who wrote an influential surgical encyclopedia, *Kitab al-Tasrif*.[7] In this book, he emphasized the importance of studying anatomy and organ function, something that students did not take lightly. From books like these, practitioners were able to develop new methods for wound management and dental care. For instance, it was a popular belief in Western Europe that the production of pus in a wound is healthy; the work of Italian physicians at these institutions (alongside the recommendations of Islamic surgeons) debunked this theory, instead stressing the importance of sealing wounds through cautery.[8]

With such a robust curriculum for that era, it's no surprise that the university drew attention from wealthy patrons. One practitioner in particular, Trota of Salerno, shaped the field of obstetrics and gynecology for decades. A 12th-century healer, Trota wrote two medical treatises known as the *Trotula* that largely focused on women's health.[9] These works were unique in that they expanded knowledge to those who were not fluent in Latin, most notably female midwives. From these books, many caregivers were better able to properly treat healthcare issues that primarily affect childbearing women, such as infertility, vaginal prolapse, heavy menstrual flow, and difficulty in childbirth.[10] For instance, Trota recomended midwives diffuse the herb spikenard during delivery as it has anxiolytic and sedative properties. Interestingly, however, the Trotula is also interspersed with social advice for the era: Trota suggests using powdered lead on the face in order to whiten it (gross!) and provides ways to pretend that one's virginity is intact.[11] In hindsight, these snippets of information may not have been advisable for medieval women to follow, but suggestions like this one highlight how intertwined cultural norms were with medical practices.

It was during the thirteenth century that the number of hospitals in Italian cities began to increase rapidly. These hospitals served as refuges for those who were marginalized—not just those who were sick. As such, there were specific wards reserved for the homeless, for the orphaned, and for the poor.[12] In contrast to monasteries during this era, Italian hospitals employed university-educated practitioners. That's not to say, however, that religion was not emphasized in these institutions; in fact, there are multiple reported instances of physicians refusing to treat patients who did not make a confession to a priest. This practice is rooted heavily in the belief that the body and soul are inextricably linked, and a failure to make a confession implied that the patient was not ready to be healed. The fact that the Catholic Church contributed significantly to hospital funding only strengthened this connection, especially in Rome.[13]

From our 21st-century viewpoint, it often appears that medieval medicine is crude and barbaric. Although this was true in some circumstances (especially in psychopathology), medieval practitioners developed impressive methods and institutions in the context of their scientific environment. It truly puts our own modern beliefs and medical procedures into perspective; how bizarre and baseless will they appear to the historians of future centuries? What may seem correct and ethnically-sound now may not be in the coming years, and that is what makes the scientific process so inspiring. In order to make progress in our fields of interest, it is important to reflect on the historic achievements that brought us here. ■

Notes:

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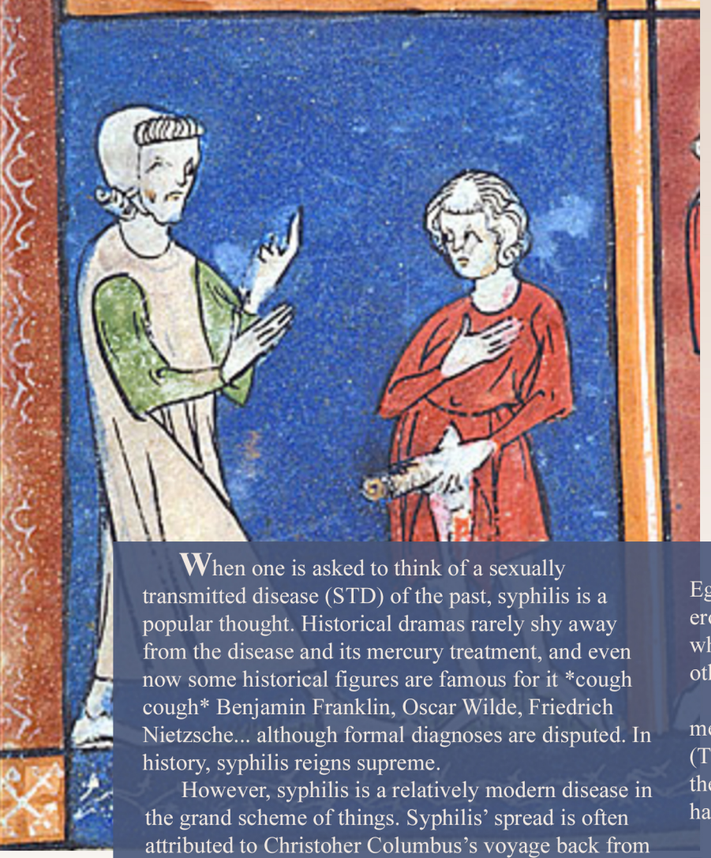
13. Buklijas.



WRAP IT UP

Julia Kravchenko

When one is asked to think of a sexually transmitted disease (STD) of the past, syphilis is a popular thought. Historical dramas rarely shy away from the disease and its mercury treatment, and even now some historical figures are famous for it *cough cough* Benjamin Franklin, Oscar Wilde, Friedrich Nietzsche... although formal diagnoses are disputed. In history, syphilis reigns supreme.

However, syphilis is a relatively modern disease in the grand scheme of things. Syphilis' spread is often attributed to Christoher Columbus's voyage back from the Americas in the 1400s. After his return, syphilis became synonymous with Europe, and seemingly everyone had it. Whether it was due to a lack of widespread use of protection, or no full understanding of how STDs worked, there were certainly no large social media campaigns to promote safe sexual behavior back then.

But, news alert! Syphilis isn't the only STD in modern times that history lovers should be aware of - gonorrhea, herpes, and chlamydia are all things that one can catch when not thinking clearly in the heat of the moment. What kinds of STDs existed before the 1400s, before syphilis rose to fame? Did any exist?

Some of our more biology-savvy readers might recognize the quickness with which bacteria and viruses can evolve. New environments and new genes can cause bacteria to become stronger and more resistant than ever before, all within the span of a few short days, let alone several hundred years. Without the advent of antibiotics to wage full war on STDs, the rate of bacterial evolution might've been slower, but it still occurred. It's possible that back in the Dark Ages and in Antiquity, the diseases we know and love to hate today might have existed in old forms.

Some clay tablets from Mesopotamia and old Egyptian papyri, in addition to old art, and paintings of erotic scenes and prostitutes, describe and visualize what we know today as herpes genitalis, along with other urethral and vaginal discharges.[1] Gross.

Some ancient Chinese and Indian physicians also mentioned some gonorrhea and syphilis in their writings (The Yellow Emperor Book of Medicine and scraps in the Vedas).[2] These mentions were brief, and both didn't happen to mention that it was a result of sexual contact.

In the Middle Ages surgeons and physicians from Europe and Arab countries also described chancres, condylomata, erosions, pustules, and various discharges, and were quite aware that they occurred as a result of sexual contact.[3] This is quite interesting considering that these diseases were often attributed to divine punishment - with sexual contact outside of marriage being frowned upon in Christianity and Islam in medieval times. While STDs might not have existed as they do now, there's still some solid evidence to suggest that some form of it was present back in antiquity.

And yet, if you did decide to mess around with the stable boy, or speak to the recently out of mourning widow, or visit a prostitute after a particularly harrowing battle with the rest of your regiment… are you automatically doomed to a short life, or to forever icky genitals? In that regard, there's less of a clear answer.

In Europe, pesaries and amulets were commonly used as a form of birth control. Pessaries would block sperm from entering the uterus, and amulets could provide divine protection from pregnancy... but no mention of these items was made after the 5th century up until the Renaissance in the 15th century, largely because the Catholic Church deemed it immoral.[4]

Ancient Romans are credited with the use of animal intestines tied at one end as a form of birth control and STD protection (the modern condom is a nod in that direction, thank you latex).[5] Most famously, one of the first recorded instances of a condom was in the myth of Minos by Antoninus Liberalis in 150 A.D. A curse caused Minos' semen to contain serpents and scorpions, and intercourse with his wives resulted in their deaths. Minos used a goat's bladder as a condom, which left them alive. Remarkable, safe, and (hopefully) consensual.

There are some references to Muslim and Jewish people in the Middle ages attemping some form of male contraception. This included covering the penis in tar or soaking it onion juice.[6] I don't envy anyone who tried that.

Some evidence from 1000 A.D. shows that ancient Egyptians also used linen sheaths to protect against venereal diseases. Some images and glyphs are shown that indicate that these sheaths were colored differently to distinguish social status.[7]

Further in line with various sheaths, the Ancient Chinese fashioned silk paper sheaths,[8] which were applied with oil lubrication, and the Japanese used Kabuta-Gata,[9] which were tortoise shell or leather caps, as a form of STD prevention and birth control.

Whatever they may have or haven't used in the past, the variety of birth control options our dear readers have is much more effective. If you're not looking for a jolly bouncing baby in 9 months, and if you're not sure where your partner has been, take a gander down the aisle of your nearest drugstore and be sure to wrap it up.

NOTES:

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9. Khan.

Answers can be found on pg 73!

WOULD YOU SURVIVE A PLAGUE?

Plague has swept into the land. At least that's what the people say. It's a little concerning and you don't want to die of the plague, but it's not really up to you is it? There are chores to be done, siblings to look after, cows to milk, chickens to feed. If you die, you die. It would suck though. Keep track of your answers to see if you die in this wave of the plague! ■

Your friend Margaret just came back from the Butcher's shop, where you know she's been talking to the apprentice, Merek. You also know that the Butcher recently died from the plague, or something. You think the body was quite disfigured when it passed in the undertaker's cart. Margaret also looks a little gnarly.

Do you:

A. She's always been pimply, ignore it and continue embroidering.
B. You don't know that the Butcher died from the plague, the body you saw could've been anyone's
C. Margaret has been good at attending church services, and so have you.
D. Is that a rat?

There's no more bread and that rat looks… delicious. Ow! something bit you, the dog probably brought fleas…

Do you:

A. Yes
B. Yes
C. Yes
D. Yes

The preacher has come by and told you to pray the plague away. His robes are white and he speaks from a tall cart. The altar boys around him waft stuff that makes your nose sting. You feel a little lightheaded.

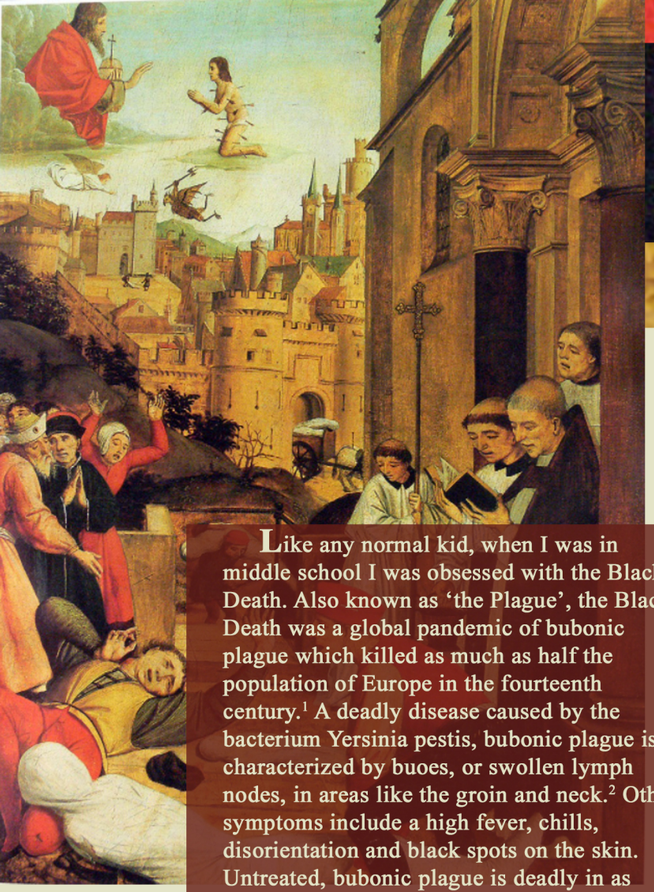
Do you:

A. Pray
B. Pray
C. Margaret might have the pox...
D. Ring around the rosie, catch a pox or posie, ashes, ashes…

The plague doctor has been around, and now he's popped up in your house. You haven't really been able to move--on account of you having the plague--and no one's brushed your hair or teeth or helped you wash for days. Rude.

Do you:

A. Wallow in misery
B. Complain to the doctor
C. Writhe feverishly
D. Get better



THE PLAGUE OF JUSTINIAN

Willa Hart

Like any normal kid, when I was in middle school I was obsessed with the Black Death. Also known as 'the Plague', the Black Death was a global pandemic of bubonic plague which killed as much as half the population of Europe in the fourteenth century.[1] A deadly disease caused by the bacterium Yersinia pestis, bubonic plague is characterized by buoes, or swollen lymph nodes, in areas like the groin and neck.[2] Other symptoms include a high fever, chills, disorientation and black spots on the skin. Untreated, bubonic plague is deadly in as much as 70% of cases.[3]

I first became interested in plague after seeing *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* for the first time; the movie includes a scene where a gravedigger calls for residents to "bring out yer dead" during a medieval plague epidemic. The character acts as casual as a modern garbage man asking for your recycling bin - can you blame me for being interested? Luckily, I was old enough to browse the internet, and I found myself reading article after article, account after account of the plague. It turned out to be a lot darker than *Monty Python* made it out to be, but that just made it all the more interesting in my angsty pre-teen mind. By the end of seventh grade, all my friends were sick of hearing about plague doctors and the posies they kept in their beak-like masks to ward off infection.

But despite my familiarity with the Black Death, I somehow remained completely in the dark about a similar bubonic plague pandemic which occurred centuries earlier. The Plague of Justinian, which began in 541 A.D., is widely described as the first plague pandemic and may have killed tens of millions of people.[4]

But let's backtrack. In 540 A.D., just before the Plague of Justinian began, the Byzantine Empire was at its apex. Under Emperor Justinian I (from whom the Plague of Justinian takes its name), the Byzantines were expanding their spheres of occupation and influence, reclaiming land which had once belonged to the Roman Empire, the Byzantine's spiritual predecessor.[5] For the most part, Justinian was successful, reclaiming land in Italy in 535 and later establishing a presence in Spain in 552.[6]

At the time, Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. A thriving trade city, Constantinople was home to as many as half a million people. To support so many citizens, grain was often imported from Byzantine-held land in Egypt. The ships that transported this grain were often infested with rats and fleas; traditionally, it has been thought that these ships were responsible for bringing plague to Constantinople.[7]

Regardless of how the plague arrived, when it struck, it was devastating. Accounts describe as many as five thousand people dying each day in the city, which was said to have to come to a more or less total standstill, with all workers either falling sick or ceasing work in order to care for ill loved ones.[8] Procopius, a historian of the time, wrote:

"As a result [of this plague] all human life was very nearly extinguished."[9]

Even Emperor Justinian himself caught the plague in 542, though he, like a minority of other plague victims, eventually recovered.[10]

The plague burned hard and fast in Constantinople: despite the high death tolls, contemporary accounts note it lasted only around four months.[11] The plague quickly moved on to other cities in the Mediterranean basin, and, later, up through Europe. It wasn't until 549 that the plague finally eased its grip on Northern Europe and the Arabian peninsula. For decades afterwards, all areas which had been afflicted by the plague were haunted with recurrences - as many as 21 major outbreaks over the next two centuries.[12]

Traditionally, historians have said the Justinian Plague was on a similar level of significance as the Black Death. Death estimates have been pegged at 25-100 million, or 40% of the Byzantine Empire's population. This was thought to have had a significant impact on the Byzantine's military as well as agrarian economy, as it would have led to a shortage of both soldiers and farmers.[14, 15] Famines in 542, 545, and 546 would seem to provide evidence for this theory, as a shortage of agrarian workers could lead to a weak or collapsing harvest. Similarly, the Byzantine's faltering military strategy overseas, including a fumble which lost them Rome in 549, indicates a shortage of both soldiers and adequate military leadership.[16]

In fact, some historians have gone so far as to say the plague marked the beginning of the descent of the Byzantine empire — for though the Byzantine Empire would persist until 1453, the Byzantine Empire would persist until 1453, it would never exceed the reach it attained in the 540s. Others have claimed the Plague marked the end of the period of antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages;[17] and that the plague caused a new valuation of labor which helped to end slavery.

However, new evidence in the past several years has indicated that this may not actually have been the case. Much of our understanding of the Plague of Justinian is based on a select few written accounts, which have dubious reliability at best.[18] For example, Procopius of Caesarea, perhaps the most oft-cited source on the Plague of Justinian, claimed in his writing that Emperor Justinian was a demon in a human body who was likely responsible for the deaths of a trillion people.[19] While his perspective can still have value in context, we can imagine how he might not be a reliable source of objective information. At the same time, new non-written sources have painted a new picture of the pandemic as much less deadly than originally thought. For instance, evidence from papyri, inscriptions, and coins suggest there were no significant upheavals during the 540s such as those which would correspond with a mass fatality event.[20]

So what does this mean? We can't quite be sure. Maybe the Plague of Justinian was a Big Deal, as much so as the Black Death almost a millenia later - or maybe not. Maybe it only felt like a big deal to the people experiencing it, and their terror has transmuted to false assumptions over time. I certainly can't blame the writers of these accounts, either way: if someone took my Twitter feed and tried to use it as gospel in fifteen hundred years, I don't think I could be liable for any misunderstandings. ■

NOTES:

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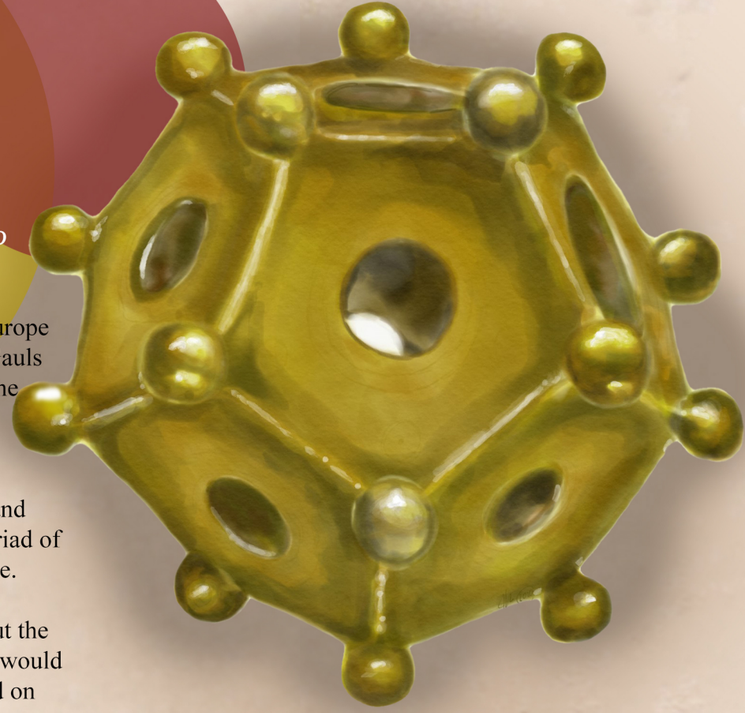
CURIOSITIES

Roman Dodecahedra

Julia Kravchenko



Roman Dodecahedra. Found in northern Europe in the territories previously occupied by the Gauls and the Rompan Empire, and dating back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, these bronze geometric shapes have remained curiosities that lack recorded explanation. With twelve perforated sides, round nubs on each corner, and sizes ranging from 4 to 11 cm, there are a myriad of theories that claim to explain their significance.

Some posit that they were a tool to figure out the perfect date to sow grain.[1] The dodecahedron would be placed onto the soon-to-be-plowed soil and on one day in spring and one day in fall, sunlight would stream through the holes to make a perfect angle with the ground. The day that happens is assumed to be the perfect date to sow grain. The math checks out, but the variance found in size, does not.

Other scholars say that they're a sort of sort of rangefinder to estimate distance.[2] This theory is largely supported by the fact that the holes on the sides have been found to vary in size. Looking through the smaller hole one one side, and focusing on an object through the larger hole on the other side, you can measure size and distance through simple mathematical ratios.

Finally, some think that the Gallo-Roman Dodecahedra were religious tools that symbolized the universe,[3] a theory largely attributed to Neopythagoreanism--a school of philosophy in 1-2 CE that attempted to merge mysticism, mathematics, and philosophy. The pentagon, deemed a powerful shape, represents five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and the soul. Additionally, the twelve sides represent the twelve zodiac signs. Thus, the dodecahedron served as a representation of the divine.

From a visual standpoint, those theories seem more than probable, and the lack of written record concerning their use means anyone could be right. Recently however, several ambitious history enthusiasts 3D printed their own models of Roman dodecahedra, and, using either a crochet hook or a needle, knit surprisingly intact and seamless fingers for gloves.[4][5][6] The nubs served as hooks for stitches, and the large hole on each side is where the completed finger is formed. The multiple holes allow for several fingers to be knitted at the same time, thus easily attaching them onto the palm of a glove. Considering the various sizes of these objects, gloves could be knitted for both children and adults, and in the cold winters of northern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland… anyone would wish for a pair. ■

Notes:

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The Voynich Manuscript

Julia Kravchenko

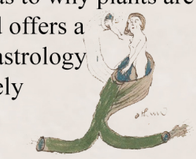
There exists a book of unknown origin, written in an unknown writing system, in an unknown language. It seems as if such a thing is hardly possible in this day and age and yet, the Voynich Manuscript is living proof of such a thing. The manuscript was brought into the public eye in the 1910s by Wilfrid Voynich, a Polish book dealer, on account of it being quite perplexing.[1] In this 102-page volume, there are a myriad of curious images accompanied by a script that ultimately looks like nothing we've ever seen before. From radioactive carbon dating we know that it was written in the 15th century, and from its vellum pages, an expensive, high quality parchment made from the skin of a calf, we can assume that whatever the book contains is important. Any other guesses are just that, guesses.

The first half of the book is illustrated with detailed plant diagrams. With those one might think it would be easy to figure out what the book was for, but like the script in the manuscript, the plants don't resemble any of the plants that we know today. Instead, the featured flora look more like Frankensteins of multiple plants - the roots of one plant are attached to stalks from a different plant, attached to the leaves or flowers of a third distinct plant. The deliberateness with which these plants are drawn make it impossible to ignore the roots, or the leaves in favor of identifying it. This herbal collection is supplemented by paragraphs of text. Perhaps these paragraphs give instructions on how to find or use these plants, or how to prepare them, or maybe even instructions on how to grow them, but we may never know for sure.

The next section of this codex features astrological symbols - at least, that's the easiest assumption. With suns and moons and stars inscribed in circles with cycling text, there's even less consensus on what they represent. Following the astrological section are pages upon pages of walls of the mysterious script. It's only broken up by images of naked women sitting in green baths, decorated with various tubes and faucets. The last section of the manuscript consists of more walls of text, but these walls are separated into short paragraphs by stars in the margins.

Naturally, this bizarre document has raised scepticism. The plants look like no plant we know of, the astrological symbols are incomprehensible, the wall of text is unreadable, this must be a hoax. However the fact that it was written on vellum, and the fact that statistical analysis of the word and symbol patterns that indicate a strong resemblance to real languages[2] point to the possibility of a serious document. But what do we think it means?

One theory posits that the Voynich Manuscript was a pharmacological text.[3] With half of the text consisting of plant drawings, this hypothesis is hardly unsubstantiated. Furthermore, the lunar cycles and unfamiliar constellations might indicate when to harvest these plants or when to brew them. The short, starred paragraphs in the back of the text may indicate a recipe structure that can be used as a guide to brew poultices and medicines. This explanation provides insight as to why plants are seemingly the main focus and offers a potential explanation for the astrology section, yet it fails to concretely explain the bathing women.



Along a similar line, but encompassing the bathing women, is the theory that the Voynich Manuscript may be a gynecological text.[4] The plants and accompanying words may be treatments for illnesses, the lunar and astrological cycles may indicate menstruation, pregnancy, or other cyclical events in a woman's life. The seemingly random women breaking up the text may be patients sitting in a healing bath. But, this theory doesn't explain the encrypted text - if this was a healing text, why not write it in Latin to help heal other women?

Maybe the contents aren't supposed to be read by just anyone, hence the encryption. If the manuscript is an alchemy text,[5] it would explain the mysterious language. Anyone who had found the elixir to immortality would be very careful not to share it. The alchemy hypothesis also provides an explanation for the strange tubing and faucets on the baths, turning them into alchemical equipment. At the very least, if this is the recipe for eternal life, whoever wrote this was kind enough to display the answer, yet arrogant and infuriating enough to reveal nothing at all.

My own uneducated hypothesis is that this item was a grimoire. Grimoires are books of magic, written and used by witches to perform, cast, or create spells. These books are highly detailed, with illustrations of ingredients, and formal instructions on how to properly perform magic. The wacky plants may be components necessary for various potions and poultices - things that witches can use to heal or harm. The astrological and lunar calendars may reflect the importance of the moon and night sky in many pagan religions - religions that we classically associate with "witches". The wall of text may be instructions, and the starred paragraphs may be incantations for certain spells to chant over a boiling cauldron. Speaking of boiling cauldrons, the women bathing in green liquid might be witches themselves, organized in a coven and performing a ritual. If this text were to be a sacred grimoire, containing the instructions for powerful spells and locations of mystical plants, it wouldn't be something that a coven of witches may want to share - hence the coded language. Although, I may be reading too much into it - I should maybe pick up a nonfiction book once in a while.

While my answer might be incorrect, that doesn't mean that yours is too. The Voynich Manuscript is available digitally for free at the Beinecke Library at Yale University[6] for perusal, should you be the one to finally crack the code.■

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Willem Roelofs

Water Meadows on the River IJssel (1870-97)

oil paint on canvas

BOG BODIES:
EUROPE'S SWAMP MUMMIES

Willa Hart

In 1950, two brothers cutting peat in the Bjældskovdal Bog in Denmark, discovered a perfectly preserved human corpse.[1]

At first glance, the brothers thought they had discovered a recent murder victim: the body looked remarkably fresh, with its hat and belt intact and its face so well-preserved that one could make out its fine wrinkles and short stubble. Archaeological investigation would eventually uncover that this man - who archeologists would dub the Tollund Man - was was over two thousand years old. He had lived in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, dying sometime in the third century B.C.E;[2] for centuries, he had laid undisturbed in the bog, kept intact by its unique chemical properties. In the years after his discovery he would become among the most famous and most valuable specimens of the so-called 'bog bodies' - corpses which, left in peat bogs, are held for years in a silent stasis, waiting to be discovered.

The first bog body was found in 1640.[3] Since then, hundreds of bog bodies have been discovered in northwestern Europe, most of them exquisitely preserved. This preservation is what makes them unique: though ancient human remains can and have been found in regions across the world, not even Ancient Egyptian mummies are as well-preserved as some European bog bodies.

This incredible preservation comes from the unique chemical nature of peat bogs. Bogs are low-oxygen environments with highly acidic water. They also contain chemicals like sphagnan, a polymer which binds to nitrogen.[4] Since bacteria need nitrogen to survive, sphagnan effectively kills many bacteria, slowing the decomposition of human remains.

In combination, these traits mean when newly-deceased bodies are placed into bogs in sufficiently cold conditions, the soft tissues of the body will mummify rather than decay.[5]

Bog bodies are usually found in the northern stretches of Europe, including Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. Occasionally, bog bodies have been found in areas of North America as well, including, most notably, Florida.

Bog bodies are not an exclusively historical phenomenon: they are still being created today. Most recently, bog bodies have been identified from the mid-20th century in regions of Europe that saw fighting during WWII.[6] However, most bog bodies date from

Sven Rosborn

The Tollund Man (2008)

photograph

the Nordic Bronze Age (ca. 1100 B.C.E. - 500 B.C.E.) or from the Pre-Roman Iron Age (ca. 500 B.C.E. - 1 B.C.E.),[7] with some bog bodies, like the famous Cashel Man, dating back even further. There is some variation in timing between regions, with Danish bog bodies, for instance, being especially prevalent in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, while Irish bodies tend to date further back.[8] The reasons for this are unclear.

While scientists understand the chemical mechanisms which allow the preservation of bog bodies, it is less obvious how and why the bog people ended up in the bogs - a question that falls to historians.

The most popular theory is that bog people were ritual sacrifices made to appease the gods.[9] Initially, there seems to be much to support this theory. First and foremost, bogs were seen by many Iron-Age cultures as mystical places which served as crossing points between this world and the next. They would have seen the bog as a perfect place to leave a sacrifice, and in fact, there is some evidence that other, non-human offerings were placed into bogs as well.[10]

Another point in favor of the ritual sacrifice theory is that many bog bodies show evidence of foul play.[11] The Tollund Man, for example, was found with what some argue is a garrote around his neck (though other archeologists contest it is a necklace). Other bog bodies appear to be victims of what is sometimes called a 'triple-killing,' a phenomena wherein a victim is killed by multiple different methods. This indicates a potentially ritualized death.[12]

One famous bog body, the Lindow man, appears to have been hit on the head, strangled, and had his throat cut before he was dropped into the bog.[13]

Additionally, other aspects about the bodies in question, including their states of dress and their final meals, can hint a ritual sacrifice.[14] Many bog bodies are found naked, including the Tollund Man, who was found wearing nothing but a hat and belt. Though his other clothes may have decomposed over time, most historians agree that it's more likely the bodies were placed into the bogs naked, another choice which would hint at ritual.

Likewise, because of their excellent state of preservation, the contents of bog bodies' stomachs can often be examined, an investigation which often yields unusual results. One bog body found in Ireland, the Moydrum Man, had what appeared to be over three hundred berries in his stomach at the time of his death, an excessive amount that could point to ritual ingestion.[15] Similarly, another Irish bog body, the Oldgroghan Man, ate a final meal of cereals and buttermilk,[16] which would have been very different from his usual meat-based diet. And the Grauballe Man, who was found in Denmark, appeared to have consumed ergot before he died[17] - a poisonous plant which could have been used to induce ritualistic hallucinations.

Wikimedia Commons
The Tollund Man (2007)
photograph PD-Old

Danish National Museum/Wikimedia Commons
Bog body from Denmark, "Borremose Man" (c. 1946)
photograph PD-1996

Still, the ritual sacrifice theory is imperfect. Not all bog bodies have evidence of foul play - indeed, one recent study of ten bog skeletons indicated that none of them had signs of peri-mortem injuries.[18] While this is certainly not conclusive, it does shed doubt on the universality of the sacrifice theory in accounting for all bog people's deaths.

Further, there is debate about why the bog people would have been chosen for sacrifice. Some historians believe that sick or disabled people were chosen to be sacrificed, claiming bog bodies show a disproportionately high level of deformities, while others, like Eammon P. Kelly, posit that it was the well-off in society who were sacrificed. Kelly, an Irish archaeologist, specifically argues that Irish bog bodies might be kings who were sacrificed following a bad harvest.[19] As it was the responsibility of Irish kings at that time to ensure the well-being of their subjects, a bad year would have led to loss of faith in the king, and his sacrifice might have been thought to appease the gods and bring future success.

SO WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO THE THEORY OF RITUAL SACRIFICE?

The most prominent is the hypothesis that bog people were criminals or social deviants killed for their social transgressions. This theory might account for the relatively young ages of some of the bodies, including the Iron Age bodies in Denmark, many of whom appeared to be around 15-20 years old at their time of death.[20] However, like the ritual sacrifice theory, it ultimately lacks sufficient evidence to fully support it.

If northern European cultures of the Iron and Bronze ages were literate, like the Ancient Egyptians, then perhaps the bog bodies would not still be a mystery to us over three centuries later. But unfortunately, no written records of this time exist. That leaves historians in the unenviable position of speculating about why the bog people were killed and why they were placed in the bogs: if they were killed as part of a ritualistic sacrifice, murdered because they were social deviants, or died from some other cause. Crucially, we are also left to wonder just who the bog people were when they were living - because though they are bodies now, they were people once, something that is important for both historians and casual hobbyists to remember when thinking about bog bodies. ■

Notes:

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MOVING THE MOAI

Collin Sharpe

On March 6, 2020, a resident of Easter Island accidentally crashed his truck into a UNESCO World Heritage site.

A brake failure sent the vehicle careening into a moai, one of the iconic stone "heads" that have made Easter Island a household name around the world. The statue was badly damaged, and the island's mayor used the incident as an opportunity to promote anti-driving laws he'd been trying to pass for some time. His point was clear: anyone with a car has the raw mechanical power to, even unintentionally, destroy irreplaceable artifacts. This includes even the massive moai, masterworks of sculpture that can be up to thirty feet tall.[1]

This is a problem the Rapa Nui, the island's indigenous people, never had when the moai were made. Prior to contact with European explorers, the Rapa Nui had only stone for their tools. While many civilizations had beasts of burden to pull plows and the stones for their monuments, the Rapa Nui had only chickens, pigs, and rats. They had so few resources for moving weight that scholars are still puzzled by how they could possibly have moved hundreds of moai - the heaviest tops eighty tons - from inland quarries to the stone platforms they stand on today.[2]

There is no shortage of conspiracies - often racist - about how the moai were moved. Many of them approach outright fantasies. Aliens, a mysterious and specifically white-skinned people from South America, and a hitherto undiscovered ancient civilization that spanned the globe have all seen their fifteen minutes.[3] But scholars agree that the Rapa Nui were responsible for this incredible engineering achievement. What they disagree about is how they managed to accomplish it.

Their competing theories, split mostly into two camps, tell deeply conflicting stories about who the Rapa Nui were. One theory, portraying the Rapa Nui as shortsighted, irresponsible managers of their environment, finds its most popular expression in author Jared Diamond's book *Collapse: How Societies Choose or Fail to Succeed.* In *Collapse*, Diamond argues that moving the moai was only made possible through widespread deforestation. The island, which today is mostly hilly plains of muted green and brown, used to be covered in palm trees, which Diamond and others argue were cut down to be fashioned into rollers for the moai to be dragged across. The island's soil, stripped of its forests, could no longer guard against erosion, while wind and rain carried its nutrients away.[4]

The result, the "ecocide" theory, was an ultimately fatal scarcity of food and wood. Already present tensions between rival elites and kin groups were exacerbated, leading to a devastating civil war that may have ended in brutal cannibalism.

William Hodges
A View of the Monuments of Easter Island, Rapanui (c. 1795)
oil on panel

Citing Rapa Nui oral history and an abundance of weapon-like stone objects at archaeological sites, ecocide theorists claim that starvation and violence reduced a growing, healthy population of nearly thirteen thousand to just three thousand. The Rapa Nui overcame their technological limitations, but only at the price of their civilization and thousands of lives. The title of Diamond's book best captures the narrative this theory would have us believe: the Rapa Nui got to choose between sustainable success or utter collapse, and they picked the latter. This story, with its parallels to present-day issues like climate change, has a cynical appeal that's smoothed its way to popular acceptance.[5]

In recent years, however, the ecocide theory has faced a capable challenger that questions whether the Rapa Nui ever had a chance to pick. Spearheaded by anthropologist Terry Hunt and archaeologist Carl Lipo, this new theory casts doubt on nearly all of the important evidence Diamond and others have put forward. While pollen records show that Easter Island had palm forests prior to human arrival, and just looking at the island todawill prove those forests are no longer around, Hunt and Lipo believe that the culprit for the island's deforestation was much smaller than the Rapa Nui.

Among the animals Easter Island's settlers brought with them was the Polynesian rat, an easy source of food that reproduced rapidly and ate the fruit and seeds like those the palms produced. Experts estimate the rat population on Easter Island could easily have grown to the tens of millions, and on an island that's only sixty-four square miles, it's easy to see how much havoc they could have wreaked on its trees.[6]

They also argue that the weapon-like objects found by archaeologists, called mata'a, are poor evidence of civil war. Few of the skeletons found from the time the civil war was said to take place have the scratches and breaks associated with a violent death, and studies of the mata'a's properties as a tool provide strong evidence that they were not

INSULAIRES ET MONUMENS DE L'ÎLE DE PÂQUE.

heavy or balanced enough to be killing tools.[7] Using statistical modeling and new radiocarbon dating has also led researchers to conclude that moai were being made well after the civil war would have taken place, a project impossible for a collapsed society.[8]

The new theory of how the moai were moved gives far more credit to the Rapa Nui. When interviewing the Rapa Nui on how the statues were moved, researchers sometimes received a frustrating, confusing response: "they walked".[9] It's easy to see why this idea wouldn't be taken seriously. But there are some interesting differences between Easter Island's completed moai and the broken, unfinished statues that lie alongside its roads that suggest that something like that might actually have happened. The incomplete moai are far more pear-shaped, with wider bellies and D-shaped bases that are oddly optimized for rocking.[10]

This prompted Lipo and Hunt to experiment with walking a moai themselves.[11] Tying ropes to a standing, replica moai made of concrete, untrained students tugging the moai back and forth could move the statue forward. Video of the test shows the moai, staring unblinking at its destination, moving in a way that was startlingly similar to a human walking.[12] Once the real moai had finally reached their stone platform, the extra weight would have been carved away as the final touches, which often included eyes of white coral and detailed engravings, were added. If true, this promising explanation of how the moai were moved tells a much different story about the Rapa Nui. Far from unreflectively destroying their own environment, the Rapa Nui moved the moai in an ingenious way that took even academics and experts until just a few years ago to figure out.

Though they may not have self-destructed from the consequences of thoughtless environmental exploitation, the Rapa Nui might still have had

an apocalypse forced onto them. On Easter Day, 1722, Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen docked his ship on a small island in the Pacific. He was the first European find it, and he gave the island the name we use today, after the day he first saw it. He also found roughly three thousand Rapa Nui, and he noted in his journal that they were strong and healthy. In 1770, a Peruvian expedition also found about three thousand Rapa Nui. Just four years later, in 1774, Captain James Cook found only a few hundred. They were weak and emaciated, the survivors of some terrible event that had killed nearly everyone they knew. By 1877, only a hundred Rapa Nui remained. If not hunger and war, what did this?[13]

There is a growing consensus among historians that the very Europeans who recorded these events may have been responsible for the Rapa Nui's real collapse. European diseases, which killed so many people in the Americas that the global climate may have cooled because of them,[14] are likely what caused the calamity between 1770 and 1774. Without the hard-won immunity the Europeans had - as the descendants of the only people that survived these deadly illnesses - the Rapa Nui would have been defenseless against them. Unable to compete with European technology and firearms, the Rapa Nui were also vulnerable to slave raids that took many of those who hadn't died of sickness. Rather than choose their own demise, the Rapa Nui, like many before and after them, succumbed to the overwhelming force of guns, germs, and steel.[15]

The Rapa Nui are still here, and they're still recovering. They still don't own the island, which was annexed to Chile in 1888.[16] It doesn't help that the ecocide narrative, still quite popular, has given them a global reputation for being thoughtless, violent cannibals who chose their current state.

How the moai were moved seems like a small question, but answering it has enormous consequences:

THE CHARACTER OF AN ENTIRE PEOPLE IS ON THE LINE.

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Michele Damaskinos
Le nozze di Cana
(c. 1561)

ITALIAN FOOD BEFORE THE TOMATO

Willa Hart

What do you think of when you think of Italian cuisine? Pizza? Pasta with red sauce? Olive Garden's endless bucket of breadsticks? If you're Italian yourself, or just well-traveled, you might be internally screaming, "These are not Italian dishes!" And, yes, I will admit that Olive Garden, though delicious, is not a great representation of Italian culture. Neither is spaghetti made with Kroger-brand noodles and generic jarred tomato sauce, or frozen Digiorno pizza. (Spoiler alert: we always knew it wasn't delivery.)

But pasta and pizza are classic Italian foods (though more delicious when made in Italy), and like many famous Italian dishes, they rely on imported foods as key ingredients. Italian staples like potatoes, eggplants, and even tomatoes are all relatively new features in Italian cooking,[1] which for many of us, may raise the question: what did Italian food look like before these ingredients were used? And, maybe more importantly, was it any good?

The answers to those two questions, in order: pretty different, and pretty good. Don't worry — medieval Italians did have both pasta and pizza in some form, though both are very different from the versions we see today. In general, medieval Italian cuisine tended to feature foods like pork, beans, eggs, and wheat.[2] Like other Mediterranean regions, Italian cuisine also featured seafood, with classic recipes including salted cod, fish pies and seafood pastas. Many of the vegetables we're familiar with today, such as onions and garlic, were eaten in Italy around this time as well.[3] Of course, Italy in its current form didn't exist until the late 19th century; during the Medieval period, Italy was actually composed of many smaller nation-states, and there was certainly some variation between the traditional cuisines of these regions, generally for geographical or cultural reasons. But broadly speaking, similar foods were eaten in most of the regions that now compose Italy.

So what, you might be asking, did medieval pizza and pasta look like? Pasta, for the most part, looked the same as it does today, just paired with different dressings. Buy a plate of spaghetti in the thirteenth-century and you might find your noodles tossed in oil, garlic, or cheese instead of the modern marinara.[4] Pizza, on the other hand, was more significantly different. Perhaps most accurately labeled a 'flatbread', pizza in medieval times consisted of water-and-flour dough which was cooked and topped with oil and herbs.[5] These 'pizzas' did not have the classic red sauce or cheese that we see as a key feature of pizza today, but it's hard to imagine they weren't delicious in their own way. (I mean: bread.)

Though this version of Italian food may seem alien to us, it's worth noting that it's not entirely dissimilar from authentic cuisine found in Italy today. Many traditional Italian dishes, like seafood casseroles or oil-based pastas, are still eaten across Italy. It's mainly in America, and in other parts of the world, that Italian food has been reduced largely to its tomato-based dishes - a shame, but perhaps one we should know to expect. Tomatoes are, after all, American, and what do Americans love more than ourselves?■

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FACT VS. FICTION:
THE LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR

Claire Brady

Whether or not you're English, the story of King Arthur is an internationally known myth and legend. Popular for his actions with the Knights of the Round Table, the sword Excalibur, his enemy Mordred, and the wizard Merlin,

Almost everyone is aware of the greatness of 'the king that was and the king that shall be'.

King Arthur ascended to the throne after he pulled the sword Excalibur from where it was stuck in a stone, a feat that marked him as the true heir. Ruling as king of England, Arthur was counseled by the wizard Merlin, and worked alongside the knights of Round Table. The Knights went on many quests and adventures, including to Roman Empire, and famously hunted for the Holy Grail. The escapades of Arthur and his Knights came to an end after Mordred, Arthur's son, declares himself king and attacks Arthur's army. Although Arthur was successful in killing Mordred, his injuries end up being fatal. Meanwhile, Lancelot, who was the greatest Knight of the Round table, and Guinevere, Arthur's wife, died of illness. Those two had been secretly in love and had an extensive and passionate affair without Arthur's knowledge. The deaths of the main players of the story result in the ending of the noble and strong Round Table of Camelot. This brief version of the legend is how most people know the story, and how the media mainly portrays it. These characters and stories have been written about by countless authors, adapted for film and television, and even used for British propaganda purposes. However, widespread knowledge and media usage does not necessarily mean the stories are completely true, or even partly true. Instead, the legend of King Arthur is an intricate combination of historical and fictitious details, as well as popular culture references of the time they were added.

To understand the roots of Arthurian legend, it is important to examine the different authors that significantly contributed to the stories the world knows about today. The largest source historians are aware of is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain,* written in the 12th century about the lives of early British kings. Monmouth gives an expansive history of King Arthur, detailing his conception, ascension to the throne, battles against the Saxons, the role of Merlin, and the final betrayal by Mordred. However, Monmouth never writes about or mentions a sword in a stone, the Knights of the Round Table, Lancelot, the Holy Grail, or the location of Camelot. These were all details added later to make Arthur's story more interesting and heroic, in contrast to Monmouth's version of Arthur, which portrayed him as more violent and temperamental. Although Monmouth's book is physical evidence of the legend, the credibility of the book as fact is virtually nonexistent. Monmouth claimed he translated the story from an ancient Latin book, but was never able to conjure said book. Furthermore, there is absolutely no archeological evidence of Arthur's existence at any listed location given by Monmouth. This tale of King Arthur may have been made up, but there still may be some truth hidden in the inspiration for Arthur and other details.

The first question to look at is whether or not a man named Arthur actually existed.

Charles Ernest Butler — *Arthurian Knight (1903)* — *print on canvas*

Although this is a very basic question, few academics can agree on an answer. Most that have studied the legend of King Arthur believe that the Arthur that did exist was not a king, but a commander of an exceptional fighting force. Academics agree that a man named Arthur, or Arturus, led a force against the Saxons, Jutes, and other groups from the north of Europe during their invasion of Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries. This finding is based on two authors, Nennius and Gildas, and the text *Annales Cambriae.* Nennius, a historian, wrote *Historia Brittonum* in the 9th century. In this history, he wrote of Arthur leading 12 different battles against the Saxons, specifically gaining a victory at Mons Badonicus. This section of Nennius's work is from an undetermined source and is not verifiable. But, the *Annales Cambriae* also includes a victory at Mons Badonicus by Arthur and mentions other battles. The other author, Gildas, only verifies this version of Arthur by placing the battle at Mons Badonicus around 500 AD, which is in agreement with the other writings. Of course, other theories still exist about who Arthur really was. One theory suggests that Arthur was a Roman named Lucius Artorius Castus. This theory claims he fought against the Picts, the largest kingdom in Scotland during the Dark Ages, during the second century AD. This places Arthur as fighting 300 years earlier than the previous sources place him.

Similar to the mystery around who Arthur really was, there is also a question about where the legend took place. The place most associated with Arthurian legend is Camelot, the city that housed Arthur's castle, Round Table, and all the other main characters of the legend. However, the city of Camelot is never mentioned in Monmouth's 12th century history. Instead, it is believed Camelot was added to the story by a French poet named Chrétien de Troyes. No historical map contains any city named Camelot, but historians have attempted to locate a place that served as its inspiration. One historian in the 18th century, William Stukely, who conducted an archeological search at Cadbury Castle in Somerset, believes that location is the original Camelot. However, King Arthur is most associated with Cornwall and various parts of Wales, though still no specific land has been pinpointed as Camelot. Another theory introduced recently by British scholar Dr. Andrew Breeze is that most of Arthur's battles were fought in southern Scotland, and his life was mainly spent in Strathclyde, Scotland. Dr. Breeze believes he has located the nine places where Arthur fought battles according to Nennius in *The History of the Britons*. His locations place Arthur in Scotland, rather than across all of Great Britain, but others reject this theory. One location that has been historically confirmed is Tintagel, the given birthplace of Arthur, which was actually a large fortress and port during the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

Along with Camelot and the true identity of Arthur, almost every other popular detail of the famous legend is either unverifiable or known to be complete fiction.

The first examples of this can be seen in the characters of Guinevere, Mordred, and Merlin. All of these characters were originally mentioned in Monmouth's history of King Arthur, but the way they are portrayed is much different now. Guinevere, Arthur's wife, was called Ganhumara by Monmouth. It is believed the name was changed in the 12th century to a more romantic, French version. Mordred is thought by scholars to be based on King Mandubracious of the Trinovantes, a Celtic tribe in pre-Roman Britain, who betrayed his uncle to Julius Caesar in the 1st century BC. Mordred, nephew of Arthur, also betrays his own family. The last character mentioned by Monmouth is Merlin, the wizard we know as being a protector of Camelot and mentor to Arthur. However, in Monmouth's tale, Merlin and Arthur never meet in person, and Merlin was only ever advisor to Arthur's father and uncle.

There are other elements of the King Arthur legend that never appear at all in the original writings and were simply added later by other authors.

One of the most prolific examples is the character Lancelot, who we know as the best of the Knights of the Round Table and secret lover to Guinevere. Nowhere is Lancelot seen in Monmouth's history, or any others, and Ganhumara is involved with Mordred instead of Lancelot. The entire concept of the Round Table and the quest for the Holy Grail was also fabricated and added to the legend during the 12th and 13th centuries. It is currently thought that these concepts were added to emphasize qualities that were admired at the time in Britain. The Round Table promoted the idea of brotherhood, while the Holy Grail added a religious undertone. Both of these aspects were ideas and topics that appealed to the knights and other people of the time. The last example of an added element, arguably one of the most known parts of the story today, is the sword in the stone. Originally, Arthur simply inherits the sword, called Caliburn and not Excalibur, as well as the entire kingdom from his father. There was never a prophecy that whoever pulled out the sword would be the king; instead Arthur's ascension happened like any other of the time. This part of the story was most likely added to appeal to the public's sense of adventure and character. The sword in the stone demonstrates the idea that anyone from anywhere can be someone great and of importance, and that it does not matter what your last name is or where you grew up.

Although King Arthur and all of the stories surrounding him are mainly based in fiction, that has not stopped generations in Britain, and all over the world, from celebrating and enjoying him. From Disney's "The Sword in the Stone" in 1963, "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" in 1975, to Guy Ritchie's "King Arthur: The Legend of the Sword" by in 2017, the media has a endless fascination with every aspect of the legend and audiences are always eager for a fresh take. King Arthur's story has had so much effect largely because of the simplistic message at its core: that the hero should be of the people and for the people, and that they will always conquer over evil in the end. Arthur as a noble and just hero has made him into a national symbol for Britain, a call to the chivalrous and mighty past of the nation. Beyond that message, Arthurian legend has details that appeal to all different types of people; whether you are interested in action and fighting, romance, magic, or religion there is something for everyone. Perhaps the lack of fact and knowledge surrounding him is part of the impact the legend has. Without many known truths, King Arthur can be presented or molded any way a storyteller sees fit, allowing for countless adaptations and tangents for the imagination to go on. ■

Although the truth of King Arthur may be lost to time, his legend is still very much alive today all over the world.

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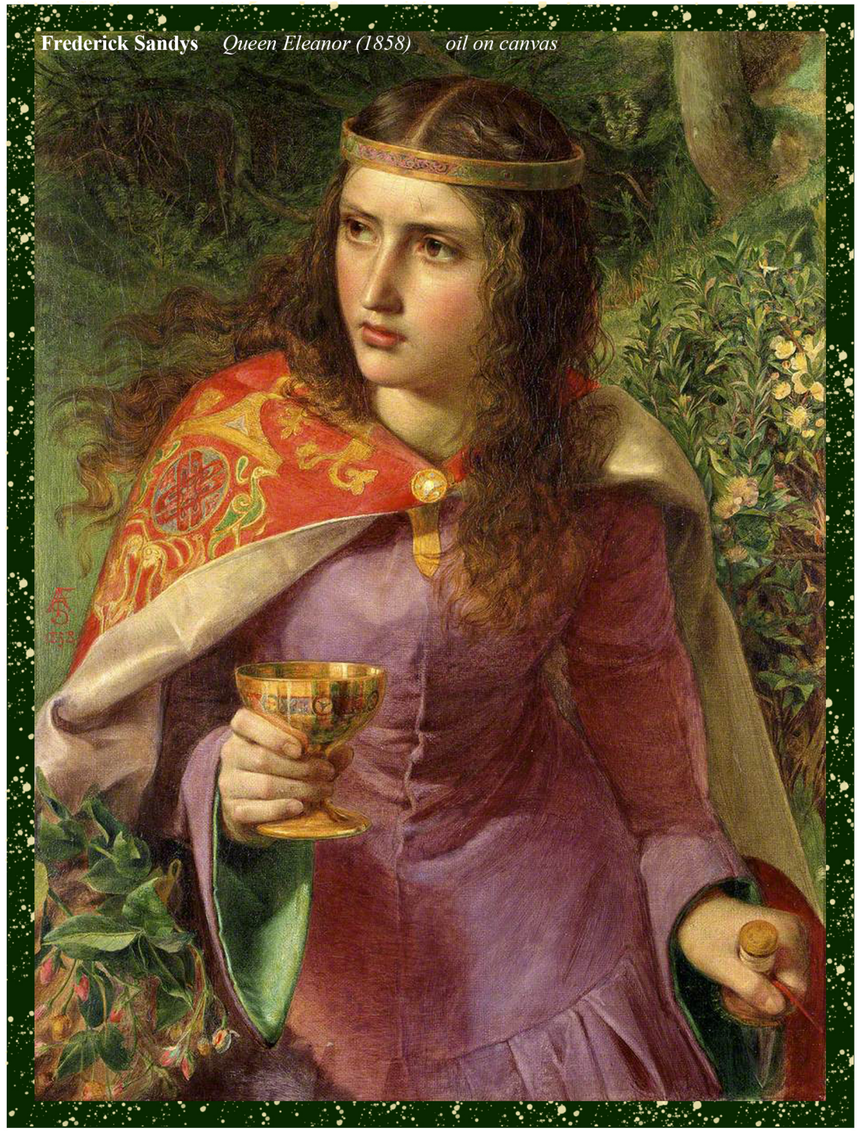

BADASS LADY FROM HISTORY: ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

Claire Brady

Eleanor of Aquitaine was born in the south of France in the year 1122. As heir to her father, the Duke of Aquitaine, Eleanor was highly educated and cultured in literature, philosophy, languages, court life, and horse riding. However, most of her activities ended at the age of 15 when her father died and she inherited his title and lands.[1] Within days of the Duke's death, she became ward to the King of France, betrothed to the King's son Louis VII, and escorted from Aquitaine to the royal palace.[2]

In one year, Eleanor went from a normal girl to the Duchess of Aquitaine to the would-be queen of France.

By Christmas Day of 1137, still 15 years old, Eleanor became the official queen of France, with Louis VII as her king. She would eventually accompany Louis on the Second Crusade in 1145, which would mark the start of the end of their marriage. By 1152, Louis and Eleanor were granted an annulment on the grounds of them being related by blood.[3] They separated, and Louis was granted full custody of their two daughters.

Eleanor didn't remain single for long, as she remarried after two months to Henry II, the Duke of Normandy. Although they were also closely related and there were rumors of Eleanor having an affair with his father, the marriage lasted long enough for them to become Queen and King of England. This marriage lasted until 1167, and saw eight children born, coming to an end after King Henry cheated multiple times.[4]

Although free of marriage and title, drama followed Eleanor back to France, where she had returned after her tumultuous adventure in England. In 1173, Eleanor's son Henry came to France to overthrow his father and seize the English throne for himself. Eleanor was thrown in prison for treason, after being accused of helping her son militarily in his plans. She would spend the next 16 years moving through different prisons and castles in England, until another one of her sons, Richard the LionHeart, ascended to the throne, that he freed his mother and granted her freedom.[5] She would go on to help Richard rule, and then her youngest son John as well. Eventually, she retired as a nun and died in 1204 at the abbey in Fontevraud, France.

Eleanor was a dominant force as reigning Queen of both France and England, and was also influential behind-the-scenes during the reign of two of her sons in England, giving them sage advice and wisdom. However, arguably her largest contribution happened after she was Queen of England, and before she was imprisoned. In the years of 1168-1173, Eleanor established the Court of Love, where she encouraged chivalry among courtiers, as well as literature, poetry, music, and folklore. It is thought that she returned to Aquitaine to find the land in desperate need of guidance, as the nobles were rebellious and the people were disordered and unmannered. Seeing this, Eleanor sought to lead her people back to chivalry through the Court of Love, which she located in luxurious and grand Maubergeonne Tower in Poitiers.[6] Some of the facts surrounding this court may have been embellished over time, but it is known that the court focused on symbolic ritual and courtly love. In this Court, Eleanor and other women listened, as knights brought their disputes over romance and love, then the women would pronounce judgement over the problem.[7]

Under Eleanor's guidance, the ideas of courtly love grew and knights learned how to be true knights. They were taught to pine for a mistress, pledge their affections to her, and strive to prove his worth by his deeds. This courtly society is reported to have attracted artists and writers, and helped spur on a growth of culture and arts in her day.

Although Eleanor of Aquitaine is not a name that is very well-known, she was arguably the most popular and powerful lady in Europe of her time, and it is time history remembers her as such. ■

Notes:

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The Long-standing Message Behind The Pillars of Ashoka

Liana Lau

Legacy is as long lasting as the material it is made from. In the fall of an ancient civilization, their achievements, verdicts, and ways of life disappear from the collective memory of the world when their cultural artifacts are destroyed. Centuries later, we begin the process of recovery, attempting to recall these memories of the past from the fragments of pottery, literature, and ancient ruins. One such investigation involves uncovering the legacy of Ashoka.

After the death of his father in 269 BC, Ashoka became the third king of the Mauryan empire, located on the Indian subcontinent. The beginning of his reign was marked by warfare against his brothers in order to solidify his claim to the throne, but after witnessing the devastation of war first hand at Kalinga, Ashoka decided to fully embrace Buddhism in his repentance.[1] Previously, he was a Buddhist in name only, but now he became determined to embody Buddhist principles in his reign. His newfound concern for the people quickly appeared in his edicts, which aimed to create a fair and just empire and played an integral part in promoting the spread of Buddhism. In his edicts, Ashoka personally decided to forgo any of the formalities that characterized the literary style of royal edicts and proclamations at the time, instead choosing to write in his own narrative voice. His writing style was straightforward: he wrote as though explaining his actions and opinions to a first-time reader, who had difficulty grasping the concepts given to them. Nevertheless, his words came off as sincere and considerate of his audience. He called for state and individual morality, asking that his administration and the people would practice compassion and respect for all of humanity and of nature. Ashoka pushed forward numerous reforms and projects and implemented routine check-ins to ensure that substantial work was being done to develop this crucial sense of morality:[2]

"This edict has been written for the following purpose: that the judicial officers of the city may strive to do their duty and that the people under them might not suffer unjust imprisonment or harsh treatment. To achieve this, I will send out Mahamatras every five years who are not harsh or cruel, but who are merciful and who can ascertain if the judicial officers have understood my purpose and are acting according to my instructions."[3]

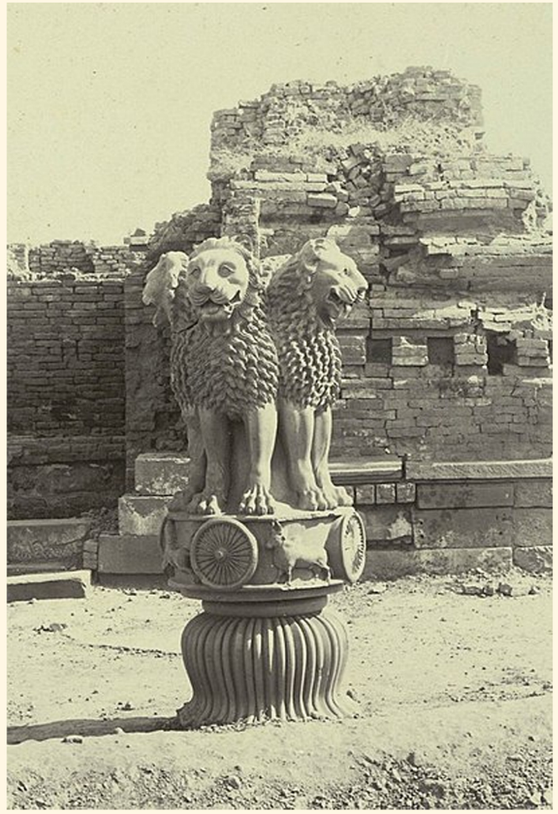
However, Ashoka ultimately believed that using propaganda to spread his message was far more effective in the long term than implementing restrictions and reforms, demonstrated in one of his major pillar edicts:[4]

"But it is by persuasion that progress among the people through Dhamma has had a greater effect in respect of harmlessness to living beings and non-killing of living beings."[5]

While it's difficult to determine if Ashoka's actions were truly effective, we know that ancient Buddhist monarchs upheld his governmental style as an ideal system, indicating that Ashoka's actions and words were long-lasting, in large part due to the pillars that he inscribed.[6] Once Ashoka's had drafted his edicts, his words were inscribed on stone and distributed throughout the Indian subcontinent in the form of intricately-designed pillars. These pillars were carved from sandstone in a quarry at the town of Chunar until they were about 40 to 50 feet tall, weighed 50 tons, and capped by a capital like an animated lion, bull, or horse. Then Ashoka's edicts were carved into the sides of the pillars in different languages based on the location that they would be erected at. Most were written in Brahmi script, which would form the foundation for many Indian languages in the future. The pillars were then covered in polish to protect the edicts from the weather and dragged for miles on end to their final resting place where they'd stand tall for thousands of years:[7]

"Concerning this, Beloved-of-the-Gods says: Wherever there are stone pillars or stone slabs, there this Dhamma edict is to be engraved so that it may long endure. It has been engraved so that it may endure as long as my sons and great-grandsons live and as long as the sun and the moon shine, and so that people may practice it as instructed. For by practicing it happiness will be attained in this world and the next."[8]

Unfortunately, only a few of Ashoka's pillars exist today and only seven are completely in-tact.[9] As a result, only a tentative understanding of Ashoka's Mauryan empire can be formed. There still lies an abundance of information just waiting to be excavated or discovered, providing more insight into this ancient past beyond what is written in the weathered edicts carved upon the stone. Nevertheless, the legacy of Ashoka lives on today. In 1950, India made their state emblem the Sarnath lion capital on one of Ashoka's pillars, which has become a source of pride for their accomplishments and heritage.[10] Indeed, Ashoka's actions are inspiring – illustrating a story of transformation and cultural excellence that wouldn't have been possible without the craftsmanship of his pillars. Afterall, achievements of a civilization are most easily remembered when displayed for all to see. ■



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Mulan's Recasting Changes Her War

Liana Lau

While Mulan enlists in the army in lieu of her father to fight a foreign enemy, her writers wage another war within her narrative. The message of her story has become a series of contradictions with every iteration a departure from the last. She has become a metamorphic heroine: one that reflects the values of the society that she is written for. Although when everything has been said and done, Mulan's overarching journey remains largely the same: she disguises herself as a man, fights valiantly in the war, and returns home to her family to resume her duties. This constant transformation presents an intriguing investigation on how literature can provide insight into the operations of a civilization. Those that write about Mulan will leave relics of their culture within her narrative. However, the most important mark on Mulan's legacy was left by her literary inception in ancient China.

From 386 to 534 C.E., Northern China was ruled by the nomadic Tuoba Xianbei, a clan of non-Han Chinese people. During this period, called the Northern Wei dynasty, the Tuoba struggled to maintain the loyalty of its non-Han Chinese and Han Chinese subjects. Positive discrimination towards the Xianbei helped reassure them of their status in the empire. They had their own ruling class ranking system and were able to freely enjoy their culture and special privileges and exemptions. It was expected that Han Chinese subjects would support the Xianbei, and they did so primarily through enslaved labor as it was harder to attract unenslaved workers. In order to legitimize their rule and bridge the ethnic divide, the Tuoba began to push for Buddhist beliefs in the region. They claimed that the emperor was a titular Bodhisattva, an enlightened individual who helps others find enlightenment as well, to gain the obedience of the Buddhist clergy.[1] By doing so, the Tuoba hoped to strengthen their own rule by weakening the traditional Confucian foundations of the Han Chinese through the imminence of Buddhism.[2]

It is during this time that Mulan's story was born. While uncertainty still remains regarding the timeline of her narrative, many have pointed to "Mulan shi", translated as the "Ballad of Mulan", as the origin of her story.[3] In the "Ballad of Mulan", Mulan sees her father's name on the draft posters and decides to take her father's place in the army. As she begins to prepare for this new lifestyle, no explicit mention is made about her disguising as a male. Instead, her transformation is described through the equipment that she buys:[4]

"In the East Market she buys a spirited horse,
In the West Market she buys a saddle,
In the South Market she buys a bridle,
In the North Market she buys a long whip."[5]

These descriptions indicate that her actions will distinguish herself from the rest of the soldiers, not her gender.[6] The ballad then proceeds to describe the fierce ten-year campaign against the foreign invaders. Her growth from a daughter into a soldier is expressed through sound: the cries of horses fill her ears as the rattling pots echo among the frigid wind. Abrupt changes in location are the primary indicator of passing time.[7] At the end of the war, the Khan asks her what she desires the most; all Mulan wants is a horse.

Once home, Mulan changes back into her old female clothing, giving up the army uniform with ease. When her fellow soldiers come to visit her, they treat this transformation with surprise. Despite fighting alongside Mulan for many years, they had not known that she was a woman. This new knowledge does not change their treatment towards her. The soldiers still continue to praise her for her valiant accomplishments in war.[8] Mulan comments on this respect in the last stanza of the ballad through an analogy, noting that a focus on gender is not present in war:

"The he-hare's feet go hop and skip,
The she-hare's eyes are muddled and fuddled.
Two hares running side by side close to the ground,
How can they tell if I am he or she?"[9]

The lack of hostility or even insecurity reveals a shared value for military excellence regardless of gender within both the story and reality.[10] Indeed, the Tuoba celebrated Mulan's brilliant strength and valor as they believed that being skilled at archery and horseback riding was an important part of everyone's life.[11] As a result, their influence in the values displayed by Mulan shows how impactful their ideology was in the creation of this story. If the Tuoba hadn't spread their Buddhist ideals in this narrative, Mulan's character would've most likely become more gentle and subservient with respect to the strong Confucian values that Han Chinese held.[12]

However, the "Ballad of Mulan" represents a blend of Tuoba and Han Chinese traditions. Mulan's devotion to her family resembles the dualistic nature of a Bodhisattva, who could be both a compassionate yet wrathful force: she was a faithful daughter who sought to shield her father from the war and fought valiantly in battle. Her act of filial piety was remarkable through the Confucian lens due to a lack of expectations that were placed upon her to even replace her father in the first place. There is no doubt that Mulan's bravery and dedication were carefully cultivated throughout her narration to inspire such courage in her readers and to reflect the ideologies of the Northern Wei dynasty.[13]

From 1644 to 1911, Manchus ruled China through the Qing dynasty. They had replaced the Han Chinese Ming dynasty, which had ruled for the past three centuries. The change in regime was marked by distinct changes in cultural practices, which were not readily embraced by the Han Chinese. Mulan's narrative reflected these grudges. She became a heroine known for her loyalty in the face of foreign opposition. Her valiant victories in battle were embellished by her death: a suicide to represent the extent of her loyalties.[14]

This portrayal of Mulan was most prominent in the *Sui Tang yanyi*, or the *Historical Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*, written by Chu Renhuo in 1695.[15] The Sui dynasty ruled China from 581 to 618, but its power declined as rebellions led by the Tang broke out. [16] With the assistance of the nomadic Tujue clan, the Tang eventually managed to gain control of China to found the Tang dynasty in 618.[17] It is during this time of strife and transition that Renhuo's Mulan is created.[18]

To set the stage for this tension, Mulan is first introduced as a Tujue-Chinese woman. Like her previous iterations, Mulan takes the place of her father in the Tujue Khan's military conscription and disguises as a man.[19] She elaborates more on her disguise by stating how ashamed she felt about the fact that there were not many filial sons and loyal male subjects. If men were more competent, she would not have had to go to such lengths of piety.[20] Mulan goes forth to save the Khan when the army is defeated. In doing so, she is captured by the Han Chinese Princess Dou Xianniang but isn't punished for being an enemy. Dou instead treats her with generosity, and they become laotong, sworn sisters, after Mulan reveals that she is a woman. The story then follows Dou's attempt to release her father from his scheduled execution by the Han Chinese emperor and her romance with a Han Chinese warlord, during which Mulan remains at her side. Every interaction that Mulan has with these Han Chinese characters presents them in a benevolent light.[21]

"Mulan joins the army" painted by Wang Xijing in 2013

Following these events, Mulan returns home to grim news. Her father passed away, prompting her Tujue mother to remarry. To make matters even worse, the Khan discovers that Mulan is a woman and decides that he is no longer indebted to her for saving his life. He instead tries to make her his concubine. Upon hearing the Khan's demands, Mulan asks to be taken to her father's grave. She calmly commits suicide, declaring that she will only be loyal to her father.[22] Her refusal to become subservient to the Khan demonstrates her devotion to the Han Chinese people, despite only being half Han Chinese herself.[23] It also served as a rejection of the immoral Tujue people, whose actions contrasted those of the considerate Han Chinese.[24] In writing this loyalist narrative, Renhuo hoped that his subliminal messaging would then be applied to perspectives towards the Manchu Qing dynasty, who's occupation left a bitter taste in the mouths of the Han Chinese. The Han Chinese were to remain loyal to their people and resist the invasive rule of the Qing dynasty.

While the roots of Mulan's story come from tensions between ethnic groups within China, consequent retellings of her story began to critique international politics and perspectives. Asian live-action films presented her as a strong and patriotic heroine, reflective of the need for nationalism during the world wars. Western films in the late twentieth century took a more creative approach to her story. *The Secret of Mulan*, a 1998 feature animation produced by United American Video Entertainment, made all of the characters six-legged caterpillars with a notable focus on differences in gender roles. The societal expectations on gender were also brought up in Burbank Animation and Studios PTY Limited's film *Mulan* in 1999. However, none gained as much international acclaim as Walt Disney Pictures' 1998 *Mulan*.[25]

Disney's *Mulan* portrayed Mulan as a strong heroine with a sassy sidekick dragon through song and action. To Western audiences, she was a brilliant role model for youths because of her traits of familial love, duty, and honor. However, critics were more divided. They examined the male and female dynamics that influenced her actions, either praising the feminist themes they found within the film or rejecting it on the basis that her actions implicated a male-led rule. Others critiqued the film for its homogenous portrayal of Chinese culture and Orientalist approach..[26] Her most recent portrayal in Disney's 2020 live-action film *Mulan* has also added fuel to this heated debate with its characterization choices and cultural inaccuracies.

Consequently, the Mulan that we know today should not be hailed as a true representative of Chinese heritage and of the past. The war that she fights for in the Western hemisphere has taken away the ethnically-motivated agency she held in her initial retellings. In the West, Mulan's portrayal on screen became an investigation into the changing perceptions towards traditional gender roles. Her choice to join the army as a male and return home to her female duties became a vehicle for discussions on gendered identity. Her story in contemporary times no longer emphasizes her dualistic attributes in compassion and wrath or her steadfast loyalty and filial piety seen in the "Ballad of Mulan" and the *Historical Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*. However, what we can tell from her numerous retellings is that Mulan is an ideal heroine, ready to uncover the virtues and issues of society through her narrative framework..[27] As a result, we should pay close attention to Mulan's recastings in the future as her story will shed light on the turmoil present within our society: no matter what happens, Mulan will always go to war. ■

Notes:

[1] "Four Hundred Years of Vicissitude." China: A History, by John Keay, Basic Books, 2009, pp. 189–550.

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[5, 9] Frankel, Hans H. The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry. Yale University Press, 1976.

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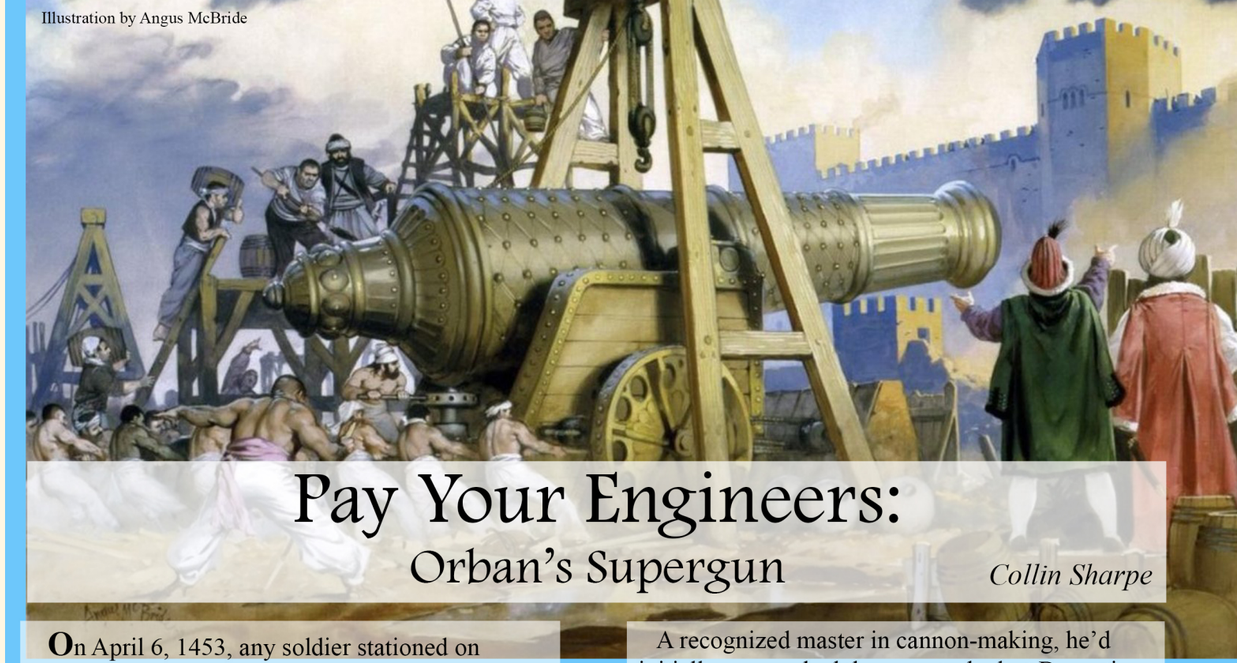


Illustration by Angus McBride

Pay Your Engineers:

Orban's Supergun

Collin Sharpe

On April 6, 1453, any soldier stationed on Constantinople's walls would have spent their day watching the eighty thousand Ottoman invaders gathering outside. Outnumbered more than ten-to-one, the city's defenders had reason to be worried about the organized, competent, and well-supplied army laying siege to it. But Constantinople, kept safe by an engineering marvel, had been taken only once in the past millennium. The Theodosian Walls - fifteen feet thick, four miles long, guarded by towers of soldiers and a deadly moat - had given the city a reputation for being impenetrable. It had survived siege every time before.

But the Ottomans had become experts in a new and game-changing technology. In the sea of spears and flags that had long been staples of warfare, observant soldiers could notice lines of cannons being rolled to the front. In the first major artillery barrage, Ottoman cannons would pepper holes into the city's fortifications with stone-breaking rounds. But that wasn't all. Just outside the sultan's tent, soldiers could see the Ottomans' own engineering marvel: one of the largest guns ever made. Dragged by sixty oxen and hundreds of men to Constantinople, nearly twice as long as the city's walls were thick, the behemoth was cast out of bronze by a frustrated, underpaid engineer. His name was Orban.

A recognized master in cannon-making, he'd initially approached the soon-to-be last Byzantine emperor, Constantine, and offered to build him guns of unprecedented size. But Constantine, struggling to manage a teetering empire, couldn't afford to pay. He kept Orban in Constantinople on a stipend instead, wanting the engineer near him and away from his enemies.

But this lasted only as long as the money did. When Constantine's wallet was too empty for too long, Orban, feeling no loyalty whatsoever to his employer, just packed up and offered himself to the Ottomans. He had even used his time on the emperor's payroll to study Constantinople's walls intently, learning how to destroy them if he ever defected. Pitching himself with a master's self-confidence to the sultan, he said:

"I can cast a cannon of bronze with the capacity of the stone you want. I have examined the walls of the city in great detail. I can shatter to dust not only these walls with the stones from my gun, but the very walls of Babylon itself."[1]

The sultan ordered the cannon made. Tons of superheated bronze were poured into a custom excavation pit, and the cannon was crafted under Orban's direction. The end result, twenty-seven feet end-to-end, hurled boulder-sized stones weighing more than one thousand pounds into Constantinople's once-invulnerable walls. Seeing it at work was terrifying. One report describes the destruction Orban's creation could cause:

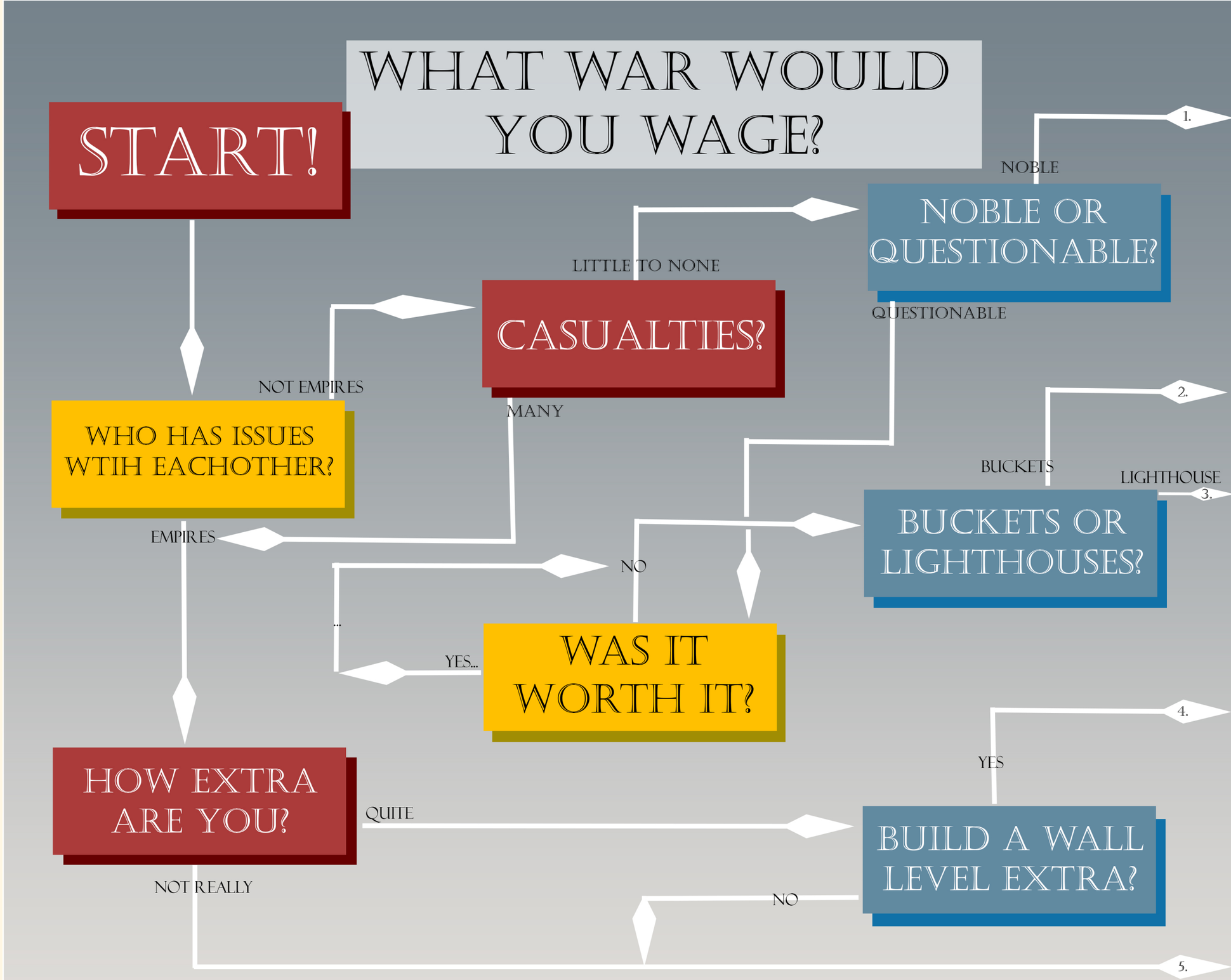
"And when it had caught fire, faster than you can say it, there was first a terrifying roar and a violent shaking of the ground beneath and for a great distance around, and a din such as has never been heard. Then, with a monstrous thundering and an awful explosion and a flame that illuminated everything round about and scorched it, the wooden wad was forced out by the hot blast of dry air and propelled the stone ball powerfully out. Projected with incredible force and power, the stone struck the wall, which it immediately shook and demolished, and it was itself shattered into many fragments, and the pieces were hurled everywhere, dealing death to those standing nearby."[2]

In the end, Orban's cannon - named the Basilica - didn't end up deciding Constantinople's fate. Its unwieldy size made it slow and cumbersome to use, and it exploded before the battle's end, unable to handle the incredible force it was sending outward. But the image of old certainties being literally smashed by new technology, a powerful symbol of changing times, has compelled writers and historians to return to it whenever the Fall of Constantinople is mentioned. Orban's ambitious, unrestrained vision for his artillery had sent a clear message: the old, medieval era of siege warfare was ending, and a new one, fueled by gunpowder, had begun.■

Notes:

[1] Staff, HistoryNet. "The Guns of Constantinople." HistoryNet, HistoryNet, 13 Apr. 2016, www.historynet.com/the-guns-of-constantinople.htm.

[2] Mazzochi, Steven. "The Siege of Constantinople." COVE, 23 Feb. 2018, editions.covecollective.org/chronologies/siege-constantinople.



1. The Battle of Bremule[1]

On the 20th of August, 1119, two forces stood on opposite sides. Gailllardbois-Cressenville in Normandy would become the stage for a rather peculiar battle between England and France. With nearly 100 years worth of battles between these two contentious countries, another was about to begin. Standing on one side we have Henry I of England, with 500 knights to his name. His holdings in Normandy were being questioned by Louis VI the Fat of France, with 400 knights by his side. These two forces would fight gallantly to reveal England, as the decisive winner. With only 3 recorded casualties in the battle, they took 140 French knights captive and! … *checks notes* gained an extreme profit from the ransoms the French paid to get their knights back?

3. The Tower of Kalla[3]

Some of our readers may be familiar with the electrifying figure that is Roman Emperor Caligula. The Tower of Kalla, a part of the Roman ruins of Brittenburg in modern day Netherlands, is the remains of a lighthouse that was constructed after Kalla's (Caligula's) decisive victory over the god Neptune. That's right, local nutjob Roman Emperor Caligula vs. Neptune, god of the sea. According to Suetonius, a roman historian, Caligula declared war on Neptune, and having lined his soldiers up on the beach, ordered them to throw spears into the ocean. As spoils of war, he demanded that his legions collect seashells from the beach. It was a decisive victory for the Romans, an absolutely *devastating* blow to the sea, and a very nice day at the beach for the soldiers, who might have been only slightly terrified to disobey.

2. The Battle of Zappolino - The War of the Oak Bucket[2]

On 15 November 1325, two italian city-states (Modena and Bologna) clashed again. Modena, a member of the Ghibellines, a political party who supported the Holy Roman Empire, and Bologna, a member of the Guelphs, a political party who supported the Pope, had fought before, but nothing at this magnitude. With 32 thousand strong, the Bolognese suffered an aching defeat to the 7 thousand Modenese, in this unusually large battle. With 2000 casualties from both sides, and a series of burnt and pillaged castles on the way, the Modenese declared victory with their chosen war trophy: a wooden bucket. Some claim that the Modenese stole a bucket from a Bolognese well, which reignited tensions between the two city-states, yet some sources claim that the bucket was only taken afterwards as a war trophy. Whether or not this stolen bucket was the cause of this battle, or only a marker is left to antiquity.

5. The Battle of Marathon[5]

The Battle of Marathon was fought in 490 B.C.E. on the beach of Marathon, Greece. A turning point in the Greco-Persian wars, the Greeks, who were solidly outnumbered (11,000 to over 130,000), annihilated the Persians. With 203 Greek deaths, as compared to 7,000 plus Persian deaths (not including the destruction of 7 ships), this battle is infamous for its Greek victory. Whether it was differences in materials, particular strategies, terrain, or even just the courage and composition of the fighters, this battle continues to be studied as a hallmark of Greek war prowess.

4. The Battle of Alesia[4]

In another saga of the Gallic Wars comes the Siege of Alesia, led by Julius Caesar in 52 B.C.E.. Alesia was a well defended settlement in modern Eastern France held by the leader of the Gallic Tribes, Vercingetorix. Julius Caesar knew he would not be able to take the city head on and decided instead to starve it into surrendering. Oftentimes the reason a siege like this fails is because there are opportunities for smugglers to bring in food and supplies and bring important people out. To make sure this didn't happen, and to ensure his success, Caesar had the unusual idea to build a wall, around the entirety of Alesia. Building an entire wall around the city takes a lot of time however, so during construction, Vercingetorix called on reinforcements to kill construction workers. And yet, Caesar had simultaneously started construction for a second wall that would surround the Romans and prevent the Gallic tribes from effectively attacking them. These elaborate construction plans did eventually result in the surrender of Alesia, and the battle itself was marked as the last formal resistance attempt from the Gauls during Caesar's conquest.

Notes:

[1] Oman, C. (1924). A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages (Vol. 1). Methuen & Company Limited.

[2] Russell, S. (2017, May 20). The Bloodiest Medieval War Was Fought Because Of A Bucket. Retrieved December 10, 2020, from https://www.warhistoryonline.com/instant-articles/bloodiest-medieval-war-fought-bucket.html

[3] Graves, R. (2007). The twelve Caesars. Penguin UK.

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[5] Krentz, P. (2010). The Battle of Marathon. Yale University Press.

Would You Survive the Plague?.... Answers!

Mostly A's - You die of the plague. You should really pay attention to your surroundings, and see who's interacting with who, :/

Mostly B's - You die of the plague. You really need to figure out who's been getting sick, it's a risk to your own health.

Mostly C's - You die of the plague. Some scepticism is good, but it was all for naught. Should've washed your hands or something.

Mostly D's - You die of the plague, but you're one of the last to go. You tried, but like the other 25-100 million people, it wasn't enough, sorry dude, better luck next time. Be sure to read about The Plague of Justinian on page __ to find out more!

HOW DID THEY DIE? ANSWERS!

VLADIMIR THE GREAT

Vladimir the Great, sanctified Saint Vladimir, was the ruler of Kievan Rus' around 1000 C.E.. Originally of the Old Faith of the Slavs, he converted to Christianity in 988, and with him converted the rest of the Kievan Rus' with a mass baptism in the Dnieper River. He was not drowned in the river, despite the pagan rebellions and the people's unhappiness. More about that can be read in the Slavic Paganism: The Old Faith of the Rus on page __. His influence and legacy can be seen on the Ukrainian 1 hryvnia, on which his likeness lies. His rule was relatively peaceful, and instead of succumbing to madness he funded schools and established churches. Into his rule he brought around 800 concubines and many wives, and had many children, yet his death was one of **B: natural causes.**

CLEOPATRA[1]

A, B, and C, are all potentially correct answers! However we tend to lean towards **B: poison concoction** as a better explanation. Cleopatra has been largely dramatized as a beautiful, seductive,

and powerful ruler, and her death is dramatized the same way. Many stories and works of art depict her and her maidens' deaths as being the result of a cobra or asp, but in all likelihood, this wasn't the actual case. Sneaking a 5 foot snake into the palace in a basket of figs is less than likely, and cobra poison takes quite a bit of time to work, which doesn't coincide with some estimated timelines. Is it still possible though? Maybe! Everyone who was there to see it happen died with her. It could have also been a form of assassination from Octavian's part, the dude who sacked Alexandria and drove Cleopatra to alleged suicide. He certainly didn't want her alive, and certainly made sure that her children were dead too (RIP Cesarion). It wasn't stabbing oneself through the heart though, the blood would have been noticeable to report. Instead, that dramatic end is reserved for Mark Antony, her lover, who heard that Cleopatra had died and decided to die with her. Most likely answer B: poisoned concoction. Some quicker acting poisonous concoction was used to kill her swiftly, and the snake added for the sheer drama of it all.

KING RICHARD III[2]

King Richard III is famous for many things. As the namesake and protagonist of Shakespeare's play Richard III, he also established the Court of Requests, where poor people could seek legal representation. He also made it possible to print and distribute books without any restrictions, which is a big win for the modern book lover. His death is also notable in that it marks the end of the Middle Ages. On August 22, 1485, King Richard III made his untimely end via **C: Fatal blow to the base of the skull (amongst other injuries)** at the Battle of Bosworth Field. He fought against the army of Henry Tudor, who went on to become King Henry VII. Some stories tell that his body was carried naked back to where he was buried, and there were quite many accounts of his body being further mishandled… His burial place wasn't found for quite some time until 2013, when his remains were finally found and confirmed with DNA testing. Where was he found though? A car park in Leicester, England. That's right, right underneath a huge parking lot. However, now, his remains have a more fitting resting place at Greyfriars Church in Leicester, England.

CONFUCIUS[3]

Kong Fuzi, or Confucius, was a highly influential philosopher around 500 BC. Highly famous by his philosophy of Confucianism, he established the Golden Rule we teach our children--Don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you, and established the principles of family loyalty and ancestral veneration so synonymous with Chinese tradition. He had a very robust political career, and was not, in fact, assassinated. Even though he exiled himself to travel across China to see Confucianism implemented, he also did not die after being robbed on the road, nor did he starve in exile. Instead, he travelled across the land to various courts, who unfortunately did not implement his ideas. After this he returned to teach his disciples on the principles of his philosophy, compiled in the *The Analects*. Buried in the Kong Lin cemetery on the bank of the Sishui River, he died of **D: natural causes**, at the ripe old age of 72.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR II

Nebuchadnezzar II was one of the most powerful rulers of the Babylonian Empire. He's famous for many things including the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Ishtar Gate, and his unflattering portrayal in the Bible. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were constructed for his wife, who missed the greenery of Persia. In love for her, he created what is now considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. He's also credited with the construction of the Ishtar Gate, the 8th into Babylon. The enormous gate is a rich dark blue, decorated with lions and dragons, pieces of which can be seen in Berlin, Germany. However despite the archaeological marvels, his reputation is mixed. During the siege of Jerusalem in 589 B.C.E., he destroyed Solomon's temple, and burned the city to the ground. This happened to land him an unflattering portrayal in the Bible, with his demise and descent into madness briefly chronicled in the Book of Daniel. Whether or not he died of **B: madness** can never be fully verified, but that's the drawback of looking so far into the past. ■

Notes:

[1] Pruitt, S. (2020, March 10). Did Cleopatra Really Die by Snake Bite? Retrieved December 10, 2020, from https://www.history.com/news/cleopatra-suicide-snake-bite

[2] Richard III dig: DNA confirms bones are king's. (2013, February 04). Retrieved December 10, 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leicestershire-21063882

[3] Riegel, J. (2002). Confucius.

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A Note from the Editorial Board:

With December coming to an end, we're thrilled to present our first ever issue: Antiquity.

A big thank you to our lovely, hardworking Staff, to the University of Michigan for having us as a club, and to you, our reader.

We look forward to many more publications.

We remain,
Julia Kravchenko and Celine Rajoulh

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