

PROCLAMATION !

UPCOMING AMRS EVENTS

Nov. 14th - The AMRS Department's second visitor in the *Doing What You Love for a Living* series will be Justin Cook, who works at the State Historic Preservation Office. He'll be talking about what goes into cultural resource management, and how AMRS majors can find their place in the worlds of museums, historic sites, and more! The talk will take place at 4:10 PM in Merrick 202.

Nov. 30th - The AMRS Student Board will be screening Monty Python and the Holy Grail at 6:00 PM, location TBA. Save the date!

THE STAFF OF THE TRIDENT

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Want to write a story? Have ideas for the next issue?

Send them to jmwaterw@owu.edu.

THE TRIDENT

Vol. XXV, Issue 2

November 2017



SOMETHING ROTTEN: WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

By: Kyle Rabung

As students, the most difficult thing we struggle with is not knowing what we do not know. We have all experienced that moment when a professor answers a question with something entirely off our academic radar. Until recently this had

been my relationship with the ongoing issues surrounding white supremacy in the public sphere and within the sphere of medieval studies. But not only is there a real issue here; it is also worse than we might first expect.

Prior to my recent re-
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search into this topic, I was vaguely aware of the connections between medievalism and white supremacy. I could have told you that Nazi Germany appropriated medieval imagery and if pressed would have been able to recall that members of the KKK called themselves “knights.” The meaning of this was lost on me, however, as I simply did not know how far this history goes. It turns out that white supremacists love the Middle Ages. They interact with one another through the use of medieval history and bond over their mutual passion for it. Unfortunately, they also use it to further their political agenda. Their vision of a “perfectly white Europe” helps them to root their racist ideology in history—pseudo-history anyway—and thus bolster their own opinions. Their integration of medieval imagery in Char-



lotteville is simply the most public example of this. The events at Char-

lotteville also sparked a crisis among the professoriate of medieval studies, which has yet to be solved. In many

ways, it feels as if the field is attempting to redefine itself. Two things are important to note about this ongoing process: One, the debate is mostly happening on the internet via blogs and websites, which means that any interested students may seek these out to keep informed; and two, the conversation is exclusively occurring among professors. I cannot stress enough that you should seek out these blogs and read. *The Public Medievalist*'s series on race in the Middle Ages is a perfect place to begin and one that I highly recommend.

The Public Medievalist

So, where do we go from here? If you find yourself asking this question, then welcome to the debate and welcome to the discussion. You have asked the same question that professors have been grappling with for months. We have to own this issue. Even as the professoriate struggles with what to do with their discipline, we must remember that as students this is our discipline as well. As professors struggle with whether or not to teach about medieval racism in

the classroom we need to ask them about the topic and make it clear that we want to learn. Showing them that we care about these issues and encouraging them to teach about them is a crucial step. We also need to become increasingly aware of the problem. We need to frequent blogs of medievalists, such as *In the Medieval Middle*, in order to understand what the problems really are. We must seek out the information and learn what will help us undermine the arguments of white supremacists wherever we might find them; be that online, at our own gaming table, or even in the classroom. In the past we might have been forgiven for not knowing that we did not know about the white supremacist fascination with our field, but now we do.

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Kyle is a senior History and Medieval Studies double major. Next semester, he will be completing his Capstone with Dr. Arnold.



FURTHER READING

The Public Medievalist:
Website cited in
“Something Rotten:
White Supremacy in the
Middle Ages.”

In the Medieval Middle:
Website cited in
“Something Rotten:
White Supremacy in the
Middle Ages.”

Medievalist.net: Website
resource used for
“Holiday Traditions in
the Middle Ages.”

Larsson of reading too much into her findings in a deliberate effort to undermine both the traditional Norse cultural heritage and the argument that the Orient and the Occident are fundamentally different places which ought to remain as such— both racially and ideologically.

Prominent scholars have taken issue with Dr. Larsson's claims as well. Foremost among them are Stephennie Mulder, an Associate Professor of Islamic Art who points out that the Viking burial site predates the development of the Kufic style that Dr. Larsson claims to have identified by a significant period of time. Likewise, Carolyn Priest Dorman, an expert on textile archaeology, has pointed out that Dr. Larsson's discovery of Kufic Script is unfounded and based upon hypothetical extensions of pattern, rather than the pattern which physically remains intact. Others point out that be-



lief in an afterlife was hardly unique to the Islamic world, and, indeed, the Norse myths have their own colorful descriptions of Valhalla (from the Old Norse Valhöll or "hall of the slain"), a place where warriors prepare to aid the god Odin during the cataclysmic end of the world.

Reactions from the general public were mixed, and though most conceded that there was contact between Norse peoples and the Islamic world, many were skeptical of Dr. Larsson's implication that there had been a significant amount of conversions to the Islamic faith as a result of this contact. However, that does not mean the evidence can be ignored; it only means that the issue is more complex than one may have originally thought.



POVERTY AND STATUS IN COMMONS AND WASTELANDS

By: Emily Howald

How much do our most basic beliefs and abstract ideas influence our interactions with the environment? Turns out those influences can be quite profound. Cultural and social concepts of nature can greatly influence governmental policies about the environment in ways we might not expect. For example, one might be able to draw a parallel between the access to natural environments and changing beliefs about wilderness and wasteland.

To start, we can compare modern examples of public properties with the commons of pre-eighteenth-

century England. The rights of the commons refer to a particular property system that no longer exists but has similarities with many current public properties. Often the commons were stretches of land that were public, not technically owned by anyone, but under the rule of the crown. The lands had certain common rights associated with them such as the right to graze animals or collect fallen wood on the land. These rights were open to anyone, but would be most exercised by the "commoners," or individuals of a lower economic class. Poverty was often associated with the commons whether or



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HOLIDAY TRADITIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

By: Christopher Shanley

Christmas in the Middle Ages was celebrated slightly differently than it is today. Perhaps the most notable difference is the sheer size of the Christmas feast. In 1213, King John of England held a feast that included 1,000 chickens, 10,000 salted eels, 100 pounds of almonds and nearly 6,000 bottles worth of wine. Even peasants were entitled to better food than normal. Christmas was one of the few times most peasants were entitled to meat (even beef!) from their manorial lord. Christmas was a time for celebration, and it was taken as an opportunity to keep spirits high in the cold winter months.

A familiar tradition that originated in the medieval era is that of the nativity scene. It is believed to originate from St. Francis of Assisi, who made a crib in a cave on Christmas Eve in 1223. Though modern nativity scenes have a collection of statues surrounding the Christ child, these original crib scenes had just the infant Jesus and two animals to keep him warm. By the late Middle



Ages, Mary and Joseph were added, along with the shepherds. The tradition of the wise men in the scene didn't emerge until later, as the Epiphany was still widely celebrated during the Middle Ages. In the west, the Epiphany marked the day the wise men came to Jesus and glorified God in his incarnate form.

An interesting custom in Western Europe was that of the Christmas Bishop, a young boy who was elected as bishop for a day on the 28th, which commemorated the massacre of innocent infants by King Herod. The "bishop" would wear proper garments. He would even give a pretend mass—the bishop would marry youths—occasionally in front of the king. The new couples would offer the bishop a gift in thanks. If the bishop disapproved of the gift, he

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not the majority of the commoners were actually in poverty. Often, they may have just been in a lower economic and social class. This association with poverty may be partly due to the general definition of the commons as wastelands.

The commons were areas seen not only as wild, but inhabitable and generally useless to humans. These included lands such as thick forests, mountainous regions, and swampy areas. But the actual practice of the right of the commons contradicts its lack of use to humans. It is unclear how much the right of the commons supplemented the livelihood of commoners, but it has been suggested that it was essential to survival for many individuals. Not only could individuals supplement their food supply from products from the commons but they could also create many useful goods such as baskets, dyes, and brooms. Despite the actual use of these lands by commoners, the lands were often referred to as wasteland. For this reason, the commoners may have been perceived as poor simply by being associated with these wastelands.

For comparison, we may think of a national park in the United States as a current form of the wild commons of moun-

tains and forests, however, few would describe it as wasteland. In addition, it is no longer primarily those of a lower economic class using the public lands. Entry prices and travel costs have made these areas accessible only to individuals of a higher economic status.

We may question what happened to this idea of access. More importantly, we may ask what happened to the ideas of wasteland that were so imbedded into the idea of the commons. Today, a Google-search of wasteland pulls up images of landscapes ravaged by human civilization, a very different wasteland from the wild commons of pre-eighteenth-century England. Perhaps different ideas of wilderness and wasteland can equate to different types of access to certain environments.

Emily is a senior Environmental and Zoology major and is Co-Chair of the Zoology Student Board. She will be graduating Spring 2018.

would smack them with a bag of ashes he kept hidden under his coat. The marriages only lasted one night, however.

In medieval Scandinavia, there were several interesting traditions surrounding Christmas that involved demonic figures. In various parts of Northern Europe, young men would try to scare people in the middle of the night during the 12 days of Christmas. They wore scary masks and tried to act like ghosts, devils, or even trolls. In Iceland specifically, there was a belief that real trolls were wandering the world during those dark days. Various sagas say that people feared that the trolls would consume their livestock on Christmas. In *Eyrbyggja Saga*, even ghosts invade Christmas parties. The ghosts try to knock the mud off their clothing and splatter the invited attendants with it. Eyrbyggja's story is notable for its high presence of supernatural events, but having ghosts crash your Christmas feast must have been especially shocking!

Christmas today is more than a religious event to celebrate the manifestation of God on earth, but that has been true for centuries. Medieval Christmases, though different from our own, were still a time to celebrate with your

loved ones. It was a time for feasts, games, and laughter, but also a dangerous time. We don't worry as much about hooligans in masks after Halloween nowadays, luckily. For the people of the Middle Ages, though, there fears surrounding the festive season were adequately justified.



COMING UP NEXT!

Look forward to more Capstone Corner articles next semester as well as a piece on the politics of a dead body!

NORSE ENCOUNTERS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

By: Matthew Pheneger

A recent discovery by Annika Larsson at Uppsala University has been turning heads in both the academic world and the modern day political arena. The discovery in question was a series of Kufic-Arabic characters embroidered into Viking burial clothing which appears to spell the words 'Allah' and 'Ali;' in addition, she found silks and other materials that seemingly originate from the East.

Though it has been well known for quite some time that Scandinavian peoples had both diplomatic and hostile relations with the medieval Islamic world, (and nearly everyone else they came in

contact with) this most recent discovery has ruffled feathers on both sides of an ongoing political issue—namely the nature of Europe's relationship with the Middle East in the midst of an ongoing refugee crisis and an increase of terrorism within Western European states linked to ISIS.

According to Dr. Larsson, the discovery suggests a relationship of cultural exchange and shared ideas beyond the stereotypical warfare and plundering normally associated with the Vikings, and, in her opinion, those who wore the silks must have understood the symbolism they contained. She goes on to say that Viking burial practices were likely influenced by contact with the Islamic world, and that the Vikings carried the Islamic idea that life continued after death into their own traditions.

The next stage of her research includes DNA analysis of the remains, which she predicts will reveal a Central Asian heritage among the Scandinavian peoples. These last points attracted criticism from other scholars as well as right-wing European political circles, the latter of whom have essentially accused Dr.

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CAPSTONE CORNER: AN EXAMINATION OF MEDIEVAL FAIRIES

By: Joseph Acero

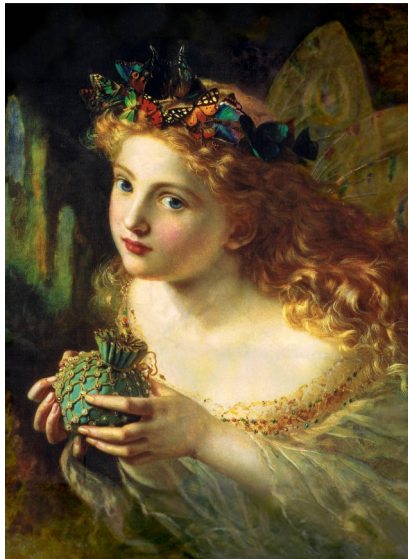
As an English and Medieval Studies dual-major, I have a deep love of chivalry, mystery, and wonder; there's no better place to find that than in medieval folk legends. Some of the best folklore and myths are ones where a character is placed into a reality that is a refraction of our own, and in medieval folklore, fair-

FAIRY-LIKE CREATURES [TOOK] THE GUISE OF SOMETHING MORE COMPLICATED

ies are usually the epicenter of these refractions. Fairies, in popular culture, are seen as mischievous little entities with tiny wings; however, it was common to find fairies, or fairy-like creatures, taking the guise of something more complicated—humans. While human-like fairies are seen with a wide range of professions, I have chosen to look at the most powerful and most mysterious entities: lords and kings who rule over their own lands. Keeping with the theme, though, the fairies' depiction of high royalty are warped and alien in many re-

gards, and the worlds they reside in reflect that strangeness.

Some take the guise of kings, like in *Sir Orfeo*, where the Fairy King visits the title character's wife in her dreams, which leads to her abduction. Others take the shape of knights, like in *Sir Degare*. A Fairy Knight molests a maiden to produce a powerful heir, and waits for the child's arrival on his island castle. Though there are others that flip this concept upside down. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, the Green Knight takes the form of a mysterious fairy, using his magic to become a



chivalric fairy. Each of these depictions are unique, but the similarities lie in their mysterious nature as shapeshifters, something protagonists of stories containing fairies must overcome.

Each of these fairy lords hold incredible power and authority over people, and much like medieval lords, they each possess a physical dominion that reflects their character and otherworldliness. The Fairy King reigns over the Otherworld, his court filled with bodies of human abductees that look dead but "nare nought," and much like its ancient counterpart, it gives the illusion of a death-like domain. The Fairy Knight's castle is on an island separated from the world much like the Arthurian island of Avalon with only women residing there. *The Green Knight* is interesting in that he has two domains, his castle where he lives as a human lord with his wife, and the Green Chapel, a cave-like residence that resembles the mounds where Celtic fairies hide in. Each of these places has human-like aspects to them, yet are all clearly separated from humanity, and are almost always places where protagonists must face a serious trial that may mean the end of their lives.

Fairies in medieval tales are tricksters at heart, and many are interchangeable with demons, but there are some powerful



fairies that take the guise. Like their human counterparts they hold a large amount of power, but they present us with distortions of lords and kings. "Fairy lords," like in *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Degare*, and *Sir Gawain*, work as proving grounds to test the main characters. These are not fairy godmothers who give you a happily ever after; they are alien lords of power and mystery that true knights must overcome, and that sounds like a worthy adventure to me.

Joseph Acero is an English and Medieval Studies major with a minor in History. He'll be graduating Spring 2018.
