



Order of Medieval Women: Women of Consequence

Medieval Musings

"We cannot live in a world that is interpreted for us by others... use our own voice, see our own light." St. Hildegard von Bingen, 1098 - 1179

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VENICE, CROSSROADS OF TRADE

Venice, situated in the heart of a lagoon on the northwest coast of Italy, has been a republic for over 1000 years and one of the first cities to engage in international commerce. Living between two worlds, the East of Constantinople and West of Europe, Venice was the portal for world trade “carrying Baltic amber to Tutankhamen’s burial chamber, blue faience beads from Mycenae to Stonehenge, Cornish tin to the smelters of Levant, Malacca spices to the court of France and Cotswold wood to the merchants of Cairo.”

Legends claim the city-state was founded March 25, 421 as a safe haven for people escaping persecution from mainland Europe, first from Attila the Hun and later those escaping the Lombards as the final remnants of the Roman Empire crumbled. The early inhabitants, known as “lagoon dwellers,” built small lagoon communities from various sized rafts supported by 60’ oak poles submerged into a mixture of silt and soil. The poles were placed close together and infilled with rock between to keep the silt from rising as additional pilings were added. Two layers of wood and a layer of masonry were placed on top, completing a structure that connected 118 small islands, offering protection from the sea while proving access to the river mouths that led to inland city market’s for their fish and salt from their salt pans. “For there may be men who have little need of gold, yet none live who desire no salt.”



Gable with its patron apostle St. Mark positioned over the saint’s symbol, a winged lion amid angels.
© Peter Milosevic CC BY-SA 4.0.

In 539 Ravenna and the provinces of Venetia and Istria fell to the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, placing Venice subject to Byzantium while allowing them to maintain their independence. In 697 Venice elected its first chief magistrate or Doge, giving life to a new government while continuing to recognize the political superiority of the Byzantine emperors until 807 when the Venetian Doge was replaced by a Byzantine governor. Seeking to increase the city’s prestige legend tells of Doge Giustiniano in 828 ordering merchants Buono di Malamocco and Rustico di Torcello to steal the body of St. Mark the Evangelist from the Alexandria monks. After capturing the body they hide it among some pork as the Venetian ship easily slipped through customs, returning to Venice. Once the body arrived the Doge had a private ducal chapel built next to his palace to house the precious relics. In 1063 as construction on a larger basilica began no one could find St. Mark’s body. After several days of intense prayer, a miracle occurred as St. Mark’s arm appeared, extending from a pillar as it pointed to his relics.

Venice, from its earliest beginnings, had strong inclinations towards trade and by the 9th-10th-century its main commerce was providing Constantinople with grain and wine from Italy, wood and slaves from Dalmatia, and salt from its lagoons receiving silk and spices as payment. When threatened by pirates in the 11th-century Venice successfully launched military missions along the Dalmatian coast, bringing a new degree of stability and wealth to the area. With the lucrative European markets now added to their trade



Marco, his father and uncle departing Venice in 1271 bound for Kublai Khan’s Xanadu with exotic creatures bottom left to evoke their exotic journey, 14th century, Ms. Bodl. 264, fol. 218r, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

routes, Venice was then positioned at the heart of Mediterranean trade. It was during this time Lombard and Byzantine possessions in Southern Italy were under assault by the Normans who had first arrived earlier in the century. As mercenaries, Robert Guiscard, his wife Sikelgaita and brother Roger played a major role in effectively ending the nearly 600-year-old rule of the Lombard’s and Byzantine. By 1071 they had driven the Byzantines from their last seaport in southern Italy and 11 years later had captured Corfu and Durazzo, defeating Alexius I at the Battle of Dyrrachium. Byzantium’s navy needed help and they turned to the Venetians. In gratitude for the Venetian’s aid against the Normans Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus (Anna of Comnenus’s father) granted Venice unrestricted trade throughout the Byzantine Empire with no customs due, a privilege that marked the beginning of Venetian activity in the East and great wealth.

After the First Crusade Venice became involved in the crusading effort,



1204 Conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders, 15th-century,
by David Aubert, Tome II fol 205r, BnF, Paris, France.

initially supplying 200 Venetian ships that assisted in the capture of the coastal cities of Syria. In 1110 Ordelafo Faliero, Doge of Venice assisted Baldwin I of Jerusalem and Sigurd I Magnuson of Norway in capturing the city of Sidon with Venice given a street in Acre. The *Pactum Warmundi* treaty in 1123 granted the Republic of Venice an area of autonomy in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in addition to commercial privileges. In 1210 the Venetians, known for their shipbuilding, received a proposal from French crusaders suggesting they provide sea transportation, warships, and provisions in exchange for 85,000 marks. The next year when the Frankish crusaders could not fulfill their promise to prepay part of the contract, the Venetians, not wanting to jeopardize the enterprise or the money already expended, suggested the crusaders could postpone payment by assisting them in subduing the upper Dalmatian coast which

years had been a constant battleground for them for over 200 years. After a successful siege of its major city Zara, the crusaders were soon approached by representatives of Byzantium to divert the crusade to Constantinople and restore Isaac II Angelos as Emperor after being imprisoned for 8 years. Based on a promise by the Byzantine representatives to cover the crusader's entire outstanding debt to Venice the crusaders launched a successful siege, capturing the city and placing the blind Isaac II back on the throne with his son Alexius IV as co-emperor. Alexis, unable to meet his obligations, lost the crusaders support which led to unrest between various factions and ultimately the crusader's sacking Constantinople on April 13, 1204, described as one of the most profitable and disgraceful sacks of a city in history. The Venetians claimed much of the plunder including the famous horses of St. Mark's, three-eighths of Constantinople's territory including the Ionian islands, Crete, Euboea, Andros, Naxos, and a few strategic points along the coast of the Sea of Marmara. Venice was now positioned as the most important center of trade in the west with all goods passing thru on their way to Europe. Although the Byzantine Empire was re-established in 1261 it never again recovered its previous power.

Marco Polo, himself a Venetian, set off from Venice on his famous expedition to the east in 1271, returning 24 years later with stories of eastern cultures, peoples, and traditions. Considered unbelievable by contemporary audiences, his journey demonstrated the possibilities of travelling to the east, not only creating a western fascination with the east (especially through his travelogue *The Travels of Marco Polo*), but also put Central Asia, India and China on the western medieval map, encouraging communication and trade with the Mongolian Empire, Persia, Armenia, the Caucasus and Asia Minor, many which included routes on the Silk Road. In 1221 a trade treaty between Venice and the Mongol Empire was established, illustrating their ambitions to extend trading capacities across Central Asia with luxury goods and daily necessities passing thru and exchanged in the markets of Venice, from salt and grain to porcelain, pearls, mineral dyes, peacock feathers, spices, along with a profusion of textiles from Egypt, Asia Minor and the Far East to Europe where they were highly valuable and eagerly sought.

The Venetian Republic became the center of a maritime empire of unequalled power, extending the entire length of their shores around the eastern Mediterranean to the islands of the Ionian Sea and Crete. By the end of the 13th-century Venice had become one of the most prosperous cities in Europe, protecting its close relationship between the city and sea. Each year on Ascension Day its relationship was symbolized with the *Sposalizio del Mare*, or Marriage to the Sea, a ceremony established ca 1000 and continues today. The Doge (now the Mayor of Venice) sailed into the Adriatic surrounded by a solemn procession of boats, offering a prayer, "for us and all who sail thereon the sea may be calm and quiet." In 1171 the tradition of casting a ring into the sea was added with the prayer "We wed thee, sea, as a sign of true and everlasting domination." While Venice's maritime trade monopoly during the 12th-13th centuries was challenged by many dominions it would be the 17th-century Ottoman Turks who finally weakened their hold on the Mediterranean.

A REMARKABLE HISTORY

The world's only existing quadriga (sculpture) of a four-horse unit used for chariot racing, was captured from Constantinople's Hippodrome during the 4th Crusade in 1204. The copper cast sculpture was installed in St. Marks Basilica in 1254 where it has remained except for about 20 years when it was carried off to Paris by Napoleon.



2nd-century Byzantium sculpture © feltor.wordpress.com.

IT WAS PRETTINESS THAT CAUGHT HIS EYE

According to a Byzantine chronicler in 830 Kassiani, a highly educated, beautiful and courageous girl from a wealthy family appeared in a Bridal Show. Smitten by her beauty Emperor Theophilus wanted her as his wife, approaching her saying 'Through a woman [came forth] the baser [things],' referring to original sin and the suffering that came to the world as a result of a woman; Kassiani responded 'And through a woman [came forth] the better [things],' referring that it was thru a woman salvation came to the world. His pride wounded by her rebuttal Theophilus rejected her, choosing Theodora as his wife.



Byzantine bridal show, Theophilus chooses Theodora as his empress over Kassiani, 829 AD, New York Public Library Digital Collection.

Bridal shows provided a way for suitable young ladies from provincial families to compete in hopes of impressing the prince and his parents. The mother of the potential young bride played a crucial role in preparing her daughter for the contest while the young king's imperial mother staged the event. Emulating Paris and the golden apple with a betrothal to the most beautiful the bridal show cast a wider net in the selection process, renewing the dynasty and legitimizing the selection for imperial needs as it bound ambitious families closer to court.

Upon her marriage, a Byzantine woman acquired bridal gifts of jewelry and her property in the form of a dowry. The bride's dowry was controlled by her husband although legally the goods belonged to her with the right to bequeath them as she wished and could not be transferred without her express permission. The decoration of a bride included a special headdress which identified her important status as wife and once she became a mother her husband would give her a silver headband decorated with precious stones to weave into her hair. At her marriage the empress did not always receive the actual title of Empress but was coronated as *Augusta* when she gave birth to a son. The empress had two important roles, first as the hostess of the court and secondly to produce the emperor's successor. As the mother of the heir, she would have opportunities to influence the next ruler as Roman law assumed that the mother of a child was the natural person to defend its rights until the age of maturity. When important family alliances had to be established children as young as seven could be betrothed and the girl might be sent to live with her future husband and parents-in-law while the heir apparent was regularly crowned as co-emperor in his father's lifetime to secure the family's succession. If the emperor's wife died or became incapable a female child might hold the title of empress and preside over the female section of the court. On her husband's death a wife regained her dowry, often increasing her wealth by inheritance and might have sufficient means to remain independent but most used it to negotiate a second marriage after the required a year of mourning since an earlier marriage carried a stigma of disrespect to her first husband.

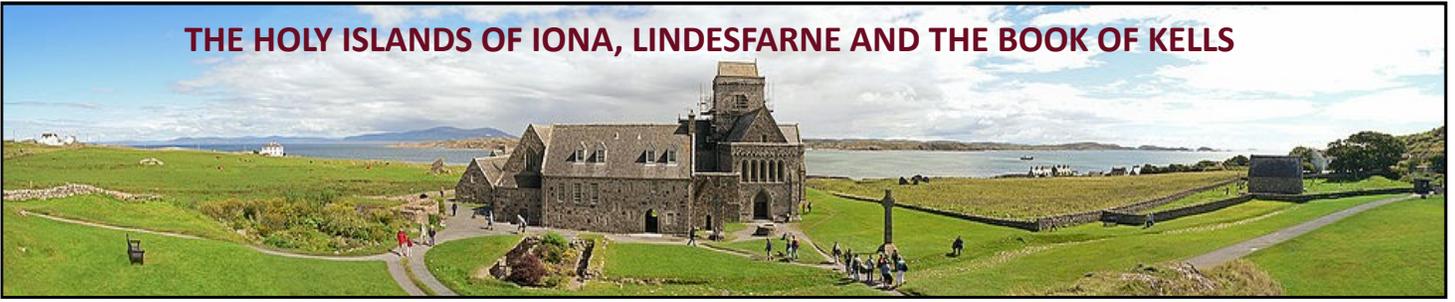
And what of Kassiani? After the bridal show, she became an abbess, only one of two Byzantine women known to have written in their names during the Middle Ages, the other being Anna Comnena. She wrote hymns for the Christian liturgy, the most famous being the *Hymn of Kassiani* traditionally, even today, sung on Holy Tuesday. Legend tells that later Theophilus, still in love with her, wished to see her once more before he died. Arriving at the monastery Kassiani was writing a hymn when she heard the Emperor was looking for her. Still in love with him but now devoted to God she hid away, not wanting her passion to overcome her religious feelings, leaving the unfinished hymn on the table. Theophilus entered her cell but did not find her as she was hiding in the closet, watching him. Theophilus cried regretting for a moment of pride he had rejected such a beautiful and intellectual woman. Noticing the papers on the table he read them, adding one more line before leaving. After he left Kassiani emerged, read what he had written and finished the hymn. She is one of the first composers whose scores can be interpreted today, about 50 hymns extant with 23 included in Orthodox Church liturgical books.

Listen to her music: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zY5x1kPlwE

LOCH NESS?

The earliest record of its existence is in the *Life of St. Columba* which describes the saint's miraculous powers. "On one famous occasion Columba witnessed the burial of a man who had been killed by a water beast. When the monster attacked another swimmer Columba made the sign of the cross and it fled in terror. According to the text, this encounter took place in the River Ness, which flows from the loch, rather than in Loch Ness itself." Source: British Library, London.

THE HOLY ISLANDS OF IONA, LINDISFARNE AND THE BOOK OF KELLS



Reconstructed Abbey © Oliver-Bonjoch CC BY+SA 3.0.

Iona, a tiny island off the western coast of Scotland, was revered during the middle ages as a dominant religious and political institution. The story begins with Columba (Colum Cille), a young man interested in the church joining a monastery and, after studying with the bard Gemman, became an ordained priest. Columba enjoyed copying manuscripts, even copying his teacher St. Finnian's psalter without permission, refusing to give it to Finnian when asked. Seeking justice they went to the High King Diarmait mac Cerbaill, a relative of Columba's, who ruled in favor of Finnian saying: "to every cow her calf, to every book its transcript. Therefore the copy you made belongs to Finnian." Columba continued to refuse hand over the copy of the psalter and began to gather his family's clans together to take up arms against the High King of Ireland. Tradition says Columba spent the night before in prayer where the Archangel Michael appeared saying he would win the battle, but since he had asked for such a worldly favor, the "blessing of God would not be upon him until he had exiled himself beyond the sea." In 561, true to the vision, Columba was successful in the battle of Cúl Dreimhne but the death of 3000 soldiers led to his being excommunicated at a Synod in Telltown. The excommunication was later lifted with a penance that he must win as many souls for Christ as had fallen on the battlefield. Accepting the penance and reconciling with Finnian, Columba exiled himself from his beloved native land, setting out in 563 from Ireland with 12 companions, settling off Scotland's coast on a tiny island known as Iona, a place where he could no longer see his beloved Ireland. Overseeing the building of a Celtic church Columba established a monastic community that became one of Europe's leading centers of learning, literacy, and springboard for the evangelization of Scotland. While none of St. Columba's original buildings have survived on the left-hand side of the abbey entrance is a small roofed chamber which is claimed to mark the site of the saint's initial tomb.



8th century St Martin's cross, one of Scotland's most sacred site Iona Abbey, 48 Scottish kings including MacBeth and St. Margaret's Malcolm are buried here © Telegraph News, UK.

The *Life of Columba*, written by Adomnán 100 years after Columba's death described Columba working in his cell on a rocky hillock, a knoll called Tòrr an Aba, "the mound of the abbot" where he could oversee the day to day activities of his monastery. In 1956, using this information as a clue, archaeologists found hazel charcoal that appeared to be the remains of a wattle hut that had been deliberately covered with beach pebbles where there was a hole from a post, possibly a cross. More recently with advanced carbon dating the charred remains of the hazel stakes found in 1956 have been found to date the hut between 540 and 650, Columba died in 597. Proven by science, Richard Strachan, Scotland's Senior Archeologist of Historical Environment stated: "It's fantastic, it absolutely nails it." Professor Thomas Clancy, Celtic and Gaelic historian at the University of Glasgow, said: "The results of the radiocarbon dating are nothing short of exhilarating. The remains on top of Tòrr an Aba had been dismissed as from a much later date, now we know they belonged to a structure which stood there in Columba's lifetime. The monastery established by Columba and his 12 companions on the Isle of Iona was an important event in the development of Christianity in the British Isles and rise of monasticism in Western Europe."

Iona also influenced an unsettled area of Northumbria, about 75 miles away, ruled by king Æthelrithm. In 616 or 617 Æthelrithm's throne was seized and his son Oswald along with his siblings and mother sought protection in the Celtic kingdom of Dalriada ruled by his uncle Edwin. After his uncle's death in 632 Oswald visited Iona where he was educated and converted to Christianity. After nearly two decades in exile, Oswald returned to claim the Northumbrian throne, however, the night before a decisive clash at Heavenfield, near Hadrian's wall Oswald reported having a vision of Columba, assuring him of martial success and a happy reign. Upon hearing of the visitation Oswald's followers pledged to become Christians after the battle. The next year is one of his first significant acts as king, Oswald established the monastery on Lindisfarne and installed an Ionan monk named Aidan as its first bishop. Relayed by Bede "he brought under his sway all the nations and provinces of Britain which are divided into four languages, the Britons, Picts, Scots, and the English." King Oswald was slain in 642, his bones relocated to Bardney Abbey in Lindsey until about 909 when his bones were

relocated to the new Gloucester minster founded by Æthelflæd, “Lady of the Mercians” which she renamed St Oswald's Priory in his honor as one of the most important founding saints of Anglo-Saxon Christianity.

Columba, Iona, and Lindisfarne are intertwined in the illuminated manuscripts of *Lindisfarne Gospels*, ca 609 - 721, and the Irish *Book of Kells*, ca 800, also known as the *Book of Columba*. In 1007 the *Annals of Ulster* describe “the great *Gospel of Colum Cille* as the most precious object of the western world.” After St. Columba’s death and burial at Iona the island remained the center of his ecclesiastical jurisdiction until foreign invasions forced Columba’s relics to be moved to Kells. While the exact location where the *Book of Kells* was created remain a subject of debate, according to authorities at the Library of Trinity College “it is almost certain that it was made at a Christian center associated with the cult of St Colum Cille, most likely in Western Scotland and/or Kells in Co. Meath in Ireland.” Regardless of its origin, the unfinished *Book of Kells* is considered the greatest achievement of the Irish medieval period.



St Cuthbert meets King Egfrith of Northumbria, Bede’s Prose *Vita S Cuthberti*, Durham, ca 1175-1200, Yates Thompson MS 26, fol. 51, British Library, London.



Book of Kells, Fol 32v, ca 800, St. Columba, fol. 28r, ca 800 © Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland.



Islamic carpet page, Lindisfarne Gospels, ca 715-21, believed illustrated by bishop Eadfrith in honor of St Cuthbert, Cotton MS, fol. 26v, British Library, London.



Book of Durrow, ca 675-700, created at a monastery associated with Columba, probably Lindisfarne, may have influenced the Book of Kells © Trinity College, University of Dublin.

READERS CORNER:

The Queen’s Hand

by Janna Bianchini



Berenguela, granddaughter to Eleanor of Aquitaine, was one of the most powerful women in Europe, forging alliances between the kingdoms of Castile and León. Inheriting the Castilian throne outright she elevated her son Ferdinand to kingship, ruling alongside him she used her assiduously cultivated alliances to set in motion a strategy in 1230 that would result in his acquisition of the crown of León and permanent union of Castile and León.

PROMISES MADE BY POPE EUGENIUS III, 1146

“Moreover, by the authority vested by God in us, we who with paternal care provide for your safety and the needs of the church, have promised and granted to those who from a spirit of devotion have decided to enter upon and accomplish such a holy and necessary undertaking and task, that remission of sins which our predecessor Pope Urban instituted. We have also commanded that their wives and children, their property and possessions, shall be under the protection of the holy church, of ourselves, of the archbishops, bishops and other prelates of the church of God. Moreover, we ordain by our apostolic authority that until their return or death is fully proven, no lawsuit shall be instituted hereafter in regard to any property of which they were in peaceful possession when they took the cross.

Those who with pure hearts enter upon such a sacred journey and who are in debt shall pay no interest. And if they or others for them are bound by oath or promise to pay interest, we free them by our apostolic authority. And after they have sought aid of their relatives or lords of whom they hold their fiefs, and the latter are unable or unwilling to advance them money, we allow them freely to mortgage their lands and

other possessions to churches, ecclesiastics or other Christians, and their lords shall have no redress. Following the institution of our predecessor, and through the authority of omnipotent God and of St. Peter, prince of the Apostles - which is vested in us by God - we grant absolution and remission of sins, so that those who devoutly undertake and accomplish such a holy journey, or who die by the way, shall obtain absolution for all their sins which they confess with humble and contrite heart, and shall receive from the Remunerator of all the reward of eternal life.”

Granted at Vetralle on the Kalends of December for second Crusade. (Kalends: Roman term for the first day of the month).

Source: Dana C. Munro, "Urban and the Crusaders," *Translations from the Original Sources of European History*, Vol 1:2.

THE FORGOTTEN CRUSADERS

As fathers, husbands, and sons responded to Pope Urban II's call in 1095 to recapture the Holy Lands women found themselves facing new challenges and opportunities. While many women remained at home as regents of their estate's others took the cross, enticed with the promise to wash away their sins and receive a special glory for freeing Jerusalem from Muslim control. One woman crusader in the First Crusade was Ela of Salisbury's aunt Florine of Burgundy who, with her husband Sweyn, Prince of Denmark, commanded a force of 1500 horsemen. It is said she took seven arrows but continued to fight next to her husband until they were overwhelmed by the Turks and killed alongside most of their men.



Men in armor with popular notched falcion swords (ca 1250-1300, a broad short sword and convex edge curving sharply to the point), lances and halberd, women waving goodbye, Morgan M.638 Maciejowski Bible, fol 33, 1244-1254, York.

In the fall of 1096, after the bloody failures of the Crusaders, Urban decreed women, old people, and children would no longer be allowed to take part in the Crusades. In spite of the Pope's ban some women continued to accompany their husbands, most notably Eleanor of Aquitaine who took the cross in the Second Crusade with her husband Louis VII of France. From her duchy of Aquitaine, she led 1000 knights and 300 women, dressed as "amazons," claiming the women were along to "tend the wounded." After the Second Crusade, the Church officially discouraged women rulers from taking vows of crusading although western women did continue to accompany men in a private capacity. The only women the Church officially approved to participate in the Crusaders army were washerwomen, usually too old to be a temptation.

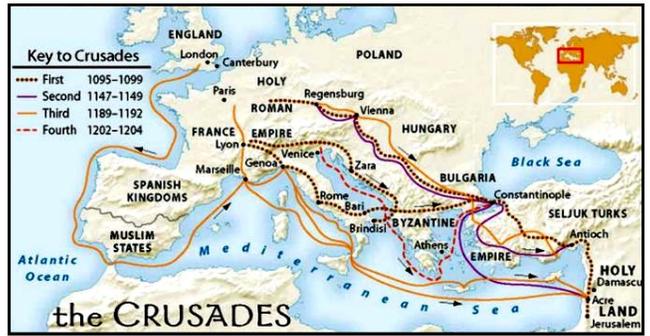
Twelfth-century historian Niketas Choniates wrote of the women crusaders in the Second Crusade, "females were numbered among them ... bearing lances and weapons ... convey[ing] a wholly martial appearance." Women also worked in the camps serving as aides as described in the historical manuscripts from the Peasants' Crusade as Peter the Hermit addressed a group of crusaders clad in armor, holding lances with women standing alongside, all preparing to leave. The *Itinerary of the Pilgrims and Deeds of Richard*, the most comprehensive and complete account of the Third Crusade, describes "a woman who labored with great diligence and earnestness" inspiring and boosting morale to both her female and male peers. Other documents also credited women for their participation as archers in the line of duty.

After the First Crusade, the demand for experienced men-at-arms was extensive, leaving many women responsible for overseeing and protecting property and finances at home. Raids on property were common and women were often called upon to defend their home or castle. The absence of a husband, son, or guardian could be as long as ten years with many men never returning. While no exact numbers exist it is reported that between the Second and Third Crusades perhaps 500,000 were lost. Women who governed in their husband's name engaged in legal transactions, directed farming, collected monies in case of ransom, and raised their children. The words of Lady Alice Knyvet, an English noblewoman in 1461 when faced with troops poised to take her castle, probably reflect the actions of many who were forced into this militant role. "I will not leave the possession of this castle to die, therefore; and if you begin to break the peace or make war to get the place of me, I shall defend me. For rather I in such wish to die than to be slain when my husband cometh home, for he charged me to keep it." Documented in the *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* Alice raised the drawbridge and "with slings, 'paveises', faggots, timbers, and other armaments of war," assisted by fifty people "armed with swords, 'glavyes', bows and arrows."

During the crusades important female royal regencies rose to keep their kingdoms intact. Eleanor of Aquitaine ruled England for her son Richard while Blanche of Castile served as regent when her crusader son Louis IX took up arms in his "Holy War." In 1247 before Louis IX departed it is reported he said to his mother: "I leave my three children for your wards. I leave this realm of France to you to govern it. Truly I know that they be well guarded and it well governed." Her son's trust was well placed, Blanche managed to suppress several rebellions, extending the power of the French dynasty when, in 1249, she completed the absorption of the southern regions thru advantageous alliances in Aquitaine, Languedoc, and Provence, transforming France more closely to its size of today.

Queens, abbesses, and widows also functioned as patronesses of the arts, providing rich opportunities to make their voices heard.

Eleanor commissioned art for the Abbey of Fontevraud while her daughters promoted literature and culture throughout Europe, Marie de Champagne sponsored works enhancing the power and reputation of women including as patroness of Chrétien de Troyes, creator of Arthurian romances. Mathilda of Saxony commissioned romances and introduced courtly poetry into her husband Henry the Lion's circle while Leonor, consort to Alfonso of Castile welcomed troubadours and minstrels to their court. Eleanor's sister-in-law from her first marriage, Agnes de Baudement financed building the church Sainte-Yved de Braine while making sure artists depicted feminist themes with topics as the Jesse Tree, often used by women as a female personification of the liberal arts. Female patronage during this period provided a growing awareness of women's worth and intrinsic value to society. With economic resources, women were able to promote cultural activities including many supporting the copying and distribution of books. Thirteenth-century Eleanor of Castile, Queen of England, granddaughter of Berengaria of Castile and consort to Edward I, was an active patroness of literature, maintaining the only royal scriptorium existing at the time in Northern Europe with scribes and at least one illuminator creating books on saint's lives, Psalters, and books of romance.



The ideas of male chivalry during the Crusades was servitude to God, fidelity, and piety, for women it was waiting for her husband while maintaining the household and serving as an administrator during his absence. The Crusades took several million lives and kept Europe in flux for 200 years but also promoted churches power and wealth, stimulated increased trade and intellectual development, contributed to a breakdown of the feudal aristocracy and with war casualties and an expanded economy provided women new opportunities.

IN THE NIGHT

Charlemagne kept lamps and wax tables at his bedside so he could record his dreams when he woke in the middle of the night.

ARRAS: A Spanish word describing a bride's personal property given by her husband as a "wedding gift" that was under her independent management; in 1170 Queen Leonor's arras included many towns, castles, and rents. A hundred years later Alfonso X, grandson to Berengaria of Castile, declared husbands and wives should possess the gift of the other but "nevertheless the husband should be the master and have control of all the property aforesaid." A husband was not permitted, however, to wantonly "sell, dispose of, or waste the donation which he gave his wife or the dowry which he received from her."



MATILDA, THE EMPRESS
 London, the Public Record Office, D. L. 10/17),
 No. 394, Date: 25 July 1141-Dec. 1142, at Oxford.

The Empress grants to Miles of Gloucester, Earl of Hereford, and his heirs the castle and honour of Abergavenny to be held hereditarily in fee from Brian fitzCount and his wife, Matilda, and their heirs for the service of

In accordance with German tradition, the seal's obverse side is natural colored wax while the reverse red, bearing + MATHILDIS DEI GRATIA ROMANORVM REGINA. Made for Matilda in Germany or Italy during her marriage to Emperor Henry V it is interesting she continued to use this seal even after becoming Countess of Anjou and Lady of the English, perhaps viewing her imperial title above all others, although use of that seal denied her the title of Empress, styling herself only as "Queen of the Romans."

Source: Peter Sheerin

TEMPIETTO ON VATICAN HILL

Architect Donato Bramante, commissioned by Ferdinando and Isabella of Castile, built this tomb in 1502 as a commemorative chapel over the spot where it was believed St. Peter was crucified. A masterpiece of High Renaissance, decorated with scallop-shell motif representing the pilgrimage to Spain's Santiago de Compostela, its antique Roman Doric columns support an entablature with keys of St. Peter and liturgical instruments of the Mass. Based on the Greco-Roman *Tholos Temple* Tempietto was the first circular contemporary building designed around da Vinci's 15th-century idealized human body, a man with his arms and legs extended, a circle within a square, a concept included in Hildegard von Bingen's 12th century illuminated manuscripts. Bramante may have been influenced by da Vinci whom he was working with at the time while da Vinci was under the patronage of Catherina Sforza's uncle Ludovico Sforza, duke of Milan.



unknown source

ELVES

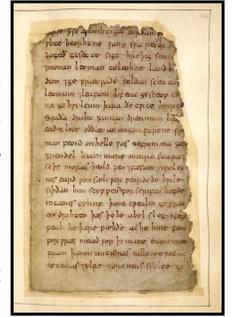


Woden and 5 early kings allegedly descended from him, 12th-century historical text: *Cotton MS Caligula A VIII*, fol. 29r, British Library.

Elves, in one form or another, have been a popular subject included in almost all cultures since early times. Medieval Germany elves were portrayed as having magical powers and supernatural beauty while in Norse mythology they were originally a race of minor gods of nature and fertility. Good and evil were living companions to the English and Jack Frost was not indicative of “weather” but mischief personified, a kinsman of the Devil nipping noses and fingers and making the ground too hard to work. Elves were often pictured as youthful men and women of great beauty living in forests and other natural places, underground or wells with springs, portrayed to be long-lived or immortal with magical powers attributed to them.

The Germanic-speaking migrants who settled in southern and eastern Britain between the 4th-6th centuries were pagans and apart from the minimal runic inscriptions little survives from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of that period. Later writers were not always reliable describing the pagan past as they relied more on sources that described Roman religions, even including the revered Bede

who lived only a few decades after the last major Anglo-Saxon kings converted to Christianity. The earliest written reference for an elf to appear is from the 1st quarter 9th-century *Royal Prayer Book*, *Royal MS A XX* in Mercia, in the time of Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians. Some pagan gods, such as Woden, continued to appear in the genealogies of Anglo-Saxon kings often alongside Christian figures as Adam and Eve. Eventually, the belief in pagan gods gave way to Christianity although the Anglo-Saxons retained beliefs from pagan lore and elements of Norse mythology with elves and Satan appearing long after their conversion to Christianity.



Beowulf, mentioning elves, England, 1st quarter 11th century, *Cotton MS Vitellius A XV*, fol. 134r, British Library.

A negative connotation of elves is included in *Bald's Leechbook*, a mid-10th-century collection of Anglo-Saxon medical remedies and diagnostic guides which suggests using written charms against the elves can cause pain to both domestic animals and ‘humans diseases of the head,’ mental illness. *Beowulf*, a poem dated between the 8th-early 11th centuries, also mentions in a passage translated from Old English by Seamus Heaney claims “...out of his (Cain’s) exile there sprang ogres and elves and evil phantoms and the giants too who strove with God.” In Anglo-Saxon lore, elves did not always have an entirely negative connotation. In the 9th to 11th-centuries many members of the West Saxon nobility gave their children names that included the element ‘ælf,’ perhaps the most notable example is Alfred, or Ælfræd, the Great with charters listing many Ælfstans, Ælfgifu, Æthelflæd of the Mercians and Ælfrics, although it is unclear if Anglo-Saxons chose names because they sounded like the supernatural beings called ‘elves’ or just as part of longstanding naming traditions.



Lincoln elf © Alstair Ross.

Beautiful women were sometimes compared to elves who could lead to trouble. In an Anglo-Saxon poem, the biblical heroine Judith describes herself as “aelfscinu” or beautiful like an elf. Perhaps one of the best-known elves is from the 14th-century legend of two mischievous imps sent by Satan to cause mayhem, first in northern England before

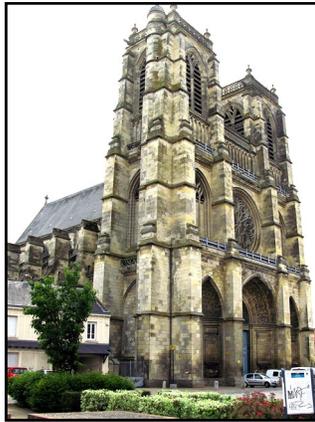
moving to Lincoln Cathedral where they smashed tables and chairs and tripped the Bishop until an angel came out of a book of prayers and asked them to stop. One elf was brave and started to throw rocks while the other covered under the broken chairs and tables. The angel turned the first imp into stone, giving the second imp a chance to escape. The stone imp is now considered symbolic of the city of Lincoln.

THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

- 529 Justinian I publishes his Code of Civil Law
- 969 St. Olga of Kiev dies at 79 years of age
- 999 St. Adelaide of Burgundy dies at 67 years of age
- 1149 End of the Second Crusade
- 1179 St. Hildegard von Bingen dies at 81 years of age
- 1209 Margaret de Quincy is born
- 1301 Ottoman Empire founded lasting over 600 years
- 1349 Plague introduced into Norway and England
- 1359 Jeanne de Belleville dies at 59 years of age
- 1369 Philippa of Hainault dies at 58 years of age
- 1429 Joan of Arc led French forces, siege of Orléans
- 1509 Catherine Sforza dies at 46, Margaret Beaufort at 66
- 1519 Leonarda da Vinci dies at 67 years of age
- 1539 Isabella d’Este dies at 65 years of age

ABBEY OF CORBIE

The Abbey of Corbie, founded by Bathilde between 657 and 661, was strategically located at the top of the Somme valley, a major center for travel and commerce since ancient times. Dedicated to St. Peter, Paul, and Stephan, the abbey prospered from its beginning with support from a long line of royal patrons including Merovingian kings Chlothar III, Childeric II, Thierry III, Clovis III, Childeric III, and Dagobert III followed by Frankish kings Pepin the Short and son Charlemagne. The abbey followed the Rule of Saint Benedict, quickly transitioning from a simple retreat for monks to a celebrated school, attracting pupils who went on to earn distinctions in French political, ecclesiastical and intellectual life during the 8th and 9th-centuries. By the 9th-century Corbie was larger than St. Martin's Abbey at Tours or Paris' St. Denis, housing 300 monks at its height.



Abbey church of Corbie, Picardy, France
© Marcus3 CC BY-SA 2.5.

The success of any monastic school and scope of its program depended primarily on the size and breadth of its library or the teachers' private book collections that could be used to develop courses. By the 770s Corbie's library possessed a considerable number of manuscripts, some written in their scriptorium while older ones acquired from various sources including the palace library during the Abbacy of Adelard, half-brother to Pepin, and the reduction of books from Charlemagne's library after his death. Corbie's library served as an important center for the transmission of the works of Antiquity to the Middle Ages with its 11th and 12th-century library catalogs listing such extraordinary early treasures as Euclid's *Geometria* translated by Boethius, Ptolemy writings of astronomy, Nicomachus on arithmetic, and Pythagoras 'translating' music.

Carolingian minuscule, developed ca 780 in Corbie's scriptorium, characterized by its clear, quickly formed letters using only downward strokes with most letters requiring only three strokes, surviving today as our lower case typeface font. Introduction of word separation offered a writing style that gave a new emphasis to accuracy, a major improvement over the almost unreadable Merovingian script. One of the monasteries greatest accomplishments were their preservation of manuscripts with almost 90% of the works of ancient Rome that exist today are written in Carolingian minuscule.

SEIÐR, A VIKING WOMAN

Although the Viking society is generally considered to have been dominated by men, some women were believed to have had special powers making them influential figures. This curved metal rod discovered buried next to a woman's body, alongside other valuable items including an unusual plaque made of whalebone implying the woman held a high status in Viking society. The staff is believed to be a Viking sorceress's magical staff, the bend made during her funeral ritual to neutralize its magical properties. Consistent with previously discovered 9th and 10th-century Norse Iron Age seiðr, the wand is believed to have been an essential part of her ritual equipment. (Oseberg's burial ship ca 834 AD also contained a staff.)



Iron Staff, Villa Farm, Møre og Romsdal, Vestnes, Norway, 900s AD, British Library.

Because the Vikings did not convert to Christianity until about 1000 AD there is strong evidence of the importance of magic in their society at a time when the rest of Europe had largely abandoned the practice. Seiðr is an Old Norse term for the practice of entering into a trance to gain knowledge and visions with women, having a central role in their society, conducting community ceremonies as a way to understand the future. While these women may have been on the margins of society they were well respected and feared. Written references suggest the woman would be dressed in an elaborate costume sitting on a raised seat or platform as she entered a trance state, perhaps accompanied by singing or chanting. After her spirit traveled throughout the Nine Worlds of Norse Mythology she could then offer a prophecy, blessing, or a curse.

YOUR MOVE

New chess rules were created for Spain's most popular game at the time in celebration of Isabella I of Castile's leadership during 1489 military siege in Baza'. While the king remained the most important piece on the board, the queen, no longer a weak restricted player, became the most powerful, able to move boldly across the board in any direction for an unlimited number of spaces protecting the King, the key piece on the board. The new rules were published in 1497, *Repetición de Amores y Arte de Ajedrez*, the oldest printed book on chess, by Ramirez de Lucena describing the game as "queen's chess" and how she was now allowed to "advance as far as she liked, as long as her path was clear."



THE CROWNING OF A QUEEN

Isabella of Castile, daughter of John II of Castile and Isabella of Portugal, was next in line for the crown of Castile after her older half-brother Henry IV. With the birth of her brother Alfonso, she became second until his unexpected and mysterious death that positioned Isabella again next in line as Alfonso's successor. When Isabella's half-brother Henry IV died at 2 am December 11, 1474, it is said she felt 'profound sadness.' Gathered around Alfonso's bedside with Isabella where two of Henry's key nobles along with Isabella's childhood mentor and Henry's nephew. As they began to prepare a plan Isabella instructed them to keep Alfonso's death quiet, wanting to use the element of surprise to decisively assert her right to rule. The next morning she sent letters out across the kingdom calling for funeral services. At 10:00 the bells of the Church of San Miguel de Segovia began ringing, quickly followed by the other local churches. Isabella appeared an hour later in mourning clothes as the priests conducted Henry's funeral mass celebrated with psalms, readings, candles and specific prayers from the well known Office of the Dead. At 11:30 a city official called out to the crowd in Segovia's Plaza of Henry's death noting Henry had left no legitimate heir, therefore his sister Isabella would assume the throne which was confirmed by two of Henry's nobles.



unknown source



Royal Chapel of Granada, Spain.

Within hours after the mass Isabella removed her dark mourning dress and emerged in resplendent attire, returning to the church to have herself proclaimed queen. The procession entered Segovia's Plaza, men bearing both Isabella's coat of arms and that of the Trastámara family which included Ferdinand's as they were second cousins, followed by the mayor, his wife, and clerics. Henry's nephew and the royal entourage followed. Finally, Isabella appeared, astride a milky-white horse accompanied by musicians playing kettledrums, trumpets, and clarinets. At the church door Isabella climbed onto an elevated brocade covered platform where she addressed the crowd loudly and clearly, pledging to defend the church and her people. Placing her right hand on the Bible she swore an oath to the commandments of the church, to look to the common good, improve fortunes, do justice and protect the privileges of the nobility; in turn, the crowd responded swearing allegiance to her. Officials then knelt taking an oath to her as their queen and to Ferdinand, her husband, after which they handed her the keys to Alcázar and the treasury. Returning the keys for safekeeping she lifted their four-year-old daughter Isabella, presenting her as her heir. Isabella then entered the church falling to her knees at the main altar then prostrating herself in subjugation to God. When she arose she took the royal pendant and placed it on the altar. As she left the church her procession was led by a man with an unsheathed sword held aloft, its tip pointed upward symbolizing justice as Isabella rode back thru the winding streets surrounded by nobles on foot followed by city officials to her new home, Alcázar of Segovia.

At the time of Henry's death Ferdinand was 175 miles away in his capital of Aragon, only becoming aware of the events several days after the coronation. Speeding toward Segovia he told his chronicler Palencia traveling with him "I never heard of a queen who usurped this male privilege." Arriving two weeks after the coronation he made his ceremonial arrival thru the city gates magnificently dressed amidst a large throng of officials and clerics, Isabella was not there to greet him. Traveling to Alcázar he found her waiting for him inside the gates, realizing their roles were now reversed, she was in control and he would have to come to her. Tempers flared as they met, each seeing themselves as the legitimate ruler, the other as consort. Deeply offended Ferdinand threatened to leave but Isabella, realizing it was essential she find a solution, convinced him the division of power was superficial, he would power and autonomy coupled a reminder that their signed pre-nup had declared if she became Queen in her own right he would serve as consort. Isabella had the Concordat of Segovia drawn up acknowledging their agreement, his name would go first and join hers in documents, proclamations, and coins, however, the sovereignty in Castile and León's right to appoint officials and how to spend money from the treasury would belong solely to her. A motto was crafted to present this unified front to the world: "*Tanto Monta, Monta Tanto*", "as one is, so is the other", saving face and allowing Ferdinand to claim responsibility for much that Isabella accomplished during her reign.



Alcázar of Segovia © wallpaperswiki.com.

“THE HOLY WISDOM OF GOD”

The golden age of Kievan Rus' was heralded by Yaroslav the Wise, son of Vladimir the Great, great-grandson to Olga of Kiev. After Vladimir's baptism in 988 Rus' became open to the West, first with Yaroslav's marriage to Swedish princess Indegard followed in 1051 with their daughter Anne's marriage to Henry I of France.



St. Sophia Cathedral, Novgorod
© revolv.com

Founded in 1011 the Cathedral of St. Sophia was embellished with marble from Byzantium's Marmara Island and decorated with mosaics by artists from Constantinople. The 125-foot high domed church is one of the earliest stone structures in northern Russia and considered an early contemporary to the French cathedrals of Notre Dame, Reims, Amiens, and Germany's Bamberg and Namburg. St. Sophia was the first church in the Slavic lands to incorporate features that diverged from the Byzantine style including its exterior walls with narrow windows reminiscent of Western Europe's Romanesque architecture. The cupolas acquired their present helmet-like shape during its 1150's restoration after a fire. The sixth and largest dome was gilded in 1408, crowning a tower that leads to the upper galleries which, during Yaroslav's reign, is thought to have held the Novgorodian treasury and his notable library including the *Slavonic Gospel* which Anne brought to France as part of her dowry, later given to the Cathedral of Reims and is known as the *Rheims Gospel*, used by several French kings, including Louis IX, during their coronations.

St. Sophia was not named for any of the female saints but rather from the Greek word for wisdom (Σοφία) “the love of wisdom”, a name from Constantinople's 6th-century Hagia Sophia's cathedral meaning ‘The Holy Wisdom of God.’

DID YOU KNOW?

The walrus, found in the subarctic seas in the Northern Hemisphere, was treasured not only for their ivory tusks but their tough 3-inch thick skin. One hide could weight up to 500 pounds which, when split, cured and twisted was the strongest rope known during the medieval period. A half-inch strand could lift a ton and preferred for hoisting heavy objects over pulleys, hanging the great bells in church steeples, and lashing together siege engines and catapults.

DRINKING HORNS



Iron with sheet gold, 5.5 L capacity, ca 530 BC, 1 of 9 from a Celtic mound © Celtic Museum Hochdorf, Keltenstrasse, Germany.

Drinking horns have been an integral part of celebration rituals from as early as the 8th century BC. After Rome's collapse, the use of drinking horns was concentrated in Scandinavia, Germany, and England and became the ceremonial drinking vessel during the Medieval period for those of high status as portrayed in the Bayeux Tapestry with Harold Godwinson feasting with a horn in his hand before embarking for Normandy.

Excavations have continued to reveal notable finds including Denmark's Golden Horns of Gallehus and V&A's 14th-century Pusey horn whose inscription reads 'I kynge knowde gave Wyllyam Pusey thys horne to holde by thy land.' The horn, by tradition, was given by King Cnut, consort to Emma of Normandy, to William Pusey as a reward for his warning of an impending Danish attack, delivered to Pusey with a letter of tenure 'Cornage,' or transfer of land by service of a horn, customary in Anglo-Saxon England.



Copies of Golden Horns of Gallehus, sheet gold with runic inscriptions, ca 5th century AD, Denmark National Museum © Nationalmuseet CC BY-SA 3.0.

For a time the popularity of drinking horns declined briefly as the church saw them as a symbol of luxury and vanity, however, by the end of the 13th century they again became popular in royal courts, used by nobles, clergy, and guildsmen.



Oldenburg Horn, German artisans 1474, Rosenburg Castle, King of Denmark's Collection, Copenhagen.

The Oldenburg horn exemplifies the intricate and artistic ability of 15th-century German artisans. Made in about 1474 for Christian I, the horn is ornamented with the coats of arms of Burgundy and Denmark which Christian and consort Dorothea of Brandenburg gave to Charles of Burgundy as Christian served as a political intermediary between Charles and the future Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian.