

# 1413

*and all that*

Journal  
*of the*  
University of St Andrews  
History Society

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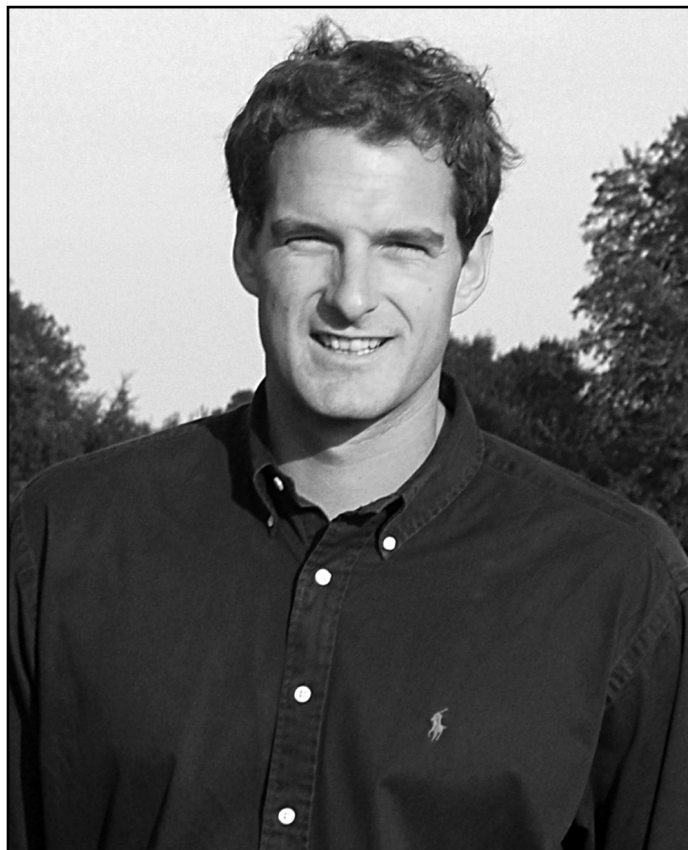
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## FOREWORD BY DAN SNOW

**W**ars, economic collapse, riots and revolutions: suddenly everyone is interested in history again. Desperate for answers, solutions and ideas we turn, inevitably, to our reservoir of human knowledge and experience, the past. 'Study the past, if you would divine the future', Confucius tells us.

Enjoy the articles in this journal, they will fascinate and amuse but also provoke and stimulate. They will remind you that humanity has seen it all before. They will provide context. History frees us from being imprisoned in the present, from being like goldfish, constantly shocked by ever repeating phenomena. Cicero wrote that 'history provides guidance in everyday lives'; I hope this journal helps you discern the path.

*Dan Snow is a modern historian, broadcaster, and presenter for the BBC.*



*Image courtesy of DAN SNOW*

## EDITORIAL PREFACE

**W**elcome to the first ever issue of the *Journal of the University of St Andrews' History Society*. The *Journal* aims to be a forum for all form of scholarship, debate and discussion, academic and light-hearted, in the fascinating field of history. All of our submissions have been written by students at the University of St Andrews, and they really do demonstrate the quality of the student population at this fine institution.

In the end, we have been fortunate enough to have had a range of submissions that span right across the spectrum of historical periods and topics. Included in this issue we offer up an exciting range of articles from discussions on sixth century sources, animals and holy men, medieval oddities and early modern crime and punishment. Moreover a selection of book-reviews provides some guidance to those looking for something interesting to read over the Christmas break.

We hope that you not only find this first edition of the *Journal* educationally beneficial but that you enjoy and take pleasure in reading about historical matters that may be presented a little differently from the tomes of the heavyweight historians of academia.

Historically,

S.C. Scholes, M.T. Taylor, & A.J.S. Toombs

*Editors-in-Chief*

## NOTE

## THE CURIOUS CONTENT OF FOURNIER'S REGISTER

S.C. SCHOLES<sup>†</sup>

Any student of history, including those confused individuals who are really lost political scientists that find themselves studying modern history, will know that the sources that have been handed down to us are often littered with odd and quite often amusing tales and descriptions. From Prokopios' account of Theodora's randy antics in sixth century Byzantium (which make an excellent insert into a lad's birthday card message), to Gerald of Wales' self-castrating beavers (something the severe feminist may wish to insert into a lad's birthday card) the mediaeval world offers up an abundance of such content. The register of Jacques Fournier, the famous (at least more so for the historian than the latest winners of an ITV talent-show competition) inquisitor of the Cathar heresy in the fourteenth century, contains a curious mix of odd comments and weird explanations. It should however be remembered that the material that we find amusing is so because we often judge it by our own social norms and standards (which are arguably increasingly laughable, if not altogether bewildering; I refer again to ITV talent shows) and this is perfectly acceptable however by the standards of the context in which or about which the sources have been writing these were serious matters and acceptable comments. Through exploring the 'odder' material it will become clear that such oddity holds a significant amount of important information for the historian as well as a much needed giggle.<sup>1</sup>

## LIVED EXPERIENCE

Guillemette Benet 'noticed that a decapitated chicken made a commotion as long as the blood ran from its body. It happens the same way for men and women: they live as long as they have blood'.<sup>2</sup> What Benet is commenting on is her understanding of the soul and that for her the soul is actually blood. What her testimony allows the historian to understand is not necessarily that all fourteenth-century lay persons believed that the soul is blood but that understanding of the more otherworldly phenomena was in part based on lived experience. There is of course some objection to using Fournier's record to reveal such a reality, perhaps on the grounds that it is a record of heretical belief or that, as the John Arnold who is not necessarily against such opinion but shows, there was more than a simple set-up of question and answer during inquisition which could result in misinformation and distortion of the real beliefs, actions and understandings.<sup>3</sup> However, with such considerations in mind, it is arguably the case that such accounts as those of Benet do allow the historian to penetrate into a little of the reality of the context by providing us with a framework into which we can attempt to, if not understand, identify with the medieval world view. A comparison would perhaps be something along the line of, if forced, once could imagine comprehending a little of why people watch ITV talent shows by simply understanding the lived experience of such a torment.

## GOSSIPING TRUTHS

For Guillaume Fort, a citizen of Montailou, the cliffs of St Andrews would have been a source of much fear given his testimony: '...that the souls of bad men, both now and after judgement, will go among the cliffs and precipices and that demons will throw them down from the cliffs onto the rocks below'.<sup>4</sup> For the modern reader the presence of the demons and soul again may raise an eyebrow or, if you need to get out more, send you into fits of heretical (note not hysterical) laughter. However, when we learn a little later in the same extract that it is by the 'common talk' that he knows of Arnalda Riba who has seen this event happen the history detective can get to work again. What such a comment illustrates is on one hand that people talked, that that talk would concern the supernatural marvels of the day. More insightful than perhaps the rather dumb point that people in the middle ages could talk (pun intended) is that this talk, gossip even, was a significant player in the formation of understandings about the world.

## CONCLUSIONS ON THE CURIOUS CONTENT OF CHICKENS AND CLIFFS

Fournier's register is a wealth of information and to take but two examples from it fails to qualify that statement. However for the purposes of this article they demonstrate just quite how revealing the oddest comments can be about the exciting mass of time that has come and gone, more commonly known as history.

1 All extracts from Fournier's Register have been taken from: *The Inquisitorial Register of Jacques Fournier*, in Edward Peters (ed.), *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe: Documents in Translation* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 171 – 176. Hereafter abbreviated to *IRJF*.

2 *IRJF*, p. 171.

3 John H. Arnold, 'Inquisition, Texts and Discourse' in Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy* (Suffolk, 2003), p. 63. See also John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, esp. Chapter 4.

4 *IRJF*, p. 173.

I am currently researching for a conference on *Religious Men in the Middle Ages* to be held at the University of Huddersfield next summer on a not altogether unrelated topic. I would welcome any comments, objections, alternatives or thoughts on the ideas presented above.

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## NOTE

## SHAMING PUNISHMENTS: PAST OR PRESENT?

ALEX HILL<sup>†</sup>

Following the riots that erupted in England this summer, the government has been under increasing pressure to reform sentencing on crime, whilst the new e-petitions website currently has over 100 open debates on the issue of the death penalty. In light of this, how do the punishments of the past, particularly the shaming punishments of the Early Modern period, compare with those used now? Such punishments were 'intended for lesser offences, to humiliate the offender, before his or her neighbours, and in more serious offences to serve as an example'.<sup>1</sup> Can examination of these contribute to the current debates on crime and punishment?

During the Early Modern period in England, there were a number of punishments available, often combined to produce the desired effect. One image from 1685, for example, shows Titus Oates being whipped around town before being placed in the pillory for his role in the Popish Plot against the future King James II.<sup>2</sup> J. A. Sharpe argues that these punishments played three roles, those of deterrence, retribution and reform, with shaming punishments being particularly popular due to the effect they would have on a person's reputation and fortune.<sup>3</sup> The pillory, like the stocks, was a device placed in the centre of town for maximum impact, and was often accompanied with a description of the crime, or visual symbol. For example, a butcher who was convicted of selling bad meat was carted around with bacon stuck to him.<sup>4</sup> Another form of punishment was that of carting or riding, also known as 'rough music', where the criminal was carried through the streets, whilst locals drew attention to them by playing instruments and shouting abuse at them.

The visual aspect of these punishments was thus very important in the way they worked, especially when the importance of community meant that any shame would stain relationships with neighbours for a long time.<sup>5</sup> Even though we no longer put offenders' heads on spikes, shaming and the exhibition of offenders is still part of modern society. Although people now tend to worry less about their reputation amongst their neighbours, newspapers and the internet perform a similar function, as they plaster the faces of offenders across the front covers. Such forms of communication also make it harder to lose a criminal record, with CRB checks a regular occurrence for many jobs. This is similar to the way that many criminals were branded, ensuring that they could not get away from their past misdeeds. Another important feature of shaming punishments was that they acted as a 'visual validation of order',<sup>6</sup> as well as ensuring that people behaved as they were expected. For instance, men who did not seem able to control their wives were punished. One example from Samuel Pepys' diary in Greenwich, 1667, tells of 'a great riding there today for a man...whose wife beat him'.<sup>7</sup> The visual show of order to modern society focuses more on the role of the appearance of law enforcers to help prevent crime.

Other aspects of shaming punishments that have not survived as well into current thinking are the more physical aspects such as whipping and public hanging. For example, the 1752 Murder Act ensured that the bodies of murderers would be gibbeted and dissected, thus preventing a proper burial.<sup>8</sup> Despite these punishments no longer being used, the death penalty itself was only abolished in Great Britain in 1969, and is still put forward by many as an appropriate punishment for certain crimes. Caning in state schools was only outlawed in 1986 with a total ban on any physical chastisement of children a fairly recent occurrence. The decline of the church has also meant that shaming punishments, such as penance and disgrace on those who had committed self-murder (suicide), no longer carry the same power, falling into disuse with the rise of more secular beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

When looking at Early Modern punishments, it is clear to see how some of our modern ideas about punishment have come through to us from this period. Just recently HM Revenue & Customs has brought in its own form of shaming punishment, permitting the publication of the financial penalties of individuals and companies convicted of tax frauds. In fact, it is not only the notions of punishment that have continued. For instance, in areas of social history such as the care of the mentally handicapped, the concept of 'Care in the Community' has once again become the norm following the closure of asylums in the 1980s. Thus, even though many of our values may have changed over the years, such examples highlight how the past has been instrumental in shaping our present.

1 E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), p.480.

2 J. A. Sharpe, *Crime and the Law in English Satirical Prints 1600-1832* (Cambridge, 1986), p.5

3 J. A. Sharpe, *Judicial Punishment in England* (London, 1990), p.6.

4 Martin Ingram, 'Shame and Pain: Themes and Variations in Tudor Punishments', in Simon Devereaux and Paul Griffiths (eds.), *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500-1900: Punishing the English* (Hampshire, 2004), p.42.

5 Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* (Essex, 1998), p.185.

6 Paul Griffiths, 'Introduction: Punishing the English', in *Penal Practice and Culture*, p.19.

7 'Samuel Pepys's Diary June 1667', in Robert Latham (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A Selection*, (London, 1985), p.785.

8 Alfred Marks, *Tyburn Tree: Its History and Annals* (London, 1908), p.247.

9 Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), p.10.

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## NOTE

## BYZANTIUM IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

ALEX LENK<sup>†</sup>

This August, Bulgaria hosted one of its greatest scholarly events ever: The 22<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies, its main theme ‘Byzantium without Borders’. Prof. Emeritus Vassil Gjuzelev and Prof. Peter Schreiner, the presidents of the National and International Organising Committees respectively, were the main coordinators of the event. From 22 to 27 August, the city of Sofia changed outsiders’ perspectives of the city as an undermined European capital. It turned into a cosmopolitan city displaying a wide variety of views and critical approaches. The multiculturalism of the city in that week should not be regarded as a settled phenomenon, but rather as a temporary reality aiming to revolutionise and present ground-breaking research about a field the whole world should be concerned with, namely that of the Byzantine studies. The fascination with the subject can be demonstrated by the exceptional number of participants, which reached 1200, twenty times greater than that of the First Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Bucharest back in 1924. The attendants comprised professors, doctors, and an impressive amount of PhD students from 120 countries altogether. The interest in Byzantium was further fostered by a large number of non-specialists and listeners, such as a group of 20 Norwegian undergraduate students whose participation was financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Education.

The Congress took place in the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century building of Sofia University, *St. Kliment Ohridski*, a symbol of Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman State in 1878, accounting for a will to establish a solid educational system and a scholarly recognition on a supra-national level. Sofia University was also the venue for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies in 1934, which was commemorated on 22 August by the patron of the Congress, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov, at the opening ceremony, held in the very same location for both congresses: the historical *Aula*. The programme was typically organised around plenary sessions in the morning, whereas the afternoons were devoted to round table discussions and ‘free communications sessions’. Topics included more traditional issues such as ‘Cities and Public Spaces’, ‘Architectural Heritage’, and ‘The Sacred in Byzantine Theology and Art’, but these explored all possible areas within or in contact with the Byzantine Empire, often neglected by scholars preferring to concentrate on the central place of Constantinople. Studies on the Aton monasteries in Greece, the rock monastery of Ivanovo in Bulgaria, the Sinai, Thessaloniki and Cyprus were presented. On the other hand, more innovative themes contributed to the increased scope of research in the field. For instance, the plenary session on the Black Sea introduced the need to investigate its economic importance; the free communications on manuscript restoration suggested the possibility of a wider access to sources in the future; the round table on the practice of magic in Byzantium revealed a new aspect of how Byzantine society can be understood. In addition, some papers came up with ground-breaking discoveries such as the paper ‘A New Archaeological Study of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul’, by Ken Dark and Jan Kostencic. The paper presented a study showing that the rooms at the South-West corner of the Hagia Sophia Church may have been built under Justinian, namely the **‘large hall’ with its antechamber, whose size suggests that it may have been considered as the venue for the 5th Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553.** Moreover, the discovery of marble-paved areas on the north and south sides of the Church implies the presence of a marble-paved court-yard and the use of marble as material inside the Church. Archaeologists might also have identified the Great Baptistry that Paul the Silentiary refers to in his *ekphrasis*.

Moreover, the Congress prepared a large programme of extra events for its participants, including tours to the old Bulgarian capitals of Pliska, Veliki Preslav and Veliko Tarnovo or the ancient city of Plovdiv. The most official event was the Opening Reception in the National History Museum in Boyana hosted by Parvanov. Fourteen exhibitions in total were progressively being inaugurated during the Congress such as **‘ANTHIVOLA. The Holy Cartoons from Chioniadēs’ in the Crypt of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, ‘Albania – Known and Unknown or Byzantium and Bulgaria: the Christian Civilisations’ in the National Archaeological Museum.** The relations between Bulgaria and Byzantium were stressed throughout the Congress with the apex being the presentation and the free distribution of the book *State and Church: Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium* edited by the American Research Center in Sofia. Thus, this Congress gave Bulgaria the opportunity to raise awareness about its past and to try to change its rather negative representation in people’s minds.

The Congress succeeded in bringing modern scholarship several steps ahead towards the exploration of Byzantium, mainly by examining its influence in space and time outside its conventional borders. What is more, it enabled countries to display their research competences and academic perspectives, thus gaining international recognition and perhaps establishing a more favourable reputation for their nation. Bulgaria will continue to be proud of having hosted a forum of such international importance.

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## NOTE

## MUSINGS OF A BEMUSED HISTORIAN

MICHAEL TAYLOR<sup>†</sup>

So, you're reading the journal of the University of St Andrews History Society. Congratulations on reading this far – I probably would have given up after the preface. I'm going to take a guess you are interested in history. Or perhaps we were just another one of many St. Andrews publications on the periphery of your intellectual radar - which this semester seem to constitute a blur of CV fodder for fourth years who should probably be getting on with some form of dissertation

Assuming the validity of the former assertion – that you are interested in history - why so? Do you have a penchant for dressing up in medieval finery and spending your weekends preparing for an imminent expedition to the continent to bash the French? Or are you just a miserable bugger – after all with all those wars and plagues surely History can't be the subject to raise at a family dinner. 'So Michael, what have you been learning about this semester?' 'Well Mum, I have learnt about how we have collectively managed to rape, pillage, kill, maim, and trample on each other through the ages from the year 500AD.' Mum replies: 'Ah well, water under the bridge eh? At least we're not like that now...'. Ominous words indeed.

Why do we study history? This is the point where I start to insert clichés that have been recycled more times than the University Library renovation spiel. In a university where choices are the bedrock of the educative process – we constantly have to justify that cheeky medieval module, or that spurious historiography course. We all know there is an inner reasoning, an ache inside us which knows why this subject – in an academic and personal way – is the very bread and butter of our collective memory, whether as an individual, a community, a city, a nation or a collection of a nation's history is the foundation for a strong and civil society. It also allows for some juicy reading: who wouldn't want to read about Henry VIII and his frivolities? As a historian it also makes me wonder why a syphilitic wife-murderer managed to make it to number 40 on the BBC's hundred greatest Britons poll in 2002.

One defining feature that marks out our generation is a collective fading of the historical memory. Despite the exponential increase in history books and television series, young people still don't have a basic chronological grasp of what has happened in the world – let alone the characters and events involved in the shaping of the past. When history students at a Russell Group university fail to name Britain's Prime Minister during the Second World War, the man who kickstarted the European Reformation by nailing his guardian editorials to the door of Wittenberg church, or which monarch ruled England when the Spanish Armada was defeated – we must have some cause for concern.

Some blame the education system. When students leave school only knowing about the history of medicine, the American 'Wild West', Henry VII's prudent economic management and the two world wars it's no wonder students have a problem enunciating the grand narrative – and consequently the rich dialogue that history can provide in explaining what actually happened. A richer, chronological-based narrative of history is increasingly seen as a better way to make sure our young people are aware of what went before.

When one forgets something, or loses their memory over time, there is a sense of detachment – of not knowing or feeling like you have lost something. There is a sense of detachment for many in contemporary Britain today. People seem lost. Our collective memory is history and losing it is like having collective amnesia. To be unaware of past events is to forget the common bonds that hold communities, nations and collections of nations together, as well as reminding us what makes us human and what shortcomings we have. Such shortcomings can be learned from – as exemplified by the phrase 'learn from history', a routine remark made by sixth-form history teachers across the country. However, learning about history in context – and seeing what achievements people made in their own time highlights not only an inspirational model for us all to work towards, but also how the world progresses and moves forward – whether in a purely utilitarian context or one which is based upon our collective happiness.

We all know there is something wrong. The positive values that generations have accrued over decades, and the collective knowledge of what makes our communities stick together have suddenly vanished. Moreover we increasingly forget the negative attributes that history teaches us – a forgetful memory that means whenever we see the fabric of current affairs unfold on the news, we've probably seen it all before.

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## ESSAY

# THE MYSTERY OF PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA: CAN HIS THREE WORKS EVER BE TOTALLY RECONCILED?

JAMES MURRAY†

Since the rediscovery in the seventeenth century of the angry pamphlet simply entitled *Anecdota*, historians and philologists have agonised over the apparently inherent contradictions in the work of Byzantium's most accomplished Classicising historian. Indeed, it was only in the nineteenth century that Procopius was finally proven to be the author of *Anecdota* (better known as the Secret History) as well as the *Bella* (the History of the Wars) and *De Aedificiis* (the Buildings). The former consensus that it should not be taken seriously, or be totally ignored, died very hard.<sup>1</sup> Only in the 1960's did an historian, Averil Cameron, really begin the necessary work of unravelling Procopius' beliefs and motivations. By the mid 1980's she had published a fully coherent historical commentary on all three works – something which had never been attempted before, and has not been achieved since. However, rather than fuel the debate she almost killed it off entirely, coming to the conclusion that it would be fruitless to search for any sort of ideological consistency within his work.<sup>2</sup> In many cases Cameron also down-played Procopius' stylistic and historico-philosophical achievements, frequently accusing him of ignorance or misapprehension when confronted by unusual or factually incorrect statements.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately her work was so lauded at the time of its publication that it was not seriously challenged or revised until Antony Kaldellis published his sadly inadequate counter-commentary in the last decade. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to show how Procopius' three very different compositions might work together to deliver a consistent polemical, perhaps even apocalyptic, message, and hopefully demonstrate why Cameron's condescending approach must be effectively challenged if we are ever to realise the true genius of Procopius.

In the *Proemium* to his *Anecdota*, Procopius states quite clearly that the whole book is to be treated as an extension of his earlier work, the *Bella*, and that it contains new information as well as new analysis regarding Justinian's reign.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, *De Aedificiis* also purports to be part of this curious re-assessment of a previous history,<sup>5</sup> though elsewhere its form appears to be that of a panegyric.<sup>6</sup> It is this revisionary method of publication more than anything else which makes the relationship between the *Bella*, the *Anecdota* and the *De Aedificiis* so unusual. Many extant Classical authors have left us unfinished work, but few if any have also left companion volumes amending and in some cases contradicting the original. Which of these authors, therefore, should we investigate in order to better interpret Procopius' motivations for breaking with tradition in this way? Modern historians frequently point out references to Herodotus and Thucydides when discussing Procopius, but these are only the most obvious in a complex web of allusions which until recently has remained almost totally unexplored. Considering that Procopius regards himself as a writer of Roman as well as Greek history, it would perhaps be edifying to also look at the introductions of the great Latin works which remain extant. Although only Livy makes an obvious appearance,<sup>7</sup> echoes from more seditious writers such as Tacitus are also undoubtedly present.<sup>8</sup>

In the introduction to his *Bella* Procopius observes that:

men who are...preparing themselves for any kind of struggle may derive some benefit from a narrative of a similar situation in history, inasmuch as this discloses the final result attained by men of an earlier day... and foreshadows, at least for those who are most prudent in planning, what outcome present events will probably have.<sup>9</sup>

To those, even with a full Classical education, who read this for the first time, the phrase would seem innocent enough. Yet once combined with the supplementary material of *Anecdota* and *De Aedificiis* it immediately points to the first book of Tacitus' *Annals*, which charts the decline of Augustus' hegemony and the growing tyranny of his wife Livia and adopted son Tiberius.<sup>10</sup> Clearly Procopius meant his audience to refer to this record of events rather than his own to derive the likely results of such a reign, but only once his later works had been published. Similarly, Procopius' extended analogy for the continuing development of invective and his own mastery of it certainly suggests that he has plans to 'kill whoever stands in the way, shield and corselet alike',<sup>11</sup> but gives no clue as to his specific targets or methods. One clue to the reasoning behind the composition of *De Aedificiis*, however, can be found in the very mission statement of the *Bella* itself – 'the history of the wars which Justinian, Emperor of the Romans, waged against the barbarians of the East and of the West'<sup>12</sup> – for war, as Lucretius so eloquently tells us, is a purely destructive process.<sup>13</sup> How could a man like Procopius, shot to fame by the success of his initial work,<sup>14</sup> hope to persuade the Emperor his praise was sincere, let alone make his own case, without also composing a history of Justinian's 'creations'? Although he never managed to write an *Ecclesiastical History*,<sup>15</sup> Procopius did write a history of Justinian's buildings which, however unorthodox, must be regarded as a necessary part of his planned but unfinished *Historia Justiniani* – a complete history of Justinian's reign consisting of separate themed compositions, rather like a monumental Classical biography. Indeed, it may simply have been the confusing unfinished state of the project which prevented the development of more nuanced appreciations of Procopius until relatively recently.

Approaching Procopius' work as a form of biography makes a significant contribution to reconciling the *Anecdota* and *De Aedificiis* with the *Bella*. As Plutarch notes in his *Life of Alexander*, 'in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities'.<sup>16</sup> By writing a 'History of the Wars', for instance, Procopius only covered one aspect of Justinian's reign, and a part largely irrelevant to the competence or character of the Emperor at that. The Roman biographer Suetonius, writing around the same time as Plutarch,<sup>17</sup> takes a similar approach to Procopius, albeit on a much smaller scale; describing separately, character,

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public actions, and military distinctions in a non-chronological format. The greatly extended nature of Procopius' work could well be an attempt to reconcile the grand rhetorical nature of history writing with the personal thrust of biography, enabling him to, as it were, 'draw the bowstring along by the forehead about opposite the right ear'.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Procopius' presentation of Justinian in the *Anecdota* appears suspiciously similar to certain *Lives* by Suetonius, both of which are explicitly mentioned in the text.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand the events of Justinian's reign seem to follow the *Life* of Nero,<sup>20</sup> while on the other his personal vices mirror those of Domitian.<sup>21</sup> The sum of Procopius' work would therefore seem to describe perfectly the so-called 'modern improvements' mentioned in the preface to the *Bella*.<sup>22</sup> With his new forms of intertextuality and an innovative blending of literary formats he is simultaneously able to slander Justinian mercilessly in a series of widely read publications, and effectively avoid detection, censorship, and punishment.

Several comparisons with Classical works run as themes throughout *Anecdota*, serving, it must be assumed, as guides to the interpretation of Justinian's actions and thus the estimation of his character. This is also true of Belisarius, who is often characterised simply as an instrument of Justinian's will in order to link the Emperor more directly with military actions.<sup>23</sup> The criticisms of Belisarius, or more specifically the influence of his wife Antonina, reflect directly on Justinian, just as the actions of the infamous Piso and Planasia from Tacitus' *Annals* are personally directed by Tiberius and Livia.<sup>24</sup> For instance, use of the name 'Cholcis' for the region of Lazica,<sup>25</sup> a description of servants being chopped up and scattered in the sea,<sup>26</sup> and mention of 'witchcraft' all point to a comparison of Antonina with the mythical figure Medea,<sup>27</sup> generally portrayed as a destructive and corrupting influence.<sup>28</sup> This ferocious attack on Antonina flows seamlessly into a similar tirade against Theodora,<sup>29</sup> clearly demonstrating within the 'feminine' sphere of scandal and intrigue the divided nature of Justinian's rule, just as Tacitus describes the similar management style of Tiberius with a narration of the mutinies in Pannonia and on the Rhine frontier –<sup>30</sup> something Procopius specifically reminds us of.<sup>31</sup> The *Anecdota* could therefore be described as an intriguing fusion of the opinionated analysis found in annalistic history with the brief episodic nature of biography, carefully constructed to serve as a manageable *libellus* instructing its select readers in a desired but disguised interpretation of the *Bella*, as well any subsequent book the author may publish.

Even *De Aedificiis*, usually regarded as a stock panegyric containing nothing of the real Procopius, responds encouragingly to a post-*Anecdota* analysis. Indeed, certain passages of apparently pure sugary praise such as the *ekphrasis* of Justinian's statue have already been proved to be nothing less than stinging indictments of the Emperor's character and competence.<sup>32</sup> Others, particularly the extended descriptions of construction, have been noted as odd, but never recognised as the uncompromising attacks the *Anecdota* tells us they must be. Many fortresses on the Persian frontier, for instance, are described as having benefited from a fairly uniform program of repair and modernisation, usually including a large circuit wall designed to keep out both enemies and flood waters.<sup>33</sup> The *Anecdota* tells us that Justinian did not hesitate to throw vast sums into erecting buildings along the sea front in the hope of checking the constant surge of the waves. He pushed forward from the shore by heaping up stones in his determination to defeat the onrush of the water, and in his efforts to rival, as it were, the strength of the sea by the power of wealth.<sup>34</sup>

Evidently Procopius did have an interest in water, but not, as James Howard-Johnston suggests, because he was some sort of aquatic engineer.<sup>35</sup> The implied relationship between these two passages suggests that he regarded it as a vital metaphor for the image of profligate naivety which he wished to pin on the Emperor, especially since we know that it was standard classicising practice to tailor facts to better exemplify ideas endorsed by the author.<sup>36</sup>

In other cases too, we must conclude that the monumental scale of Justinian's civic and architectural achievements as described in *De Aedificiis* are either ironic inversions of reality, or further metaphors for aspects of the Emperor's character and administration. The first notable example would be the description of the Hagia Sophia which, though suffused with complimentary vocabulary and passages of encomium,<sup>37</sup> appears to be more of a parody, criticising both the building itself and Justinian's personal involvement in its construction. To start with, the circumstances surrounding the commission of the new building and its initial description appear strikingly similar to those found in Suetonius' *Life* of Nero regarding the great fire and the re-building of the *Domus Aurea*;<sup>38</sup> something which can only strengthen the connection Procopius draws between Justinian and this model of a reprobate Emperor in his *Anecdota*. The church itself is depicted with curiously ambivalent language: 'it seems somehow to float in the air on no firm basis, but to be poised aloft to the peril of those inside it. Yet actually it is braced with exceptional firmness and security',<sup>39</sup> perhaps recalling the frequent derogatory references to Aristophanes' *Clouds*, again found in the *Anecdota*.<sup>40</sup> Later, Procopius directly associates the Emperor with the decision to complete an arch even though the piers beneath it had begun to crack, 'impelled by I know not what, but I suppose by God (for he is not himself a master builder)'.<sup>41</sup> If we are to believe Kaldellis' controversial assertion that Procopius was a reluctant Christian, as well as his suggestion of a possible association with the scholar Simplicius,<sup>42</sup> this passage must certainly be interpreted as a direct accusation of ignorance and incompetence on the part of Justinian. Yet, even if we follow the more coherent logic of Cameron,<sup>43</sup> the ambiguity of the statement does not preclude an implied prediction that the church would indeed collapse at some point in the near future. Therefore it would seem that *De Aedificiis* is not the simple panegyric history it purports to be, but an account of Justinian's 'creations' just as seditious as the narration of his 'destructions' in the *Bella* – at least if read in conjunction with the *Anecdota*.

Since the very genius of Procopius is that his grand satire is split into three distinct works, giving no solid statement of intent in any one of them, how can we be sure that the conclusions which have been drawn so far are not based on coincidences? Archaeological work carried out on various sites associated to some degree with Procopius' *De Aedificiis* seems to suggest that, while prosperity and grand architectural projects continued in the Eastern Empire for much longer than previously assumed,<sup>44</sup> the period associated with Justin and Justinian did indeed mark a significant watershed.<sup>45</sup> Even compared with the reign of Anastasius, new buildings appear insignificant,<sup>46</sup> while 'repair' work seems to consist of dramatic reductions of the defended areas of forts and cities.<sup>47</sup> Although the effects of the plague in the middle of Justinian's reign may have been largely responsible for this trend,<sup>48</sup> the archaeological evidence proves there can be no doubt that *De Aedificiis* could ever have been composed or regarded as an honest or accurate record of the Emperor's building projects. In the light of this conclusion, it also seems unlikely that the description of the rebuilding of the fortress at Dara, among others, could have been composed in pure praise. Since we know that Justinian's repair work was in fact minimal and of inferior quality to the original Anastasian construction,<sup>49</sup> Procopius' directly contradictory assertion could be taken as extreme irony, while the very depiction of a



Image courtesy of The York Project

**IMPERIAL:** Justinian I, Byzantine Emperor from 527 to 565, is the subject of Procopius' works.

reinforced failure really seems to undermine any sense that the fortress was a long-term success, and emphasises the inadequate nature of the project as a whole. The on-going archaeological revelation of Justinian's building work could therefore be said to lend great strength to the argument that *De Aedificiis* is in fact satirical at heart, and consequently that it is also just one aspect of a tri-partite character assassination of the Emperor.

No argument linking Procopius' three works in such a way can ignore the fact that by far the largest, most accomplished and polished of them, out of all proportion to the other two, is the *Bella*. Although *De Aedificiis* and *Anecdota* appear to be unfinished,<sup>50</sup> and a proposed *Ecclesiastical History* seems not to have been written at all, the sheer preponderance of the *Bella* suggests it is of particular significance. Considering the proposed tri-partite nature of the sum, however, this fact seems hard to reconcile. The *Anecdota* has already been labelled a *libellus* and minor work of humorous invective by design, but why should the 'destructions' be so much more significant than the 'constructions', and why should they be published first, at a time when it was apparently too dangerous to even write down the other material? The elephant in the room, with regards to Procopius at least, seems to be the Empress Theodora. Not only did all his extant works appear in quick succession shortly after her death,<sup>51</sup> the *Anecdota* also explicitly states that its publication was impossible 'as long as those responsible for what happened were still alive'.<sup>52</sup> Roger D. Scott has suggested that strict censorship in place from about the time of Justin was relaxed towards the end of Justinian's reign as his programs of cultural conditioning began to take effect.<sup>53</sup> It is also possible that this relaxation was associated with the death of Theodora, who really does seem to have been far more intolerant than her husband.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, considering the aforementioned passage in the preface of the *Bella* concerning *sententiae antiquae*, it seems likely that Procopius returned to Constantinople expecting to have to write according to the pleasure of the Empress, whom he no doubt expected to out-live her husband by many years in the mode of the infamous Livia.<sup>55</sup> We can only conclude that when she unexpectedly died Procopius carried his inadequate *Bella* to completion, but then quickly proceeded to compile the *Anecdota*, using the highly ironic and multi-dimensional *De Aedificiis* as a foil to distract Justinian, before he expired himself a few years later.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most significant events Kaldelis identifies as not being included anywhere in Procopius' writings is the exile of the seven Platonic philosophers from the ancient school of Athens.<sup>57</sup> Since Procopius was clearly a proponent of many ideas embodied by these men,<sup>58</sup> we can only conclude that this was a particularly controversial issue which could not even be mentioned after the death of Theodora in the light-hearted *Anecdota*. If, in addition, we are to ascribe to Kaldelis' argument that the *Bella* is in large part an obituary of philosophical rule in the civilized world,<sup>59</sup> it suddenly becomes clear why Procopius gave it such priority. Since the issue was so central to his criticism of Justinian, yet could not be tackled overtly, it was necessary to address it by proxy – the best form of which was Heroditian ethnographical history.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, although three books separately detailing the 'destructions', 'constructions' and character of an Emperor should naturally be given equal emphasis, the 'History of the Wars' also happened to be the perfect medium for a semi-independent criticism of the general ideological and administrative direction of the Roman state. The *Bella*, unlike the other two compositions, seems to have been written initially to stand alone, although it does also form one necessary corner-stone of a personal attack on various members of Justinian's administration, and consequently the Emperor himself, which was only made possible by an unanticipated relaxation of censorship.

Further examples of Procopius' agenda and methods could be given *ad infinitum*, but a limited case has been made for the essential unity of the three texts, *Bella*, *Anecdota* and *De Aedificiis*. Intertextual links with earlier Roman history and biography have been identified, suggesting that Procopius intended in particular to emulate and out-do the great orator and historian Tacitus by weaving links between his own works, enabling him to use contemporary material rather than embark on an annalistic history of distant times to guarantee his safety.<sup>61</sup> It has also been suggested that the *Bella* may originally have been intended to stand alone as a highly complex and guarded criticism of the general state of the Roman Empire, but was swiftly amended and transformed into a vicious personal attack after the unexpected relaxation of censorship laws contemporaneous with the death of the Empress Theodora in 548.<sup>62</sup> Controversial claims by Kaldellis have also been discussed, though perhaps not fully addressed. His conclusion, for instance, that Procopius only maintained a veneer of Christianity in his work, disguising a deeply held Platonic belief system, is certainly possible considering the breadth of his Classical education,<sup>63</sup> but must be regarded as extremely unlikely.

While it might be said that the encyclopaedic work of Cameron makes similar, though better supported, points about the unity of the three works, its inherent attitude towards Procopius is negative, attributing apparent inconsistencies to a failure on his part rather than hers. Substantial work still needs to be done on Procopius' subtext, particularly in relation to his Christianity and references to Christian texts in the *Bella*, which equals, perhaps even surpasses, the monumental scale and vision of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. I believe that if a proper investigation is carried out it will make a significant contribution to the final reconciliation of Procopius' work. More importantly, however, it will also reveal some very intriguing ideas about the end of the Roman Empire, the end of the world, and his perception of Justinian's role in it.

- 1 A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, (Paperback edition, Abingdon, 1996), p. 4.
- 2 *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, pp. 33 – 46.
- 3 E.g. Cameron's reluctance to engage with Procopius' complex association of Tyche with God, *Ibid.*, pp. 117 – 18.
- 4 Procopius, *The Secret History*, trans. G. A. Williamson and Peter Sarris, (London, 1966), §I.
- 5 Procopius, *Buildings*, trans. H. B. Dewing, (London, 1940), Book I, §I.
- 6 Though a very unusual one: J. Elsner, 'The Rhetoric of Buildings in the *De Aedificiis* of Procopius', in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. L. James, (Cambridge, 2007), p. 35.
- 7 In the *Proemium* of the *Anecdota* Procopius says: 'what I am about to write will appear incredible and unconvincing to future generations... I am afraid that I will be regarded as a mere teller of legends', (*The Secret History*, §I) just as Livy says: 'Events... have come to us in old tales with more of the charm of poetry than of sound historical record', (Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. A. De Selincourt, (London, 1960), Book I, §I).
- 8 E.g. 'the Emperor Justinian... [took] over the state when it was harassed by disorder', (*Buildings*, Book I, §I) compared with 'Augustus... found the whole state exhausted by internal dissensions and established over it a personal regime known as the Principate.', (Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant, (London, 1996), Book I, §I).
- 9 Procopius, *History of the Wars Books I and II*, trans. H. B. Dewing, (London, 1914), Book I, §I
- 10 *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Book I, §I-XV.
- 11 *History of the Wars Books I and II*, Book I, §I.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R. Melville, (Oxford, 1997), Book I, lines 1 – 49.
- 14 Procopius, *History of the Wars Books VII:36 – VIII*, trans. H. B. Dewing, (London, 1928), Book VIII, §I.
- 15 *The Secret History*, §I.
- 16 Plutarch, *Lives VII*, trans. B. Perrin, (London, 1919), *Alexander*, §I:2.
- 17 Suetonius probably wrote between 98 and 138 AD: Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. R. Graves, (London, 1979), p. VII.
- 18 *History of the Wars Books I and II*, Book I, §I.
- 19 Nero: *The Secret History*, §I; Domitian: *The Secret History*, §VIII.
- 20 See: *The Twelve Caesars*, Book VI.
- 21 See: *The Twelve Caesars*, Book XII.
- 22 *History of the Wars Books I and II*, Book I, §I.
- 23 Hence; 'I shall proceed to recount all the wicked deeds committed by Belisarius first, and then I shall reveal all the wicked deeds committed by Justinian and Theodora.', *The Secret History*, §I.
- 24 *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Book II, §44 and 52 – 61.
- 25 *The Secret History*, §II.
- 26 *The Secret History*, §I.
- 27 *The Secret History*, §I.
- 28 *The Greek Myths*, ed. R. Graves, (London, 1960), pp. 557 – 59.
- 29 *The Secret History*, §II.
- 30 *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Book I, §16 – 48.
- 31 The letter Chosroes reads out to his mutinous troops recalls the failed efforts of Drusus and Germanicus to remedy their situations with letters from Tiberius: *The Secret History*, §II.
- 32 *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, p. 53.
- 33 *Buildings*, Book II.
- 34 *The Secret History*, §VIII.
- 35 J. Howard-Johnston, 'The Education and Expertise of Procopius', in *Antiquité Tardive*, vol. 8, (2000), p. 29.
- 36 *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, p. 6.

- 37 i.e. it was the basis for Paul the Silentiary's *ekphrasis* of the Hagia Sophia in 558: 'The Rhetoric of Buildings in the *De Aedificiis* of Procopius', p. 35.
- 38 E.g. the burning of the church during the *Nika* riots, the fact that 'the Emperor [disregarded] all questions of expense', and the descriptions of a 'golden dome' (*Buildings*, Book I, §1) calls to mind: *The Twelve Caesars*, Book VI, §31.
- 39 *Buildings*, Book I, §1.
- 40 **Beginning**, *The Secret History*, §X.
- 41 *Buildings*, Book I, §1.
- 42 *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, p. 105.
- 43 A. M. Cameron, 'The "Scepticism" of Procopius', in *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 15, (1966), p. 482.
- 44 E.g. A. Poulter, *Nicopolis ad Istrum: A Roman, Late Roman and Early Byzantine City – Excavations 1985 – 1992*, (London, 1995), p. 17.
- 45 *Nicopolis ad Istrum: A Roman, Late Roman and Early Byzantine City – Excavations 1985 – 1992*, pp. 31 – 32.
- 46 B. Croke, and J. Crow, 'Procopius and Dara', in *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 73, (1983), p. 146, and N. Christie, and A. Rushworth, 'Urban Fortification and Defensive Strategy in Fifth Century and Sixth Century Italy: the Case of Terracine', in *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol. 1, (1988), pp. 80 – 81.
- 47 See *Buildings*, Books II – IV, and 'Procopius and Dara', pp. 144 – 48.
- 48 M. Whitby, 'Recruitment in Roman Armies from Justinian to Heraclius (ca. 565 – 615)', in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East – States, Resources and Armies*, ed. A. Cameron, (Princeton, 1995), p. 103
- 49 'Procopius and Dara', pp. 152 – 56.
- 50 E.g. 'The Rhetoric of Buildings in the *De Aedificiis* of Procopius', p. 34.
- 51 *The Secret History*, p. XIII.
- 52 *The Secret History*, §I.
- 53 'Malalas, the *Secret History* and Justinian's Propaganda', in *Dumbarton Oak Papers*, vol. 39, (1985), p. 106.
- 54 C. Foss, 'The Empress Theodora', in *Byzantion*, vol. 72, (2002), p. 153.
- 55 *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Book I, §4 – 5.
- 56 It seems highly unlikely that Procopius lived to see the collapse of the dome of the Hagia Sophia in 558: E. Jeffreys, 'Malalas, Procopius and Justinian's Buildings', in *Antiquité Tardive*, vol. 8, (2000), p. 76.
- 57 *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, p. 101.
- 58 *ibid.*, p. 104.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 61 Tacitus discusses this in his introduction to the *Agricola*: Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, trans. H. Mattingly, (London, 1970), §II – III.
- 62 'The Empress Theodora', p. 147.
- 63 *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, p. 106, and *Letters of the Younger Pliny*, trans. B. Radice, (London, 1963), Book X, §96.

## ESSAY

# THE LEWD, THE CRUDE AND THE DOWNRIGHT RUDE: HETEROSEXUAL SEX IN MEDIAEVAL WESTERN EUROPE

JIMMY BOULTON<sup>†</sup>

**A**s a mediaeval history student, the subject of sexual practices in the Middle Ages may seem to be a rather crude one to be studying, yet it is a topic that raises its head in many areas of historical enquiry. If one wishes to enter into the psyche of people in the mediaeval world, it is vital to examine every part of their lives, even that which they may have considered the most private. If one has never really considered thinking about sex in the Middle Ages, it is useful to pause and think of what images pop up when one does. Ruth Mazo Karras, the leading expert in the field of mediaeval sexuality suggests two views. First is a world of repressed urges; a pious world of strict adherence to Christian teachings on the evils of giving into bodily desires. The other vision is one of lewd knights sleeping with ladies of the court away from the prying eyes of their families; of monks and nuns copulating in secret passages; of kings and nobles with multiple mistresses; and of peasants coupling behind bushes by the side of the road.<sup>1</sup> The tales of Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio paint an image of a world that far from being ignorant or reticent about sex, was promoting it as the hottest of topics. Neither of these views is incorrect and it is this seemingly irreconcilable contrast in opinion between the clergy and laity that forms the basis of this enquiry.

## SOURCES OF MEDIAEVAL SEXUAL PRACTICE

One immediate problem that confronts us when we consider sex in Mediaeval Europe is that the vast majority of our written sources were written by celibate clerics that were shut away in monasteries, far from the temptations or even sight of members of the opposite sex. This makes them very unreliable sources for examining sexual practice and so for the most part we must use other kinds of sources.

Mediaeval literature would appear to be the most useful yet it also has its problems. Writers of mediaeval fiction were not historians; they composed and wrote solely to entertain. This is not to say that they are without use, indeed we can find out much from them.

### COURTLY LOVE

Some of the most famous literature from the period comes from the popular genre of courtly love. This emerged at the start of the twelfth century and soon became the dominant form of entertainment at the courts of the mediaeval kings and nobles. These were tales of brave knights and beautiful ladies, of loyal companionship, and, of course, of love. Some of the best known tales of the genre are Arthurian tales such as *Lancelot, Knight of the Cart* written by the French troubadour Chrétien de Troyes in the late twelfth century. This is a notable work for many reasons but most interestingly it has the first appearance of the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere. In the story, Lancelot is sent by Arthur to rescue his wife from the evil Meleagant. On the way Lancelot has many adventures including having to cross a bridge made of a single sword and decapitating an arrogant knight who had offended a maiden, offering the head to her after having done so. Upon saving the Queen it becomes clear that the two have feelings for each other and this leads to them sharing a night together:

Their play was so sweet to them, with kissing and touching, that in fact a joy and a wonder befell them such as has never been heard or told. But I will continue to keep it silent, for it does not belong in a story. Of all joys the choicest and most delightful is that which the story conceals from us.<sup>2</sup>

Chrétien's story of the affair of Lancelot and Guinevere was copied by many other famous writers of Arthurian legend, including Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* who described the liaison thus: 'Sir Lancelot went to bed with the Queen... took his pleasure and his liking until it was the dawning of the day... and when he saw his time that he may tarry no longer, he took his leave'.<sup>3</sup>

The love described in these tales and in the genre of courtly love in general is tender, it's understated and the emphasis is on the feelings between the parties, and not the actual act of love making.<sup>4</sup>

### THE *FABLLAUX* AND ITS FOLLOWERS

For more vivid descriptions of sex in the Middle Ages we can look at the French *fabliaux*. These were comic tales composed by travelling French minstrels in the High to Later Mediaeval period and hundreds of them survive today. One of the leading scholars on *fabliaux*, R. Howard Bloch describes them as being full of: 'Sexual and scatological [toilet humour] obscenity, their anticlericalism, antifeminism, anti-courtliness... they indulge the senses, whet the appetites (erotic, gastronomic, economic) and affirm ... the "celebration of lower body parts"'.<sup>5</sup>

These were written to excite and possibly arouse provincial peasant and bourgeois French society, rather than the courtly-love dominated aristocratic courts of Europe. Although most *fabliaux* were written anonymously, we do know the identity of some of their authors. One is Jean Bodel who lived in early thirteenth century northern France and wrote, amongst other things *The Peasant from Baillet*. It is typical of the genre and features a love triangle between a gullible peasant, his deceitful wife and a local chaplain. The wife, Erme greets her husband after a long day in the fields, feeds him wine and in the process manages to persuade him that he is on the brink of

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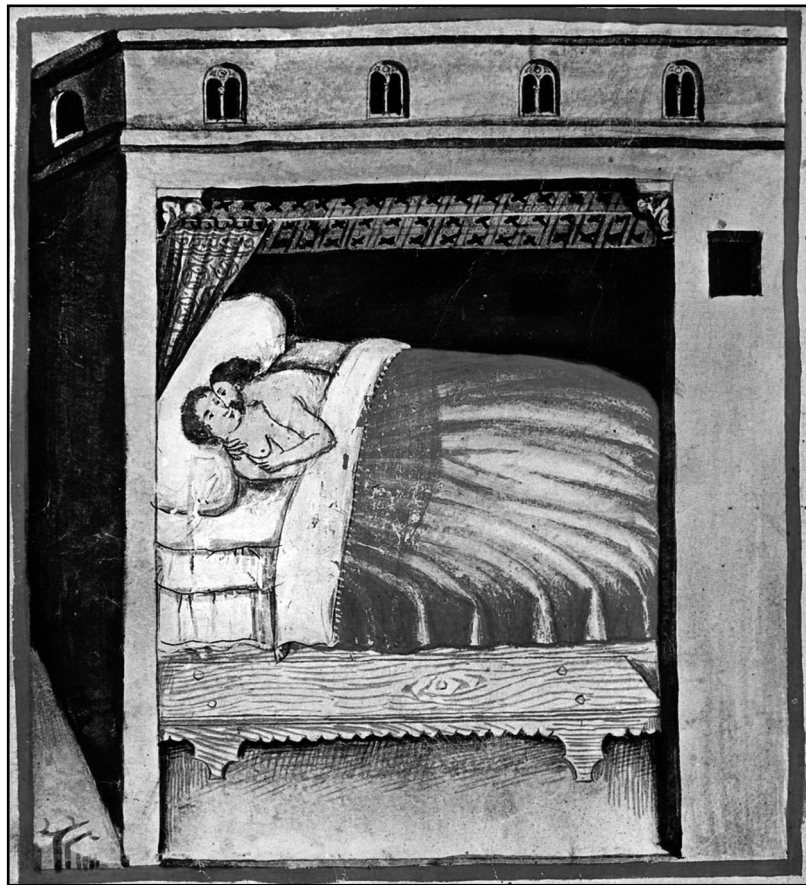


Image courtesy of Biblioteca Casanatense Roma

**EROTIC:** A 14th century woodcut illustrates mediaeval sex.

death. She summons the chaplain whom she wishes to sleep with and has him read her husband the last rites. Erme and the chaplain then move onto some straw nearby and proceeded to have sex. The husband, upon noticing 'the stawsack jumping, saw as well the chaplain humping' shouted out that if he were not 'dead' that he would beat him to within an inch of his life. The chaplain laughs and states that now he is 'dead' this was no longer a problem that he needs fear, whereupon the happy couple resume their 'fun without anxiety or care'.<sup>6</sup>

The success and popularity of these minstrels meant that many of their tales ended up being copied by other authors. One of these was the *Decameron*, which was written between 1348 and 1353 by Boccaccio. It tells the tale of 10 Florentine aristocrats (7 maidens and 3 men) who fled the city to a rural villa to avoid the Black Death and entertained each other by each telling one story per day for 10 days, thus amounting to 100 stories. Amongst these were a great many ribald tales, including one told by Elissa on the ninth day where an abbess goes to scold one of her nuns for having a lover, yet the abbess herself was having sex with a priest. In her haste to reprimand the nun, the abbess instead of putting on her habit, puts on the breeches of the priest. In another tale, there is a rich Perugian man who finds that the young man that he lusted after was his wife's lover. The three turned this awkward situation to their advantage and have a threesome, after which the man leaves the married couple 'not altogether certain which he had the more been that night, wife or husband'.<sup>7</sup> *Decameron* caused such a stir in Italy that it was banned by the Church, though curiously not for its graphic sexual content, but because it portrayed the clergy as being greedy, incontinent, and deceitful.<sup>8</sup>

This clerical opposition did not prevent Chaucer writing *The Canterbury Tales* which was based on a very similar literary style, this time being thirty pilgrims telling each other stories whilst on pilgrimage. The lewdest of the stories is *The Miller's Tale* which tells the tale of an amorous student (Nicholas) who persuades Allison, the young wife of his elderly landlord (John) to sleep with him, yet they have the problem of consummating their affair. They manage this through persuading the landlord that a flood is coming and that they are all in danger. The solution they presented was to lie in separate bath tubs suspended from the rafters. This ruse allowed them the opportunity to sneak off and have sex, though they are disturbed by John's servant, who was also deeply in love with Allison. He goes to a privy vent between the hallway and Allison's bedroom and asks for a kiss. Unable to get him to leave, she presents him not with her lips, but her bottom. Enraged by this the servant retrieves a red-hot poker and attempts to get his revenge on Allison, but when he attempts to get Allison to repeat her insult, it was Nicholas who appeared and has the poker shoved into his bottom, causing him to scream out in agony.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear then from these literary sources that secular writers in the Middle Ages were not afraid to write about sex. The tales they wrote had their characters using sex for everything from financial gain, revenge, love, lust and many other things besides and for the most part unashamedly enjoying the act of coitus. These stories are, however, purely fictional and thus there is a limit to how useful they are.

#### ABERLARD AND HÉLOISE

A more accurate reflection of mediaeval sexual practices would come from the writings of real people. While people did not keep diaries in the period and their memoirs did not tend to include their experiences, there are exceptions to this and the greatest of these is

the *Historia Calamitatum* by Peter Abelard and the collection of letters written between him and his lover Héloïse. Abelard had been hired by Héloïse's uncle Fulbert, a Parisian canon to educate his niece, but very quickly they became lovers:

We were united first in the dwelling that sheltered our love, and then in the hearts that burned with it. Under the pretext of study we spent our hours in the happiness of love, and learning held out to us the secret opportunities that our passion craved. Our speech was more of love than of the books which lay open before us; our kisses far outnumbered our reasoned words. Our hands sought less the book than each other's bosoms -- love drew our eyes together far more than the lesson drew them to the pages of our text.<sup>10</sup>

Although their love affair ended badly, with Héloïse becoming pregnant and Abelard's attempt to marry her ending with his being violently castrated and packed off to a monastery, their story is a vivid illustration that the sordid liaisons of Chaucer and Boccaccio were not merely imaginings of fiction; there were illicit relationships in the mediaeval world, just as there are in the modern world.

## THE BARRIERS AND CRIMES OF MEDIAEVAL SEX

### THE INS AND OUTS

The writings of Abelard and Héloïse are quite unusual, however, and we do have little in the way of information as to how, how often, where, when and with who people in mediaeval Europe engaged in sexual intercourse. Frequency in particular is hard to determine. The Church attempted to restrict intercourse between married couples and did so by banning it on certain occasions. In his excellent programme for the BBC broadcast in 2008 entitled 'Inside the Mediaeval Mind', the University of St Andrew's own Prof. Robert Bartlett outlined the situations in which intercourse was banned. These included: when the woman was menstruating, pregnant or nursing a child; during Lent, Advent, Whitsun week, Easter Week or any fast or feast day; on any Wednesday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday or indeed any day whilst it was daylight; when naked; and whilst in church.<sup>11</sup> This left only about 50 days a year on which one could have sex, though we do not know for sure how strictly these guidelines were enforced or adhered to. We believe that sex in general took place in the marital bed as almost all households, even those of peasants, tended to have one (although poorer families may have shared the bed with their children). Despite clerical objections, we can see from illustrations to books of the period that the couples tended to be naked whilst having sex, although there is only so much reliability that we can attach to these. A variety of sexual positions it seems were used (despite the clerical position being that only what is today known as the missionary position was officially approved) though a theme appears to be that the male tended to take the superior position.<sup>12</sup>

### ADULTERY

As to with whom people in the Middle Ages had sex, we can see from the literature outlined above that marital sex was not the only relations that people engaged in. Adultery was taken very seriously by Church authorities in the Middle Ages. Theoretically it was equally bad for the man or woman to commit adultery but in practice it was considered worse when a married woman erred. If both parties were married it was considered to be the woman's marriage that had been violated and her husband that was considered to be the most wronged. There are a number of reasons for this, only one of them being a simple explanation of sexism. In noble circles the major problem for female adulteresses was that it cast doubt on the legitimacy of her children. An example of this is when the three daughters-in-law of Philip the Fair were accused of adultery in the so-called Tour-de-Nesle affair. This led to the knights with whom they were accused of having sex with castrated, then either drawn and quartered or broken over wheel, and then hanged. This was not the end however, as the question over the legitimacy of the Philip the Fair's grandchildren cast a shadow over the Capetian dynasty and was an indirect cause of the Hundred Years' War.<sup>13</sup>

There is also an element of male insecurity and fear which led to women getting treated worse than men in matters of adultery. The bedroom was one arena in which women could compete with men in importance and this fear is shown in that the most common sexual offense with which women were accused was adultery.<sup>14</sup> Women were seen as being more sexually driven than men, a theme explored in the *Romance of the Rose* where the character 'Jealous Husband' goes on a diatribe against women, asking if they dressed up in their finery when leaving the house purely to attract men in the street.<sup>15</sup> Although the knight's who befouled Philip's son's brides suffered a terrible fate for their liaisons, in general men did not suffer the same social stigma; indeed it was to an extent expected. As can be seen in the Tour-de-Nesle Affair, it only really became an issue when their actions impinged on the honour of another man.

### COMMON WOMEN

If men did not wish to run the risk of committing adultery with a married woman, he could always meet his needs with employees of the world's oldest profession. Organised prostitution emerged in Europe in the twelfth century, mirroring the emergence and growth in the size of towns, and in the following centuries the industry grew until most towns in Western Europe had their own municipal brothels or areas of the city where prostitution was permitted, such as Cock's Lane in London.<sup>16</sup> These women were referred to as 'common women' as distinct from respectable women who would avoid these areas for fear of gossip emerging about their sexual conquests. Brothels were heavily regulated but could provide a good income for their owners, indeed the Bishopric of Winchester owned no less than two brothels and claimed rents and payments from all owners of other brothels in the diocese.<sup>17</sup> For the unmarried man these houses were seen to be ways for them to release their pent-up sexual desires and thus discourage them from engaging in the seduction or rape of local women, particularly those of the local rich burghers. The Church officially disapproved of whore-houses and many clerics were disgusted by what they were doing to the towns and cities of Europe. Richard of Devizes, a Winchester monk wrote to a companion advising that they avoid London:

Whatever evil or malicious thing that can be found in any part of the world, you will find in that city. Do not associate with the crowds of pimps... the number of parasites is infinite. Actors, flatterers, pretty boys, effeminate, pederasts, singing and dancing girls... extorters, night-wanderers... all this tribe fill all the houses.<sup>18</sup>

Despite their obvious abhorrence of this flagrant sexuality, it does seem that the Church preferred that if a man was to visit a brothel, that it should be an official one. Like the town elders, they saw it as a way to release men's pent-up tensions and as a means to prevent greater sin. In the words of Ptolemy of Lucca, a Dominican prior and companion of Thomas Aquinas 'a whore acts in the world as the bilge in the ship or the sewer in a palace: Remove the sewer and you will fill the palace with a stench'.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

This rather broad-stroke enquiry into mediaeval sex does not really do justice to what is a fascinating emerging field of historical research. It is clear from my very brief study, however, that sex was as important to people living in the Middle Ages as it is to people today. It formed a central part of people's lives, and this is reflected in many of the best known works of the period which have been outlined here. The works of Malory and Chaucer are some of the foundations of English literature and are vital to the study of Mediaeval Europe as they examine every part of the lives of all members of society, from the most powerful king to the dirtiest peasant. The tales of romantic love and ribald sex in them show just how rich life in the Middle Ages could be. People in the Middle Ages had more barriers to their love-making than modern couples as they faced far greater clerical opposition yet it is clear that this did not stop many of them. Whilst the clergy preferred that only married couples have sex, and then only for procreation, it is clear that the laity and even individual members of the clergy gaily engaged in intercourse for reasons as varied as lust, love, revenge or even simply because it was fun.

- 1 Ruth Mazo Karras. *Sexuality in Mediaeval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (Oxon, 2005) pp. 1-2.
- 2 Chrétien de Troyes. *Lancelot, The Knight of the Cart*, ed and trans. Deborah Webster Rogers (New York, 1983).
- 3 Thomas Malory. *Le Morte D'Arthur: The Winchester Manuscript*, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford, 1998).
- 4 Laurie A. Finke. 'Sexuality in Mediaeval French Literature' in ed. Bullough and Brundage ed. *Handbook of Mediaeval Sexuality* (New York, 2000).
- 5 R. Howard Bloch. *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago, 1986) p. 11.
- 6 *The Peasant of Bailleul* by Jean Bodel in Conor McCarthy ed. *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook* (London, 2004).
- 7 *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. J.G. Nichols (Richmond, 2008).
- 8 David Loth *The Erotic in Literature* (London, 1961) p. 59.
- 9 *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford, 1996).
- 10 Peter Abelard. *Historia Calamitatum*, trans. Henry Adams Bellows <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/abelard-histcal.asp>.
- 11 *Inside the Mediaeval Mind* written and presented by Robert Bartlett for BBC 4 (2008).
- 12 Karras, *Sexuality* pp. 81-83.
- 13 Karras, *Sexuality* p. 89.
- 14 Ruth Mazo Karras. *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Mediaeval England* (Oxford, 1996) p. 108.
- 15 Karras, *Sexuality* pp. 89-90.
- 16 Merry E. Weisner-Hanks *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London, 2000).
- p. 45.
- 17 Karras, *Common Women* pp. 41-42.
- 18 *Chronicle of Richard of Devizes* in Conor McCarthy ed. *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook* (London, 2004).
- 19 Karras. *Sexuality* p. 106.

## ESSAY

# TALKING WITH THE ANIMALS: HOLY MEN AND THE BEASTS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

SAM KENNERLY<sup>†</sup>

When conjuring an image of the engagement between holy men and animals, the first vignette to come to mind is perhaps St Patrick's purging of snakes from Ireland. The tale typical of late antiquity (c.300-700AD) is however Jerome and his dutiful lion. Such stories have interest beyond their deliberate didactic appeal. They indicate the symbolic sophistication of the hagiographic tradition and the powerful impress of pagan sanctity in the formative period of Christian notions of holiness.

The holy man's ability to tame animals extended back to Orphic and Pythagorean traditions of sanctity. In his *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, the Neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry (c.234-305AD) argued that the holy man's taming of animals was the ultimate proof of his knowledge. Pagan holy men could speak animal languages, which showed they approached even beasts through reason. The holy man's care for the animal world was also a signature of his goodness. It marked his recognition that animals too had souls. The early Greek philosopher Empedocles (c.495-435BC) argued for the idea of 'metempsychosis', the transmigration of souls into other bodies. For Empedocles, refusal to acknowledge metempsychosis led to disastrous consequences in Greek religion:

A father lifts up his own son, changed in form,  
and prays and slaughters him, the fool, while he cries pitifully,  
beseeching his sacrificer. But he, deaf to his cries,  
slaughters him in the halls and prepares an evil feast.<sup>1</sup>

Such sentiments led the early physicist Thales (c.624-525BC) to elide animal offerings by making a sacrificial ox out of pastry.

Not all pagan thinkers agreed with the philosophic rigour of the migration of human souls to animal bodies. In an argument familiar to modern defences of vegetarianism, Porphyry regarded the holy man's care for animals as simply indicative of his reverence for all animate life. For Porphyry, this was best expressed in the animal-headed deities of Egypt. Porphyry argued that the Egyptian depiction of the gods piously instructed believers to respect the beasts, linking animals to the divine through religious art.<sup>2</sup>

Porphyry's thoughts manifested a lively hagiographic tradition. In this, Pythagoras stirred especial attention. It is important to note that the modern conception of Pythagoras as a super-scientist with a particular affinity for triangles is a recent development. In late antiquity, Pythagoras was a figure whose piety and vegetarianism proposed an alternate way of living against the Greco-Roman norm. The late antique hagiographies of Pythagoras are unanimous in regard to his positive engagement with the beasts. Often, Pythagoras' dealings with the hostile animal world could take the form of social service. Pythagoras was accredited with taming a bloodthirsty bear that routinely terrorized a local population.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the first-century wonderworker Apollonius of Tyana (d.c.97AD) was able to tame a rabid dog that pestered the city of Ephesus.<sup>4</sup> Other tales were closer to Pythagoras' personal philosophy. Pythagoras had a particular aversion to the consumption of beans, and is stated to have prevented an ox consuming a farmer's crop of pulses by speaking to it in its own language.

These tales may not seem an immediately pertinent theme for Christian thinkers to draw from. Indeed, it is normally claimed that Christian tales of holy men and beasts draw from the independent tradition of the restoration of paradise. The proximity between the context and meaning of Christian tales to their pagan precursors refuses this conclusion. Due to the Christian holy man's retreat to the wilderness from the human world of the city, his engagement with animals was particularly common. In Athanasius' (298-373AD) enormously influential *Life of St Anthony*, Anthony too was able to control animals through speech- even through the Coptic language: 'Anthony, with grace and dexterity, captured one of the beasts and said to all of them, 'Why do you harm me when I do you no harm? Go away, and in the name of the Lord do not come near here anymore'.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere Athanasius' hagiography borrowed from another of Porphyry's tropes. Wild animals tested the courage of the holy man, and ferocious beasts like bears and lions were frequently introduced in hagiographies to illustrate the holy man's achievement of this cardinal virtue. This stresses that the animals of hagiographies were not arbitrarily chosen, but emerged from the shared symbolic language of late antiquity.

The holy man's mastery of the beasts had an overlooked, pragmatic value. In a period where livestock were especially valuable, the holy man's understanding of the animal world meant that he could offer a form of veterinary care. The Syrian holy man Thalelaeus was famous for his ability to heal animals, and it is notable that his hagiographer, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c.393-457AD) depicts all Thalelaeus' patients as domestic beasts.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, later Christian hagiographies mark a turn to the theme of the restoration of paradise. This meant the language of lordship became common, consciously tracing Adam's mastery of the animal world. The Syrian holy man Symeon the Elder was said to have 'rich grace from above, even to the extent of exercising authority over the most bold and fearsome animals'.<sup>7</sup> The Egyptian monk Abba Helle's taming of a man-eating crocodile simultaneously expressed the pagan origins of dealings with animals and Christianity's growing assertiveness against its pagan influences. Like the Pythagoreans, Helle first commanded the beast to obedience. But after using the crocodile as a makeshift ferry to cross the Nile, Helle killed the animal with the sign of the Cross:

'[Helle] crossed the ford with the beast, came ashore, and hauling the beast out of the water, said to it, "It is better for you to die and

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make restitution for all the lives you have taken.” Whereupon the animal sank onto its belly and died.<sup>8</sup> The sign of the Cross was typically reserved for the conquest of demons, and wild animals were increasingly found listed in the same category as the devil’s servants.

Pagan approaches to the animal world however did influence Christian sanctity in another theme; diet. The asceticism of late antique Christian holy men is their most immediately recognizable feature, but one that traces back to pagan origins. Pagan holy men were nominally vegetarian and always frugal. This carried across into Christianity, where it met with some opposition. The Cappadocian Father Basil the Great (330-379AD) argued that Christians should eat whatever was set before them to consciously reject the wrong-headedness of pagan vegetarianism. Basil’s pleas fell on deaf ears. Christian holy men tended to reject meat, with justification following pagan theory. Flesh foods had the effect of weighing down the soul through bodily heaviness, to be avoided in the holy man’s quest for spiritual contact with God. Nonetheless, Christian emphasis on suffering in imitation of Christ led to one key change. Pagan holy men wore linen in rejection of clothing from animal products, but Christian saints were clad in lacerating hair shirts. Roman cultural norms linked clothing from animals to barbarism. Christian saints, like their pagan precursors, consciously sought to separate themselves from wider society.

This example summates the nexus of influences that Christianity emerged from and worked with. This paper has attempted to offer a brief analysis of the intersection between pagan and Christian concepts of holiness through the neglected trope of engagement with the animal world. Through the study of such points, Christianity’s use, and later conscious separation from its formative pagan influences can be traced in new and intriguing ways.

- 1 Early Greek Philosophy, trans. Jonathan Barnes (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 2001), p.158.
- 2 Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, trans. Gillian Clark (London, 2000), II.26:3.
- 3 Porphyry, ‘Life of Pythagoras’, trans. Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (London, 1920), p.23.
- 4 Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans F. C. Conybeare (London and New York, 1912), VI.XLIII.
- 5 Athanasius of Alexandria, ‘The Greek Life of Anthony’, in *The Life of Anthony*, trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Kalamazoo, 2003), p.167.
- 6 Theodoret of Cyrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, 1985), XXVIII.5.
- 7 Ibid, VI.2.
- 8 Norman Russell (trans.), *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachum in Aegypto* (Oxford, 1981), XII.7.

## REVIEW

**POLAND: A HISTORY***Adam Zamoyski, Harper Press, 2009, 448 pp., £14.99*STEPHANIE KIRBY<sup>†</sup>

When I picked up *Poland: A History* by Adam Zamoyski in Waterstones at the beginning of the summer, the most I knew about Poland was Pope John Paul II, pierogis and Hitler's 1939 invasion. To be frank, it was as much the vellum colour cover and bare bones title that attracted me as anything else.

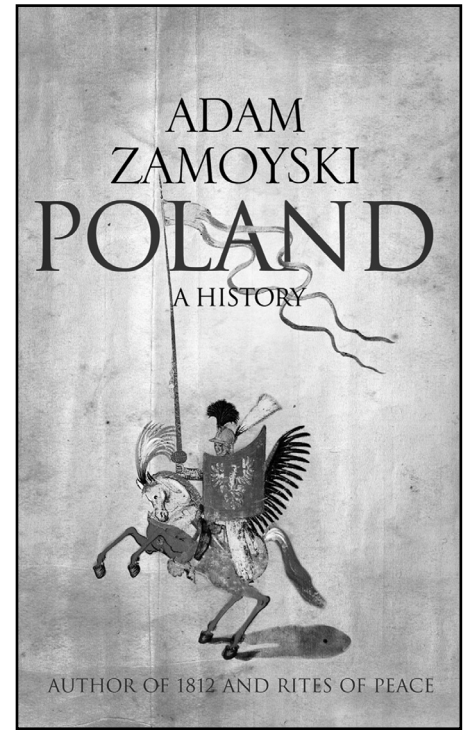
Bare bones the title may be, but the narrative certainly is not. Covering over a thousand years of Polish history, from the surprise discovery of the Polonaie by Otto I in 955 right up until 2005 and the death of Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II), the book has something to interest the Mediaeval, Modern, and IR student alike.

While Zamoyski's presentation of Poland as an ideal state, a modern anachronism in Dark Ages Europe initially caused two raised eyebrows on my part, he nevertheless provides a consistent, convincing and eloquent argument in its favour. Sweeping briskly through Teutonic invasions and Tartar hordes, he proffers multiple examples of Polish distinctiveness. This covered every aspect of life, from the tiny population (at a time when Europe was experiencing a population boom) to the unusually multicultural free cities... even its immunisation from the Black Death when every other country experienced nearly 50 percent mortality. Perhaps the most striking difference for me was the religious pragmatism of medieval Poland, summed up perfectly by Zygmunt II in response to a bloodthirsty Papal envoy: 'Permit me to rule over the goats as well as the sheep'. Hard to imagine French or English kings having the same opinion.

Quite apart from the read-more compulsion you get just from discovering this anomaly of European political and religious history, Zamoyski's chatty, easy-going style of writing makes *Poland* a pleasure to peruse. At times, it seems more like a mildly instructive adventure novel than historical non-fiction. The best example of this is probably the career of King Stanislaw Augustus, whose exploits in the bedroom of Catherine the Great literally won him a kingdom. However, my personal favourite is still the account of the Warsaw uprising during World War II, which frequently saw me put the book down – reluctantly – to demand of my bemused parents why nobody had thought of making a film of it. Zamoyski's narrative of Iron-curtain era Poland was also the first time I studied post 1950's history without groaning in pain. Despite the horrifying devastation of Poland in 1945, the strength and courage of the Polish people in actively and passively resisting Soviet oppression was exciting and inspiring. On the IR side, Zamoyski examines post-USSR Poland with jaundiced eyes, slicing through party propaganda and EU promotions to reveal a country that is still precarious to the influence of pro-Russian politics despite the huge strides made since 1989.

Zamoyski's work is not faultless. A history of Poland, written not just by a Pole, but, according to the omniscient Wikipedia, a member of the ancient Zamoyski clan of the Polish nobility, was never going to be unbiased. Even through my haze of holiday mental vegetation, I could see Zamoyski's interpretation of events should only be read with an entire canister of salt. In particular, his presentation of Poland as a mediaeval utopia strikes an off-note, despite the copious evidence he provides. Furthermore Zamoyski occasionally skates too lightly over certain areas, particularly the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where he focuses overwhelmingly on Polish cultural nationalism to the exclusion of discussion of Poland's changing position on the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Not being overly fond of social history, those few chapters (however well written) were endured with gritted teeth. Emerging unscathed from those negatives, however, is a fresh rethinking of Polish history: ancient, mediaeval, modern, and so-modern-it-hits-you-on-the-nose.

So should you buy this book? Yes. If it can get even a confirmed mediaevalist like myself to get interested in post-World War II history, then it's a book that is worth the equivalent four pints from the Whey Pat.

*Image courtesy of Harper Collins*

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## REVIEW

## SOVIET FATES AND LOST ALTERNATIVES

Stephen F. Cohen, *Columbia University Press*, 2009, 328 pp., £19.50

REHANNA JONES-BOUTALEB<sup>†</sup>

Why did the Soviet Union come to an end? Was the Soviet system reformable? Were there historical alternatives to Stalinism? These are the questions that Stephen F. Cohen raises in *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War*. In a series of seven essays, Cohen challenges conventional assumptions on the course of Soviet and post-Soviet history, examining the fates and lost opportunities of Stalin's preeminent opponents.

For Cohen, captivated by the theme of political alternatives in history, Stalinism was never the predetermined outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Tracing the policies and aspirations of Nikolai Bukharin, Nikita Khrushchev, Yegor Ligachev, and Mikhail Gorbachev, he argues that there were both viable alternatives to Stalin's Terror, and the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist reforms, for instance, represented a real alternative for the Soviet future of the 1960s. A 'viable anti-Stalinist tradition,' Cohen argues, linked Bukharin's progressive socialism of the 1920s and Khrushchev's political revivalism of the 1960s.

In his first chapter, aptly entitled 'Bukharin's Fate', Cohen cuts to the heart of the Bukharinist alternative Stalinism. In contrast to textbook explanations of Stalin's rise to power, he explains that the Bukharin's opposition to Stalin's economic and political strategies actually gained widespread support within the Communist Party. Advocating conciliatory economic policies to enable both private and state sectors to evolve into socialism, Bukharin was the historical representation of a road not taken in 1928. Linking the Soviet leader firmly to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) of the 1920s, Cohen emphasizes that Bukharin's visions for the state did not follow him to the grave: 'During the Brezhnev years, economists continued to explore NEP's contemporary possibilities' (p. 24).

The fate of Stalin's opponents are further unearthed in a somewhat incongruously placed essay on the lives of Gulag returnees during Khrushchev's administration. By 1959, Cohen argues, the surviving victims of Stalin's repression had been released from colonies, camps, prisons, and exile. Collectively, their common needs and demands generated fresh problems that required responses from the administration. Although few survivors received any financial compensation for their years of hardship, they came to play a significant role in Soviet politics. Cohen emphasizes that some returnees even found themselves close to the center of power.

Fast-tracking to the 1980s, *Soviet Fates* also examines the career of Yegor Ligachev, the second-ranking politician under Gorbachev's leadership. Rather than the neo-Stalinist 'archvillain' of Soviet reform, as often portrayed in the West, Ligachev emerges in Cohen's account as a conservative who believed that the Soviet Union could remain viable and undergo reform. Cohen stresses that without the backing of Ligachev and the regional Party bosses he represented, Gorbachev could never have attained power in March 1985.

Following from Ligachev's vision for reform, Cohen attacks the idea that the Soviet Union was initially constructed along totalitarian lines and thus fundamentally incapable of serving pluralist goals. He stresses that Gorbachev's principal domestic reforms were introduced and ratified in the highest Communist nomenklatura assemblies. He further rejects one of long-held axioms of Western scholars, the notion that the final years of the Soviet Union brought forth '...an accelerating revolution from below' (p. 90). Cohen emphasizes that large majorities of Soviet citizens, ranging up to 80 percent, remained opposed to free-market capitalism, and continued to support the main economic and social features of the Soviet system. The multinational Soviet state could have been reformed. By 1991, he concludes, the Soviet system was '...in a process of far-reaching democratic and market reformation...[and] in full transition' (p. 109).

In the work's most perceptive chapter, its epilogue, Cohen also raises the question of who lost the post-Soviet peace. He explains that the story line put forward by a majority of American political and media establishments was that friendly state relations, cultivated by former presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin in the 1990's, were destroyed by the 'antidemocratic' agenda of Vladimir Putin. Refuting these charges, Cohen argues that the opportunity for a constructive post cold-war partnership between both states was lost long before Putin took office: the Clinton administration effectively contributed to the dissolution of positive relations by promoting a false triumphalist vision of Cold War history.

When the Soviet Union ended in 1991, Cohen notes, Washington proclaimed a U.S. victory, adopting a fresh approach to Russian relations, one based on the premise that the Soviet Union had 'lost' the Cold War. Despite the inaccuracy of this view - the Cold War ended almost three years before December 1991 - triumphalism took hold in Washington. Russia could now be regarded as a defeated nation, and the consequences were disastrous. U.S. attempts to 'promote' democracy and effectively dictate Russia's political development attracted widespread critique within Russia.

For Cohen, it was Washington, not Moscow, that squandered the opportunity for a genuine post-Cold War relationship. Although this argument has attracted widespread critique from historians and politicians alike, *Soviet Fates* finds its stride in Cohen's ability to challenge conventional wisdom on the causes and consequences of major turning points in Soviet and post-Soviet history.

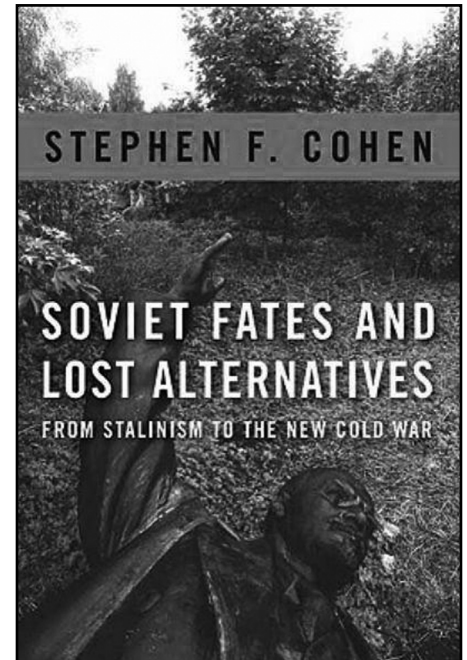


Image courtesy of Columbia University Press

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

In addition to its role in publishing the *Journal*, the University of St Andrews History Society also facilitates a plethora of events for History students, or those interested in history. During Michaelmas Semester, we hosted a successful garden party, as well as numerous social events, pub quizzes, a trip to Edinburgh, and a visit to St. Andrews Cathedral and Castle. The society is the perfect way to get to know your fellow historians and actively engage in your subject whilst at university!

We have an array of events planned for the forthcoming semester including:

- An address by the Lord Rector, Alistair Moffat – historian, writer, broadcaster and former director of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.
- Numerous social events including our infamous pub golf, bonfires, pub quizzes and film nights.
- During the spring break we will be travelling to the North East of England for our trip this year. We will be covering various sites of historical significance such as Hadrians Wall and Lindisfarne, as well as visiting the mediaeval city of Durham and the modern, bustling metropolis of Newcastle. Overnight accommodation and transport will be included in the trip.
- We will be hosting the annual inter-departmental quiz which will pit the four History departments against one another in a heated battle of minds. The IDQ is our signature event and has been a sell out event the previous five years.

Take a look at our website for more information <http://stauhs.wordpress.com> or email [mt368@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:mt368@st-andrews.ac.uk). To join the Society's mailing list, email [historysoc@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:historysoc@st-andrews.ac.uk). You can also follow us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/357450112160/>.

