# Table of Contents

Letter from the Editor......................................................................................................................... 1  
Education and Isolation: The Didactic Methods of *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*........ 3  
Exemplifying Byzantine Otherness: Historiographical Trends in Fourth Crusade Scholarship.......................................................................................................................... 21  
“Musterai i mun livre”: Monastery History and Practices of Seeing in Matthew Paris’ *Vie de seint Auban*.................................................................................................................. 43  
Book Review: The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects and Practices........................................................................................................................... 66  
Book Review: The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe................................. 69  
Book Review: *Vox regis*: Royal Communication in High Medieval Norway...................... 72  
Book Review: Savage Economy: The Returns of Middle English Romance...................... 75  
Book Review: A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy........................................................................ 78
Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

We proudly present the open-themed Spring 2017 issue of Hortulus.

This issue features three articles on a wide range of subjects and disciplines. In “Education and Isolation: The Didactic Methods of Konungs skuggsjá and Hirðskrá” Benjamin Harrison focuses on the education of King Hákon IV Hákonarson’s retinue in thirteenth-century Norway. Harrison describes how the royal hírð was exposed to continental ideas about courtly culture through two didactic texts. Elizabeth Light discusses the visual rhetoric employed by the thirteenth-century chronicler Matthew Paris in his Vie de seint Auban. In her article, “Musterai i mun livre: Monastery History and Practices of Seeing in Matthew Paris’s Vie de seint Auban”, Light emphasizes how the Vie, as a historiophoty, solidifies the identity of the monastery of St. Alban’s as a locus of devotion through visuality. Alexander Johnson traces the origins of scholarly bias in the early historiography of the Byzantine Empire in “Exemplifying Byzantine Otherness: Historiographical Trends in Fourth Crusade Scholarship”. After centuries of conflicting perceptions of the Byzantine presence during the Fourth Crusade, Johnson shows, modern historians are still tasked with disproving common misconceptions, and argues that this process can be facilitated by coming to grips with the origin of the discipline.

We are currently accepting submissions for our Fall 2017 themed issue “Selfhood and Otherness”— submissions are due September 25. We encourage readers who presented on the topic of otherness at Leeds IMC 2017 to consider sending their papers for review. We are particularly interested in submissions with a methodological focus, but are open to any submissions related to the theme. *Hortulus* is also pleased to announce that we are hosting a sponsored session at Kalamazoo ICM 2018: “Innovative Technologies: Modern Responses to the Medieval (A Roundtable)”. The Call For Papers can be found [here](#).

As this is my last term serving as Senior Editor of *Hortulus* I would like to conclude this letter by expressing my thanks to our terrific editorial team. Our reviews editor, Heidi Djuve, has ensured that our reviews section remains a thriving part of the journal. I hope that *Hortulus* can rely on her critical eye and dedication for several issues to come. Rebecca Straple and Ryan Lawrence have been our assistant editors for this issue, both of whom have shown exemplary skill as contacts between the journal and our authors. They remained flexible throughout our tumultuous publication schedule and did not hesitate to carry out extra work whenever this was necessary. I cannot thank them enough for this. It has been a pleasure share the co-editorship with Gwendolyne Knight during the past year. Gwen has been critical, effective and, most of all, a sheer joy to work with. It is with full confidence that I pass the baton to her and there is no doubt in my mind that she will lead the journal with great professionalism and enthusiasm. I look forward to the new directions *Hortulus* will doubtlessly take and will continue to follow the journal with great interest.

Nadine Kuipers, *Hortulus* Senior Editor
Education and Isolation: The Didactic Methods of Konungs skuggsjá and Hirðskrá

Benjamin Harrison

Abstract

During the thirteenth century, the Norwegian royal hird underwent a significant change – developing from an unruly band of bodyguards into a European-modelled court. This development was instigated by King Hákon IV Hákonarson, by introducing courtly culture to his hird. This article focuses on two texts that were used as tools in this process: Konungs skuggsjá, an educational text that dealt with politics and morality, and Hirðskrá, a legal codex that concerned the laws and actions of the hird. The aim of this article is to support the idea of the Norwegian kings making use of these texts as didactic tools in a conscious attempt to develop their hirðmenn into a more sophisticated, devoted group. The article examines the texts’ pedagogic natures in order to analyse the didactic methods used to entice the king’s men to more devotedly serve their monarch, and subsequently assesses how the texts sought to use courtly culture as a method to make aristocrats voluntarily segregate themselves further from the rest of society, centring themselves around the king. Ultimately, this article intends to contribute further knowledge to our understanding of how both these texts were aimed at and applied to the royal hird, and showcase how the hirðmenn were encouraged to voluntarily alter their attitudes and isolate themselves on the premise of gaining closer relations to the king.

Introduction

From an early point of his reign, King Hákon IV Hákonarson (1204-1263) of Norway found himself frustrated at the lack of control he had over his hird.¹ He therefore decided that the institution needed to be reformed and began to adopt the cultural and social attitudes of the European courts into his own.² To do this, Hákón employed the use of various pedagogic texts at his court. Under his command, he had didactic texts written for members of the court, and for

² Brégaint, 2016, p. 2.
example commissioned translations of Old French tales of courtly romance and *chansons de geste* (Songs of Heroic Deeds) in Old Norse to be recited at his court for entertainment, but also to cultivate courtly attitudes among his men, and educate them on the wider European world in his efforts to Europeanise Norway.\(^3\) These modified French tales are now more commonly known as the *riddarasögur* (*Chivalric sagas*). This conscious effort to begin changes would transform his often-recalcitrant retinue into a more subservient group. Understanding the events that led to this process of change is imperative before one can approach the texts themselves. I will thus put forth a focused analysis of the didactic aspects of two medieval Norwegian texts. The first, and most significant in this process, is *Konungs skuggsjá* (*The King’s Mirror*). It was written c. 1250s, presumably under the commission of King Hákon Hákonarson and aimed at the education of his sons, Hákon and Magnús, but had a secondary role of disseminating ideas of courtly culture through the *hirð*.\(^4\) The author is unknown, but through a study of the text it is clear that he must have been a well-educated individual, versed in theology, law and pedagogy which he likely learned whilst living abroad.\(^5\) In modern scholarship, *Konungs skuggsjá* has often been linked to the widely defined *specula principum* genre, or ‘mirrors for princes’, a loosely defined genre of political writings created with the aim to educate political leaders in the methods in which they should rule and act.\(^6\) It is a didactic text, constructed as a dialogue between two characters: Son, a young man wishing to learn about the world, and Father, who

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4 For discussions on the dating of *Konungs skuggsjá*, see: Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King’s Mirror*, (Odense, 1987), especially pp. 11-13; *Hirð* comes from the Anglo-Saxon *híred* or *hírd*, meaning household, retinue, brotherhood, or company. Initially it referred to informal companions or bodyguards of the king whom had sworn allegiance to a powerful magnate. However, by the beginning of the thirteenth century in Norway, it had undergone a more formalised system of homage, where men now served as a vassal, either directly in one’s retinue by the side of the king, or elsewhere in the country, but acting as his public agent. Those who were currently residing by the king’s seat, and in current attendance to him were the foundations for what would become the Norwegian royal court. See: Steinar Imsen, ‘King Mangus and his Liegemen’s Hirdskrå: A Portrait of the Norwegian Nobility in the 1270s’ in *Nobles and Nobility: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Suffolk, 2000) pp. 205-220.


6 The concept is usually expressed as a ‘European tradition’, a problematic labelling from two perspectives. The first is that by calling it European, it ignores the Eastern texts that conform to the genre, especially those originating from the Islamic world. Secondly, the term ‘tradition’ implies as continuous transmission of texts, and that there is a direct line of influence. However, many texts – *Konungs skuggsjá* especially – seemed to have been written without the direct knowledge or influence of other mirror texts. For further discussion on the debate of the problematic genre group of ‘mirrors for princes’, as well as *Konungs skuggsjá*’s relation to it, see: Einar Már Jónsson, ‘Les “miroirs aux princes” sont-ils un genre littéraire?’*, *Médiévales*, 51 (Autumn 2006) pp. 153-166.
answers his questions, explaining the nature and structure of society.\(^7\) The second text is *Hirðskrá* (*The Book of the Hirð*), which consists of a collection of laws regarding the appointment and duties of the royal *hirð*, compiled c. 1270 under the orders of King Magnús VI Hákonarson (1238-1280) as part of his country-wide project of recording written legislation.\(^8\) It is primarily a legal text, concerned with appointments and the legal statuses and demands that accompany them. Although it does have some of the typical elements that occur in normative sources, for example how it portrays the king’s view on how the *hirð* ought to act, it does not delve into the level of detail that *Konungs skuggsjá* does. Due to its legislative incentive, the text is not as concerned with courtly education, though it does make several references to attitude and behavior. This article thus puts forth a comparative inspection of the methods and techniques that these texts use to educate their audience.\(^9\)

With the introduction of courtly culture in Norway, the structure of the aristocracy changed. Sverre Bagge refers to it as a transformation into an ‘aristocracy of the realm’, as opposed to the prior local aristocracies.\(^10\) Local aristocrats left their lands to come to Bergen and be close to the king. A similar idea appears in *Konungs skuggsjá*, which states that there is no mutual contract in society – all men are subjects of the king.\(^11\) This article will evaluate and compare the didactic methods of *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá* to understand how these courtly ideals were disseminated, and why the *hirðmenn* voluntarily adopted them. With an overview of some of the troublesome encounters that can be found in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, the first section will explain why Hákon wished to change the social attitudes of his *hirðmenn*. Such encounters were largely based on prior predicaments in Hákon’s life where he struggled with issues of insubordination within his *hirð*, in addition to the issue of negative reputation that his country and subjects received abroad. Having established such a foundation, I shall then proceed with an


\(^8\) Steinar Imsen, 2000, p. 205.

\(^9\) The *riddarasögur* will not be discussed in further detail as they lack the direct didactic approach that the two discussed texts use. Instead, they aim to teach through inspiration and allegory, rather than a direct method. See: Carolyne Larrington, ‘Learning to Feel in the Old Norse Camelot?’ in *Scandinavian Studies*, 87.1 (2015) pp. 74-94.


approach the pedagogical elements of *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*, comparing the different 
didactic methods in which they use to educate their audience, and encourage them to adopt new 
social attitudes aimed to tame the problematic behaviors of the royal *hirð*. I will examine how 
both texts push to create a societal divide between the aristocracy and peasantry through the 
introduction of courtly culture, and the emphasis on the virtue of nobility that comes from 
serving one’s king. Conclusively, the article will demonstrate how *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá* utilise their differing didactic forms in the pursuit of the same goals, and 
why the two texts have been written with such different approaches in doing so.

**The Need for Courtly Culture**

Praised be God that I have this day fulfilled that errand which was charged on me 
on behalf of holy Rome and the lord Pope and all the cardinals; and now is your 
king crowned, and thoroughly honoured, so that no king can have gotten such 
honour before in Norway. Praised be God also for this that I did not go back on 
my course as I was urged. It was told me that I should here see few men; but even 
though I saw some, then they would be liker to beasts in their behaviour than to 
men; but now I see here a countless multitude of the folk of this land, and, as it 
seems to me, with good behaviour.\(^\text{12}\)

In 1247 Hákon Hákonarson was crowned King of Norway under papal authority, with the 
emissary William of Sabina traveling from England to conduct the coronation.\(^\text{13}\) The above 
extract is from *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, written by Sturla Þórðarson under the commission 
of Hákon’s son and successor, Magnús VI Hákonarson.\(^\text{14}\) In this speech, William of Sabina 
makes reference to the poor image of Norwegians held by their European neighbours; a belief 
that the Norwegians were almost animalistic due to their crass demeanour and lack of even the

\(^{12}\) *Hákonar saga Hákonarson*, p. 248, ch. 255, 3-15. ‘Lofaðr sé Guð, at ek hefi þat örendi full-gört í dag, sem ek hefir umboð til af hendi heilagrar Róma-borgar, ok herra Pávans, ok allra kardinálæ; ok nú er konungur yðarr kóðnaðr, ok fullkomliga sæmðr, svá ar eingi mun slíka sæmð fengit hafa fyrr í Noregi. Mér var sagt, at ek munda, hér fá menn sjá; en þó at ek séja nökkura, þá mundu þeir vera likari í sínni afþverð dýrum en möðnum; en nú sé ek hér ótaligan fjóðba af þessa lands folki; ok sýnish mér með göðum afþverðum.’ Trans. Dascent, p. 258.


most basic social etiquette. Whilst William dispels the stories he had heard and chooses to praise the behavior of his hosts, it is worth noting that these words should not be taken too sincerely considering the audience he was addressing. Hákon had a stronger desire to build relationships with Europe compared to his predecessors, and he constantly strived to further diplomacy and increase trade with neighbouring countries to the south, specifically France and Germany. Nevertheless, the attitudes of his men proved to be a constant hindrance to his efforts. In 1248, Louis IX of France extended an invitation to Hákon to bring his men and join him at the French court where they would discuss leading a new crusade. Hákon opted to decline, citing many reasons why, one being that he was embarrassed about how his men would act as he described them as ‘impetuous and imprudent, impatient of any sort of injury or restraints.’ Men from the king’s hird also had a duty to serve as envoys and ambassadors abroad, and as such, they functioned as representatives for their king and country. Logically, these representatives largely defined the image of Norway and its ruling class within royal courts across Europe. An unruly, ill-mannered ambassador would strike a blow against the European connections that Hákon endeavoured to foster. Evidently, Hákon himself was well aware of the reputation his men had amongst their European neighbours, and did not think of this ill stature as undeserved. He did wish, however, to bring about a change to better his relationships with other countries.

The unruly attitudes and actions of Hákon’s hird were a large source of embarrassment for him abroad, and also posed a personal danger to Hákon because of their unpredictable behavior. Throughout Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar, we see that hirdmenn are a constant source of endangerment for him – particularly because of their excessive drinking. One chapter tells of a nine-year-old Hákon returning by ship to the royal seat in Bergen, where the journey is fraught

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17 Brégaint, 2016, p. 2.
with disaster. The group took to sea in the evening, Hákon’s hirðmenn still intoxicated from having ‘drunk hard’ that evening. Their carelessness led to the ship losing its direction in harsh weather and its rudder damaged. This inattentiveness put the young Hákon directly in danger, since their excessive drinking meant they were unable to properly attend to their duties. Whilst no one died in this incident, alcohol did lead to death in Bergen c. 1227: After an evening of heavy drinking, one of Hákon’s men misidentified one of the men of Skúli Bárðarson – Hákon’s co-regent – as the murderer of his relative some years prior, and slew him. Realising his error in this, the killer fled to the closest church to take refuge and Hákon was obliged to protect this man both under the law and as his lord, yet he had to restrain not only his men, but also those loyal to Skúli. This led to division and insubordination within the hirð, as even though they were sworn to Hákon they did not agree with his full authority and legitimacy in his actions of preventing them from carrying out retribution. From this we can clearly see that the hirð was not necessarily always a strong, cohesive unit. Regardless of Hákon having power over his men through the oaths of fealty they had sworn to him, they evidently did not see themselves as completely subordinate to his authority. Therefore, Hákon continuously faced problems of dissent within his ranks, an issue that was further compounded in 1240 when Skúli staged an armed rebellion against Hákon, which led to the Earl’s defeat at Niðarós. Hákon took some of Skúli’s surviving men into his own hirð out of necessity and unsurprisingly faced even further issues of subordination from these men especially.

Hákon’s retinue was a group of ill-disciplined, self-serving men that caused problems for the king and his country both internally and externally. In Norway the king faced insubordination and neglect of duty, which in numerous situations potentially endangered his life and consequently made his ruling difficult. Outside of the country, it put a strain on foreign relations

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21 Ibid., ch. 157, pp. 145, 3-20.
25 For a further discussion of historical insubordination within the royal hirð, see: Brégaint, 2014 and Brégaint, 2016.
due to the embarrassment that his men caused him. His hirð needed to be brought under a stronger level of control, but he knew that it could not be done by force; therefore, looked towards the continent and decided to imitate the culture at foreign courts in order to ‘domesticate’ the elites of Norway. \textsuperscript{26} Thus, Hákon not only aimed to strengthen his domestic power, but also to dispel the negative stereotype that prevailed in his foreign affairs.

**Altering Social Attitudes**

Before examining how the two texts facilitated the development of courtly culture in medieval Norway, an explanation of the term ‘courtly culture’ first needs to be addressed. Courtliness in Europe chiefly emerged from the French royal court and based itself around *courtoisie*, actions that embodied virtue and grace and was the antithesis of *villain*, a term that originally referred to a peasant, but at this point had developed connotations of also being ugly or vulgar. \textsuperscript{27} The importance of proper etiquette and social hierarchy was paramount within courtly environments.

An important aspect of courtly culture was therefore how it served to divide society between the *courtois* aristocrats and *villainous* peasants. Furthermore, courtly culture is not an inherent way of acting, but a mind-set that one is socialized into, and which seeks to distinguish the aristocracy from the ordinary. \textsuperscript{28} Courtly attitudes in Norway were therefore purposely developed and cultivated by the monarchs to transform their courts and change the attitudes of their liegemen.

The prologue of *Konungs skuggsjá* implies that good morality was lacking in society. \textsuperscript{29} In other words, courtly manners were not well known prior to the reign of Hákon which supports the idea that *Konungs skuggsjá* aimed to demonstrate the ways a virtuous man ought to act. The prologue openly declares its intention for the education of the king, but also claims its accessibility and applicability for all who wished to be ‘good men’. \textsuperscript{30} This is an intentional tactic, as *Konungs skuggsjá* was not just intended to teach Magnús how to rule, but also how courtiers should act

\textsuperscript{26} Brégaint, 2016, pp. 2-3.


\textsuperscript{29} Brégaint, 2016, p. 7

\textsuperscript{30} *Konungs skuggsjá*, Kgs, p. 2, ch. 1, 36.
towards their king.\textsuperscript{31} Regarding the \textit{hirð} and its conduct, the second section which regards the king and his court is most significant. It is this section that allows us to see how the text was used in a persuasive manner to mould the attitudes of the king’s men, and to transform them into more subservient followers.

A core attitude that the text wishes to change is the prevalence of drinking, which it condemns with a two-part approach that highlights both the danger it poses to one’s king, as well as one’s own reputation:

Never get drunk, wherever you are; for it may fall out at any time that you will be summoned to hear a dispute or to supervise something, or that you will have important business of your own to look after. Now if such demands should come to a man while he is drunk, he will be found wholly incompetent; wherefore drunkenness should be avoided by everyone, and most of all by kingsmen and others who wish to be reputed as worthy men, for such are most frequently called to hear suits at law and to other important duties. Moreover, they ought to set good examples for all, as some may wish to learn decorum from their behaviour.\textsuperscript{32}

Firstly, those who are unable to attend their duties due to an intoxicated state would be considered ‘incompetent’, a direct besmirch upon their honour – an integral aspect of Northern societies. Secondly, this text stresses that by maintaining sobriety, a person acts as a noble leader for others at the court. This action would increase their personal standing as the text not only defines the hierarchy under the king, but also explains a hierarchy of courtliness within the \textit{hirð} in an unspoken fashion.\textsuperscript{33} In keeping with its persuasive theme, \textit{Konungs skuggsjá} never attempts to tell one not to drink. It merely advises that a virtuous, courtly man does not debase himself through the lowly sate of intoxication and certainly does not drink excessively in the presence of his king.\textsuperscript{34} The implication of this is that a man who is always in a fit state to attend

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 2, ch. 1, 33-36.
\item \textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 81, ch. 37, 3-12, ‘… þá ger þik aldrigi drukkin, þvíat iðuliga má svá at berask, at þú sér þá kallaðr til mála manna ok til yfirsjónar, eða elligar þurfir þú um þín vandamál at væla; ok ef slíkir hlutir kunnu manni meðan til handa at bera, er hann er drukkinn, þá er han til enskis þerri; ok hæfir fyrir því hverjum manni við ofdrykkju at sjá, allra helzt konungsmönnnum, ok þeim er síðarmenn vilja heita, þvíat þeir verða optast til kallaðir yfir mál manna at sjá eða til annarra auðsyna; enda skulu þeir hverjum manni góð dómi gera, ef nökkurr vildi eptir þeirra síðum nema at lifa.’ Trans. Larson, 1917, ch. 37, 74-83.
\item \textsuperscript{33}Brégaint, 2014, 192.
\item \textsuperscript{34}Brégaint, 2016, 4-5.
\end{itemize}
his king is reliable and trustworthy, and he will therefore be viewed most favourably by him – increasing the likelihood of advancement and bestowment of honours.

_Hirðskrá_ likewise argues against excessive drinking, but is even firmer in its case against intemperance by making reference to the seven deadly sins:

> Be also particularly careful to avoid with all of the powers of discernment God has given you those seven cardinal vices which are the root and basis of all (other) vices. And men of wisdom identify them such that the first is immoderate indulgence in food and drink […] be further on guard against drinking too much, for many persons lose both their senses, their property and their friends as a result of this; and finally, and what is worse, the soul also is lost when the drunk man is unable to attend himself to God or to good men.35

This passage provides a stark warning for its audience: intemperance can lead to the loss of one’s honour and social position, and it also puts one in a state removed from God and piety. Just like _Konungs skuggsjá_, the text does not officially place a ban or restriction on a retainer and his alcohol consumption, which can be seen as odd given the legal disposition of the text. This is likely due to the societal importance of alcohol, because of which the king could never truly place a firm restriction upon alcohol consumption.36 _Hirðskrá_ also states that one may lose their property because of excessive drinking, implying that whilst drunkenness is not punishable, it certainly would not go unnoticed by the king. Nevertheless, the text does not declare an official penalty on drunkenness. In reading these two texts, a _hirðmaðr_ would thus learn that to be drunk is not only a betrayal of his king and his duties, but a betrayal of God – the two most important figures in his life. This was also an effective didactic tool, as neither text forces a change upon its audience. Instead, it presents temperance as a virtue and clear and sensible way of conducting oneself, allowing one to make their own choice to change their attitudes. To demand such a change would be an incredibly unpopular move, and likely just cause problems for the king who tried to enact it. By presenting it as a completely optional and free choice, those who wished to

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35 _Hirðskrá_, p. 110, ch. 28, 1-19, ‘Uarazt oc æinkanlega sem fræmmazt gefr guð ðeer skilning. Oc maatt til með ollu kostgíæve þinu þau siau haufðlyti sem root oc grunðvollr er allra onda luta. En þau graëina suu vittrir menn oc sannsnyr at þat er first ofmeyylza matar oc dryckiar … þat nest at þu græter þin fræ ofðryckiu þui at af hanný tapar margr hæilsunni bæde oc vitinu fe oc felogum oc þui siðazt sem maest er at salen er tynð þar sem ðrukkinn maðr ma æigi sialfs sins giæta oc æigi suðs ne goðra manna.’; Trans. Berge, p. 50; Unlike the other sources I have made use of, a version of _Hirðskrá_ in standardised Old Norse form does not exist, therefore it is reproduced here in its original form.

please the king would be sensible with their drink, and ensure they were known to be. Then, the
king could give public praise for this, which would spread such behavior through the hirð, as
men wished to receive graces from him. Joachim Bumke has highlighted that ‘warnings against
gluttony and drunkenness […] had a permanent place in the courtly etiquette’. Those who lived
in a courtly society would, of course, be wealthy aristocrats, and had everything they desired in
abundance. Gluttony was sinful – which Hirðskrá directly discusses – but moderation is its
antithesis, and therefore should be upheld and embraced. This was often reflected in European
courtly literature, which would have enforced the virtuous ideal of temperance at the
Norwegian court, not just through Konungs skuggsjá and Hirðskrá, but any French or German
poems or literature that would have been recited as entertainment for the royal hirð.

Konungs skuggsjá is successful in its development of the hirð through the exploitation of the
common desire for social advancement within Norse society. The text does not present itself as
any sort of compulsory commitment, but instead makes clear that any adoption of courtly ideas is
entirely out of the adopter’s free will. The second section opens with an explanation of the
benefits one can reap from servitude in the king’s household, and then expounds the many ways
of how one could achieve these benefits. In relation to this, David Brégaint has highlighted how
the author use the constant application of the verb vil, to want or to wish, when talking about
self-advancement. The author is persuasive in his tone, and implies that whilst one is not
obligated to heed his advice, it is incredibly advantageous to do so. Royal service is beneficial,
the author explains, and therefore all sensible men know that to courteously serve one’s king is
the wisest decision, as it is the greatest advantage to be in the king’s full protection and
friendship.

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38 Ibid., p. 180-3.
39 Brégaint, 2016, p. 10.
40 Ibid., p. 11.
41 Konungs skuggsjá, p. 62, ch. 28, 12-14.
After its explanation of the advantages of good behavior and devoted service, *Konungs skuggsjá* proceeds to explain how one becomes courteous through a purposeful effort to change one’s attitude, actions, and appearance:

And if the king should happen to speak a few words to you which you did not catch, and you have to ask what he said, do not say ‘Eh?’ or ‘What?’ or make a fuss about it, but use only the word ‘Sire;’ or if you prefer to ask in more words: ‘My lord, be not offended if I ask what you said to me, but I did not quite catch it.’ But see to it that it happens in rare cases only that the king need to repeat his remarks to you more than once before you grasp them.42

With this passage, the author clearly suggests a rather large change of attitude in how one communicates with the king. It was presumably commonplace to speak to the king in the same way one would speak to any other, but with this proclamation *Konungs skuggsjá* puts forward a new standard of addressing one’s liege, with specific and formal language.43 It emphasises the usage of the honorific *herra*, ‘sire’, expressing the king’s higher status and title over those who address him. It also tells one to ensure the king does not need to repeat his words, further emphasising the king’s rank over his *hirðmenn* and continuing the significance of hierarchy. Speech is just one example of how the text shapes the attitudes of its audience in order to create a stronger hierarchy, reaffirming the king’s higher status. In turn, this reduces the autonomy of the *hirð* and consequently subjugates it and reduces the possibility of future subordination. The repeated emphasis on the importance of attitude and manners in *Konungs skuggsjá* can be seen within Hákon’s own *hirð* during the latter part of his reign.44 As an example, Sverre Bagge highlights that of his advisors, only ten out of 22 came from families of the high-status *lendirmenn*, whereas the majority of his personally appointed councillors came from a lower aristocratic background.45 This allows us to see that *Konungs skuggsjá* was in keeping with


43 Caroline Larrington, 2015, p. 77.


Hákon’s desire to reform the attitudes of his men, and that he must have actively preferred men based on their qualities rather than solely their lineage.

Considering its legal nature, *Hirðskrá* understandably provides a lot less detail when it comes to specific actions and behaviors of the *hirð*. It only makes general remarks regarding attitudes in chapter 29, where the text asserts the following:

> All good manners have their origin in loving God above all else and in the constant fear and love of him in all of your dealings, regardless of whether you are joyful or apprehensive … If you come into the king’s service, then show him a love second only to your love of God; love him more than other men, for he may be the source of all happiness for you if you serve in the right manner the rightful king.⁴⁶

Following this, it lists a selection of short maxims concerning one’s behavior not only to the king, but to one’s peers. The text affirms the hierarchy of the king being second only to God in adding strength to the notion of the *hirð* being completely subordinate to the authority of the monarch. Although such notions are discussed in a lot less detail, the general theme of the section is in keeping with *Konungs skuggsjá*’s discussion of manners and attitudes. It does not demand or force the audience to change how they act, but it persuades them via an appeal to their religious identity, and also through a desire for self-advancement. Understanding *Konungs skuggsjá*’s model of communication is crucial in comprehending how it was received by its audience, and how it transmitted its teachings. The Son addresses the Father in a highly formal fashion, using *herra*, just as the author suggests that a liegeman should use for his king. The dialogue between the two is an effective method for educating the reader on how to act and behave by teaching through example. Especially since the text is driven by the Son asking questions about the king and society, the audience may well have wondered why the king had such an importance, and why he should be served in such a way. These questions could never have been asked openly at court, as the person would be seen as foolish – or worse, treasonous. In this manner, the text thus allows the subjects to explore these questions and answers themselves, in privacy and security, whilst also instilling values that it wished to cultivate at

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court. *Hirðskrá’s* didactic method fundamentally differs from that of *Konungs skuggsjá*. Despite both texts being normative in nature, *Hirðskrá* is primarily a legislative text and, therefore, rather than being persuasive, *Hirðskrá* tells men how they ought to act. However, it is still important to note that it never phrases it as forceful demand; instead, it discusses it as the expectation of one to fulfil as part of their position. The text discusses the ranks of the *hirð* and the duties that come with them, as well as the adoption of courtly attitudes as a secondary, lesser part of one’s role as a *hirðmaðr*. However, the difference is, of course, that one is not penalised for not adopting these attitudes. Despite their different methods, however, both texts seek a common goal of reforming the social attitudes of the royal *hirð*. In doing this, they encourage what could be called a self-imposed segregation, and isolation from non-aristocratic, non-courtly individuals, turning the royal *hirð* into a closed sphere, gathered around the king.

**Societal Isolation of the *Hirð***

The ulterior motive of courtly culture has been put succinctly by Marlen Ferrer: courtly culture is ‘a manner that serves to distinguish the aristocracy from the common people’ 47 As previously mentioned, it is thus an attitude which one is socialized into and which requires a conscious effort to adopt. By separating the noble from common it creates a greater division in society, emphasising who is tied to the king, and who is not. This creates an ‘isolation’, where the courtly voluntarily segregate themselves away from the non-courtly within closed aristocratic spheres – the most desirable sphere being located around the king. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has observed that the growing concentration of power meant that the king became increasingly isolated, and this reached its zenith in the thirteenth century. 48 Therefore, those in his inner circle had a more beneficial position as it gave them access to power through their personal influence on the king.

One way by which the aristocracy were separated from the rest of society was how they physically appeared. They were expected to dress and groom themselves in a specific way. *Konungs skuggsjá* describes the standard of dress which a man at the court ought to follow,

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and this account is so detailed that it is likely that the author himself must have been a part of Håkon’s hird.\textsuperscript{49} He describes the quality, cut, and colour of the clothes:

> Your costume you should plan beforehand in such a way that you come fully dressed in good apparel, the smartest that you have, and wearing fine trousers and shoes. You must not come without your coat; and also wear a mantle, the best that you have … Your shirt should be cut somewhat shorter than your coat; for no man of taste can deck himself out in flax or hemp. Before you enter the royal presence be sure to have your hair and beard carefully trimmed according to the fashions of the court when you join the same.\textsuperscript{50}

The author emphasises the use of specific colours and specific materials to create a divide between the court and the commoners. In the thirteenth century, it was illegal in Norway – as it was in most parts of Europe – for those of a lower status to wear clothes that were dyed with specific colours, or made from expensive cloth.\textsuperscript{51} By establishing what could be called an unofficial dress-code for the Scandinavian aristocracy the divisions that already existed within this society were widened, serving to isolate the elites and promoting a closed sphere within the highest tier of society. The Norwegian court was probably following examples set within other parts of Europe, as we can see laws that possibly date back as early as under Charlemagne’s rule which dictated what the peasantry and aristocracy could wear.\textsuperscript{52} All such laws had the same purpose: to constrain what commoners could wear, and allow the nobles’ extravagance – emphasising the divide between them.

\textit{Konungs skuggsjá} does not discuss a mutual contract of loyalty between the king and his hird. As the king is the rightful ruler of the country and all of his subjects within it, the obedience of his liegemen is implicit.\textsuperscript{53} Consequently, the author makes the point that since all men are to

\textsuperscript{49} Bagge, 1987, p. 220.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Konungs skuggsjá}, p. 67, ch. 30, 3-13, ‘En klæðabúnaði þinum skaltu òðr hafa svá háttat, at þú sér klæðr öllum göðum gangvera, þein sem þú heifr vildastan til, ver hosaðr ok skúaðr; eigi skaltu ok kyrtilslauss vera; þvílfika yfirhöfn ok, sem þú hefir vildasta til … Ætla jafnan göðum mun styttir skyrtil þína en kyrtil, þvíat engi maðr hœfeskr má sik prúðan fá gört af hör eða hampi. Skegg þitt ok hár skaltu láta virðuliga göra, aðr en þú gengr. fyrr konung, eptir þeim siðum er þá eru í hirða, er þú leitar til hirðar.’; Trans. Larsen, 1917, ch. 30, 41-53.

\textsuperscript{51} Bumke, 2000, pp. 128-132.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 128.

serve their king, it is only natural to want to attend as closely and loyally as possible to him – for it is that which ennobles a man.\textsuperscript{54}

Now since all the men of the realm are thus bound to the royal service, why should not every sensible man regard it a greater advantage to be in the king’s full protection and friendship, no matter what may happen in his intercourse with other men, and to be superior to his comrades and hold them loyal to the king if they will not otherwise obey, than to be called a mere cotter who is constantly under the control of others, though he still owes nearly the same duties as otherwise?\textsuperscript{55}

Konungs skuggsjá had an aim of enticing the liegemen of the king, and to attempt to secure a place within the hird and in order to stay at the court. In doing so, it would allow them to increase their proximity to the king, which was essential for gaining his honours and advancing one’s self within the upper echelons of society.\textsuperscript{56} With this the second section of the text exemplifies the division in society that it aims to create. A strong point is made on the nobleness that comes from one directly serving the king, stressing the contrast between being a hirdmaðr and what is derogatorily called a kotkarl, a cottage-dwelling peasant farmer. There is a definite emphasis on the division between the leaders of society and the peasants. The writer continues his persuasive tone here, as every man should wish to serve the king directly, and in turn be able to guide his own future through gaining the king’s friendship. However, a man who opts not to is no different from a peasant who has no control in life; he is merely controlled by those above him. Once again, the social divide between the elite and the commoners is reinforced to centralise the elites in one place: directly under the king.

The legal provisions in Hirðskrá constantly act to enforce the authority of the king over the hirdmenn. As previously stated, the text takes the loyalty of the king’s men as absolute. The last chapter of the text is a provision as to when the book should be read aloud for the benefits of the hirdmenn, as well as the penalties for those who disobey its summons:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Bagge, 1987, p. 180.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Konungs skuggsjá, p. 62, ch. 28, 12-18, ‘Nú með því at allir menn eru skyldir með konung til þjónostu, þeir sem í eru ríki hans, hví mun þá eigi hverjum vitrum manní þykjkja mikill munr undir því vera, at hann sé í fullu Konungs trausti ok hans vináttu, hvat sem til handa kann at berask við aðra men um viðsókiti, ok vera yfirmaðr fóstbræðra sinn aok stjórna til hjýðni við konung sinn, ef þeir vilja eigi áðr hjýðmir vera, heldr en heita kotkarl ok vera æ undir annars stjórn, ok þá náliga skyldr sem áðr.’; Trans. Larsen, 1917, ch. 28, 31-37.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Brégant, 2014, pp. 197-9.
\end{itemize}
Thus, it is also affirmed in the court of all the hirð men, and with the king’s will and advice, that every Yule the entirety of Hirðskrá will be read to the hirð men on the days that the king believes to be best suited, and he will call for them to meet … But whichever hirð man does not come to these meetings, if he is in town, he has lost his position if he has not got leave from the king, for it can be that he spends his time on what is not appropriate or useful.\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{Jól} – Yule – was a combination of Christian celebration and pagan tradition during the thirteenth century in Norway and at this point it had mostly lost the pagan elements of worship, albeit many of the old traditions remained, such as the feasting and celebration.\textsuperscript{58} The chapter essentially states that any time the king wishes to summon his men for no reason other than to reinforce the knowledge of the codes and laws they are expected to live by, he could do so. Failure to attend resulted in loss of position. Whilst this punishment only applies to those ‘in town’ – referring to wherever the king currently resides – those not geographically close to the king would already have had to gain permission to leave him, as is outlined in chapter 34, which stipulates that any leave of absence must be authorised by the king.

This last chapter therefore functions as a further act of solidifying the king’s power over his hirð. The section essentially gives the king full authority over where his men are located during \textit{Jól}, ensuring that they are kept within close proximity to him, thus restricting how far his men could effectively travel without expressed permission. The addition of it to \textit{Hirðskrá} shows a reaffirmation of the hirð’s subservient role when the text was being compiled, the provision laid out in this chapter is arguably redundant. Whilst \textit{Hirðskrá} specifies the king being able to gather the hirð at \textit{Jól}, he already had the power to summon them whenever he wished; the act of gathering them to read from the text is merely establishing his dominance as monarch, and underlines that their purpose is to serve him.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Hirðskrá}, p. 179, ch. 54, 1-11, ‘Sua er oc staðfastlega tekit innan hirðar af ollum hanðgengnum monnum með konongs forsio oc raðe at i huerium jolom skal alla hirðskra upp lesa ollum hanðgengnom monnum þa þagha sem kononge þickir til fallet oc hann laetr hanðgengnom monnum til blasa … En huer hanðgengin maðr sem ei komr til þessa tals oc er hann innan bœar þa hever han firigort þionostu sinni nema hann have konongs orlof til þui at værða kann at hann nytí æinar hueriair sunnûr til þeis sem eigi se viðræumelegre ne nytisamlegre en til þessa.’; Translation my own. The sole English translation for the text only covers chapters 1-37, hence the use of my own translation here.

Conclusion

Through an investigation of *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*, and their dissemination of courtly culture towards the king’s *hirð*, this article has undertaken an evaluation of the didactic forms of the two texts, and sought to show that they differ in the methods applied to achieve the same ultimate goal of subordination and behavioral chance. This examination supports the claim that a voluntary social change in etiquette and attitude was engineered by an appeal to the king’s liegemen’s desire for self-advancement. Both texts take a two-part approach in this objective. Firstly, they aim to sophisticate the *hirð* through establishing a new social etiquette inspired by the courts of the European mainland, in order to bring more control and civility to his liegemen. A second objective was the isolation of these men by facilitating a further societal division, which would spatially centralise the aristocracy around the king, consolidating his power over his *hirðmenn*.

The didactic qualities of the two texts also differ from each other, but are still in the pursuit of the same outcome. *Konungs skuggsjá* has a persuasive approach and aims to guide its audience to change their ways voluntarily. It appeals to one’s desire for self-advancement, teaching that the adoption of courtly and virtuous behavior is what leads to promotion within the ranks. It almost never pushes, or demands any change – it merely embraces a didactic technique that aims to teach rather than demand social and behavioral improvements. *Hirðskrá*, however, is more direct in its didactics. It retains a suggestive form when discussing maxims of morality, but with any discussion of duty its tone changes to being firm and uncompromising. *Konungs skuggsjá* aims to bring a shift away from the old system of local aristocrats who opted to reside in their own lands, and primarily look after their own interests. Subsequently, the higher echelons of society began to condense into an insular sect, which can be seen even more clearly in *Hirðskrá*, emphasising the noble ideal of serving the king. All men had the duty to serve their king, and those who excelled in their service gained honour and prestige amongst their peers. Those who could serve yet opted not to were no better than peasants in lack of ambition and self-advancement. *Hirðskrá* reaffirmed and upheld the efforts of *Konungs skuggsjá*, maintaining its ideals and political thought but in a legislative manner. The aristocracy had now become a more homogenous, courtly group, beginning to condense under the king. This change led to the ability to place stricter rules and regulations on them, resulting in *Hirðskrá*’s more direct tone. It aimed to more firmly establish this isolated sphere which contained the Norwegian courtiers. Both
texts, though they have fundamental differences, were employed in similar ways to ultimate work towards the same goal, proved to be invaluable tools in the process of educating and isolating the royal hird.

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Exemplifying Byzantine Otherness: Historiographical Trends in Fourth Crusade Scholarship

Alex Johnson

Abstract
The historiography of Byzantine history and culture contains myriad topics of interest to historians. The historiography of the Fourth Crusade in particular deserves attention, as it highlights the origins of Byzantine studies. As a discipline, the study of Byzantium has not been analyzed in terms of the profoundly negative perceptions of the Byzantine state that were shaped by its early historians. In this essay, I examine a centuries-long swath of Byzantine historiography relating to the Fourth Crusade, the defining event in the thirteenth century in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, I argue that Enlightenment-era philosophes aped Crusader narratives to shape their histories, thereby distorting perceptions of the Byzantines; these biases would trickle down in many pervasive forms into the Western historiography of the Eastern Romans. I also analyze the relevant primary sources with a particular focus on how these shaped the metanarratives of later historiography. While the historians who studied the Fourth Crusade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made monumental leaps forward in the professionalization and perfection of methodologies of history, their tainted portrayal of the Byzantines as cowardly Oriental theocrats led to a turn towards objective and empirical histories of the event beginning in the nineteenth century as well as corresponding pro-Byzantine backlash dynamic in the twentieth century. The damage done to the popular vision of Byzantine identity and the study of Byzantium by Edward Gibbon, Voltaire, and Montesquieu is still being undone today.

Introduction: Byzantines, Greeks, and Orientals
In 1994, as the Iron Curtain began to lift from Eastern Europe, Belgian statesman Willy Claes decried the “Byzantine influence” and “Oriental worldview” of Balkan states, noting that the latent, backward mindset of the people inhabiting formerly Byzantine land was a more fertile ground for the spread of Communism. Indeed, in Europe today, “‘Byzantine’ and ‘Oriental’ are
still regurgitated as metaphorical synonyms.”¹ Historian Dimiter Angelov discusses the “harsh judgements” that are still being doled out by modern academics on this long-dead civilization, and the neologism “Byzantinism” is bandied around as shorthand for complex autocracy and bureaucratic theocracy, just as the adjective “byzantine” has become a pejorative adjective to mean complicated or obtuse.² What processes allowed the heir of Rome—the Byzantine state—to become something apart, something other, something alien, from the rest of Europe?

I respond to the call put forward by Anthony Kaldellis in his most recent monograph, *The Byzantine Republic*, to study the study of Byzantium.³ My inquiry covers the scholarship of one critical incident that shaped the Byzantine state: the Fourth Crusade. Indeed, the event defined the thirteenth century in the Eastern Mediterranean; against the backdrop of centuries of political and ecclesiastical friction, this controversial crusade provides one of the few examples of an actual armed conflict between Eastern Romans and Western Europeans. Moreover, the scholarship of the Fourth Crusade exemplifies Western attitudes about Byzantium, as authors often took sides corresponding to the parties in the armed conflict. As a result, this historiography is revealing as to the historical biases that informed modern views of the Byzantine state.

Within this study of centuries of historiography, picking out the prejudices of many historians, I group authors thematically instead of chronologically. For example, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Edward Gibbon are included together because their similarly vitriolic views of the Byzantines shaped the later historians—they form an unholy triumvirate. Other historians are grouped along similar lines, though their works may have been composed centuries apart. They share more in terms of their view of the Fourth Crusade than their place in the timeline. Voltaire and other Enlightenment authors created a perception of Byzantium as the “Other” within the frontiers of Europe, both damaging and denigrating the Byzantine state as something non-European and “Oriental.” They generated a two-pronged historiographical backlash. Subsequent generations of

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historians who studied the Fourth Crusade worked to undo the damage done to Byzantine studies as a discipline: Some historians buttressed the conclusions of the philosophers; others blatantly valorized the victims of the crusade. In composing objective histories, others yet effaced the biases of the eighteenth-century authors and sought culpability for the cataclysm.

**Historiography and Philology**

Launching from Venice in 1202 and culminating with the sack of Constantinople in 1204, the Fourth Crusade and its far-reaching consequences provide modern students of Byzantium with a rich historiographical tradition which meanders from the thirteenth century through the Renaissance and Enlightenment and into our own epoch. Authors have long addressed the issues and controversies of the crusade: Did the leaders of the crusading army intend *ab initiō* to sack Constantinople, or was their diversion a product of their circumstances, both material and financial? Debates on various issues related to the crusade have raged for centuries. Did the conquest of Constantinople really make inevitable the end of Byzantine civilization in 1453? How did subsequent authors describe Byzantium, and how did the Fourth Crusade affect their perceptions of the late Roman Empire?

The nomenclature and demonyms of the medieval Roman state are especially thorny, and, consequently, discussions of exonyms, endonyms, and philology will occupy a significant portion of this examination of the historiography of the Fourth Crusade. The widely accepted term today for the monarchical phase of the Roman state is Byzantium, based on the Greek word for the city that existed on the site before Constantine rededicated it as Constantinople, but even this term is an exonym applied in the 1500s by a German Hellenist.4 “Byzantines” would not have recognized that term during the long life of the empire. While many use the term “Greek empire” to describe Byzantium in both academic publications and in contemporary popular works, this term is a maladroit exonym applied by Latin-speaking Romans to all Greek-speaking Hellenes after the Romans encountered a small community called the Graikoi in Italy. It is not a term Greek-speaking Romans used; however, dubbing Eastern Romans “Greeks” is commonplace in popular publications and in academic works today.5 Every linguistic community

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employs exonyms to some extent, but in the case of the Eastern Romans, the clumsy exonym comes to define them as something “Other” compared to Western Europe, orientalizing them and alienating them from “true” heirs of the Roman tradition, and refusing to accept their identity as Romans. As is common among authors in the field, I will alternate between “Roman,” “Eastern Roman,” and “Byzantine” to describe the people and their state. I use these terms because the people in question would have called themselves Romans, and because scholars today have adopted Byzantine and Eastern Roman as acceptable exonyms.

It is clear that eight hundred years of distance makes the number of secondary sources on the crusade daunting; I have chosen relevant sources that speak to the event itself and enlighten us on how Byzantium was made into the “Other” by scholars studying the Empire and the Fourth Crusade in particular. Given limitations of space and time, I have necessarily omitted historiographical sources that deserve their own study and consideration, such as the literature and novels of the Fourth Crusade, the material history and relics that were taken to Western Europe, and the rich tradition of the artwork depicting the sack of Constantinople.

What is lost in the academic attempt to remain clinically objective and study the historiography on the Fourth Crusade are the tragedies, both in terms of human lives lost and cultural patrimony destroyed. An unknown number of Constantinopolitans were left homeless due to the sack of the city and the subsequent fires that raged therein. Countless Eastern Orthodox holy relics and treasures of the state were either melted down into coinage or stolen and taken to Western Europe, and the Byzantine state was splintered and hobbled, unable to retake its capital until 1261.

**The Doomed Crusade: A Brief History**

Departing Italy, the mostly Frankish and Belgian fighters of the Fourth Crusade cut a sanguineous swath through the Balkans, sacking the Dalmatian Christian city of Zara, and landed outside the walls of Constantinople, the great city of the Byzantine Empire. Whereas previous crusades had been led by kings and high courtiers, the Fourth Crusade was led by minor lords such as the nonagenarian Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo, who had provided the crusaders ships and provisions. The crusade’s leaders had expected many more fighters to come on the quest.
and, consequently, were significantly indebted to the Venetians when their host was smaller than expected. The intricate dynastic politics of the Angeloi princes and emperors certainly encouraged the Crusaders to divert to Constantinople; Isaakos II Angelos had been deposed by his brother Alexios III in 1195, and he and his son, Alexios IV, were subsequently imprisoned. Alexios IV, who was eventually freed and taken to Germany, met with the Crusaders, and convinced them to return him to the throne of Byzantium with promises of money and supplies for their crusade.

Lured by the promises of Alexios and having encountered financial troubles right from the start, the crusaders bivouacked outside the walls of Constantinople and awaited their payments. Alexios III fled after the Crusader Army attacked the city, and Alexios IV and Isaakos II were installed as co-rulers. Shortly thereafter, they appointed Alexios Doukas to serve as an emissary to the Crusaders; Doukas, seeing the dissatisfaction of the citizens of Constantinople, seized the opportunity and imprisoned Alexios IV and Isaakos, crowning himself Alexios V and ruling as emperor.

Constantinople had endured and even repelled sieges from far larger hosts before the Fourth Crusade, and the walls of the city had proved inviolate since the time of Constantine. When the Crusader siege finally broke the city’s defenses in April 1204, the acts of carnage and brutality committed against Eastern Christians and their city were widespread and indiscriminate. According to Robert de Clari, as discussed below, the conquerors were beyond amazed at the wealth, size, and splendor of the city, which was both one of the last living links to antiquity and a veritable museum of the achievements of Western civilization. After the Byzantine rout, Baldwin of Flanders was installed as ruler of the new Latin Empire.

“Supramundane Wonder:” The Primary Sources

The historians who have taken up the study of the Fourth Crusade have all drunk from, in one way or another, the same font of primary sources. There are a number of extant accounts from all sides of the conflict, and it behooves this study to briefly examine them and their divergent recounting of the history. These sources would come to inform the narratives of the historians writing centuries after the Fourth Crusade. My focus is on how the historiography turned against...
Byzantium and the Roman identity of the Byzantine state, and consequently, the primary sources play a smaller role compared to the secondary material.

The most complete Roman perspective is that of Niketas Choniates (ca. 1155 – 1217), a Byzantine historian and senator who served in a number of appointed positions in the Thracian poleis and in Constantinople. Synthesizing classical and Christian culture, Choniates was vividly Byzantine: a medieval polymath steeped in the classical works of the Graeco-Roman tradition, his annals, written after 1207, contain allusions to Homer, are filled with ancient anachronisms, and make frequent references to Scripture. Choniates was actually in Constantinople at the time of the crusaders’ sack of the city, and his is a lucid firsthand account of the rapine, plunder, and excesses of the Franks and Venetians. Choniates’ history is distinctly a product of his positions as a Roman of high status, one made homeless by the crusade, and as a statesman who watched the destruction of the Queen of Cities. Many later historians would lift passages liberally from Choniates, and most came to rely on him in one way or another.

It is difficult, even eight centuries after the pillaging of the great city, not to be stirred by Choniates’ lament: “O City, City, eye of all cities, universal boast, supramundane wonder […] What jealous and relentless avenging demons have made a riotous assault upon you in wild revel?" Choniates also evokes the hypocrisy of the Latins as killers of Christians, contrasting their rapine with the benevolent treatment that Christians received from Muslims when they retook parts of the Crusader States.

The most useful extant Frankish sources are from fortuitously different men: one comes from nobleman Geffroi de Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne, a leader of the Fourth Crusade, and the other, that of Robert de Clari, provides a common soldier’s account. Villehardouin plays the foil to Choniates—he was a Frankish apologist who participated in the battles at Zara and Constantinople. Villehardouin describes the Byzantines as “Greeks,” contrasted with the crusaders, whom he describes as “pilgrims.” While the Frankish Marshal omits any description of the wanton violence against the Byzantines, he does describe the mass plunder of Roman property. “Of the treasure that was found in that palace I cannot speak,” he writes, “for there was

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so much that it was beyond end of counting.” Both Franks write that Catholic clergy traveling with the pilgrims allowed the crusaders to attack the “strongest city in all the world” because the Byzantines had “withdrawn themselves from obedience to Rome.” Clari, perhaps having been influenced by Catholic clerics, calls the “Greeks” disloyal and “worse than Jews.” He describes at length, after the conquest of the city, the inexhaustible and unbelievable wealth and mystical marvels of Constantinople: “Nor do I think, myself, that in the forty richest cities of the world there had been so much wealth as was found in Constantinople.”

The Turn of the Philosophe: Declamations and Miracles

Voltaire, Montesquieu, and other philosophes who propelled the Enlightenment forward often took up the Fourth Crusade as an element of their study of the Romans. As their government underwent changes around them, the thinkers looked back to Rome to examine the failures and successes of that state. The way they wrote about the Fourth Crusade, including their use of primary source material, altered the discipline of history by removing God as the primary agent of progress, and replacing Him with the acts and motivations of humans. By searching for motive and meaning of the historical actors themselves, the philosophes sought to understand the impact of humans on history. Moreover, the association of Byzantine kingship with Louis XIV was a key factor that soured the perspective of the philosophes on topics Byzantine.

Voltaire, guided by his zeal for reason and his skepticism of organized religion, describes the Byzantines and their achievements in florid language, offering both praise and scorn simultaneously—with the emphasis on the latter. In his 1769 essay “Le Pyrrhonisme de l’histoire,” Voltaire discusses the writing of Roman history after Tacitus, lamenting its lack of objectivity, and more subtly, the influence of Christianity on Roman historiography. Voltaire writes, “There is another history even more ridiculous: that is Byzantine history. This unworthy

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8 Ibid., pp. 56, 65.
10 Ibid., p. 101.
11 I will use the term philosophe, from the French for “philosopher,” to refer to Voltaire and Montesquieu. Their roles as philosophers who used history to advance their vision of the world makes them neither historians as we will come to understand them, nor fully philosophers in the Attic sense.
collection contains only declamations and miracles: it is the disgrace of the human mind, just as
the Greek empire was the reproach of the earth.”

This passage, dripping with disdain, sums up Voltaire’s vision of Byzantium, which would affect the scholars who wrote after him.

Of note are several philological points. Voltaire does not recognize the Romans on their own
terms: he refers to their history as “Byzantine” and their state as “Greek.” This is significant to
the story of trends in Byzantine historiography, because the people living in the “Greek empire”
fully identified as Romans in the ancient tradition, calling themselves Romans, living under a
King of the Romans, and speaking the common language of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Choniates, whom Voltaire had clearly read, even made an ironic quip about his countrymen
being erroneously called “Greek,” (τὸν Γραικὸν) by the Latins. To the Byzantines, this term
was a clumsy and maladroit exonym. In another work, Voltaire admits that these people called
themselves Romans and not Greeks, but he refuses to use their own endonym and engage with
them on their own terms.

Voltaire addresses the crusades in detail in his multi-volume work “Essai sur les mœurs, et
l’esprit des nations.” Voltaire constantly revised and tweaked the text up until his death in 1778.
In it, he attempts to offer an impartial vision of the history of Europe and the Near East from the
reign of Charlemagne until the reign of Louis XIV. He relies on primary sources to recount the
history of the Fourth Crusade, a model that would be taken up by later historians, including
Edward Gibbon.

In recounting the actual history of the crusade and the siege of Constantinople, Voltaire draws
heavily from Choniates’ account, and even recounts a detailed passage of a harlot singing sordid
songs on the patriarchal chair in the Hagia Sophia. In his reproduction of Choniates’ account,
the man of the Enlightenment is repeating as fact the history of the Roman courtier and imperial

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13 Choniates, O City of Byzantium, p. 316.
14 Choniates, O City of Byzantium, p. 316.
16 Ibid., 116. Many scholars picked up on Choniates’ salacious tale, perhaps to paint a more vivid picture of the conquest of the city, or to add some authentic Byzantine hues to their histories.
historian while also applying the lens of Enlightenment reason and skepticism. Voltaire’s text is deeply critical of the actions of the crusaders, saying that, “These men of the cross, [...] ruined their Christian brothers,” and it acknowledges that “Constantinople was something other than Jerusalem.” In the latter quotation, Voltaire seems to argue that the goal of the crusading expedition was not intended to be reaching Constantinople, but rather that the warriors were diverted there; he later suggests that perhaps the tangled web of the dynastic struggles of the Angeloi enticed the crusaders. In his quest to untangle the many webs of history, Voltaire attributes the actions of historical figures to the human condition and some of its less savory elements, including greed and lust.

Additionally, in accordance with the Enlightenment zeitgeist of the eighteenth century, Voltaire vigorously questions the particular details of the Fourth Crusade and of sources like Choniates. He even brings into doubt the use of Greek Fire in the crusader siege of Constantinople. One wonders if perhaps he doubted its veracity or that it ever existed—after all, how could an empire capable of only profane declamations and miracles master this technology that brought other armies to their knees? Voltaire writes of the fire, “If it was real, as has been said, it would have assured [Roman] victory,” comparing it to the phosphorus that was used in his own time. To follow Voltaire’s logic, because the Constantinopolitans were conquered by the Latins, one of their primary military technologies must not have actually existed. Voltaire’s histories of the Fourth Crusade and his caustic portrayal of the Byzantines were caught up in the larger Enlightenment milieu of anti-clericalism and vigorous rational inquiry; to him, the Romans of Late Antiquity and especially the Byzantines of the Middle Ages were simply too ecclesiastical and too unlike the Classical Romans he admired.

Montesquieu, another prominent French thinker writing in the early eighteenth century, studied Rome from its republican epoch to the fall of Constantinople in 1453 in his 1734 work *Considerations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains, et de leur decadence*. In this wide-ranging work Montesquieu synthesized his Enlightenment philosophy and presented his

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17 Ibid., p. 117.
18 Ibid., p. 115.
19 Ibid., p. 116.
vision of government as well as his understanding of Roman history, including his thoughts on the Fourth Crusade.

Montesquieu’s vitriolic view of the Byzantines is especially relevant for this study: he blames the “feebleness of the mind” of the Eastern Romans for their defeat, and identifies their religion and monastic tradition as key elements of the fall of the empire. Like Voltaire, he regularly denigrates the Eastern Romans as “Greek” and views their state as a fallen Rome, a lesser Rome. “Greek” can be read in this context as a coded attack against the Byzantines.

Montesquieu describes the result of the Fourth Crusade as an inevitability, given primarily the lust for war among the Western Europeans and the Venetian hatred towards Constantinople. In addition, Montesquieu’s philosophy of history turns away not only from God, but also individuals, as agents. He writes that throughout history, general causes and movements affected kings and nations more than the acts of individuals. This may be familiar to the modern reader as a notion of “progress,” the teleological sense that history is moving in a particular direction—that things follow a certain linear path towards a particular end.

For these eighteenth-century historians, the correlation of Byzantine kings with the autocracy of France’s Louis XIV was clear. In seventeenth-century France, a renewed interest in Byzantium resulted in the printing of many imperial Byzantine texts and histories—some of which were ordered to be printed by the royal court. Louis XIV may have studied Eastern Roman kings as he expanded his own power in and over the state. For authors concerned with freedom and the role of the state, this association mattered.

Both Montesquieu and Voltaire are representative of the Enlightenment view of the Fourth Crusade and Byzantium: an inferior Roman state, a feeble-minded ecclesiastical autocracy and, most importantly, a “Greek” state that was more alien than European, more foreign than familiar. Though they largely viewed the Fourth Crusade negatively, they were less inclined to criticize

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21 Ibid., p. 475.

22 Ibid., p. 378-379.

23 Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, p. 3.
the crusaders themselves than the people whom they conquered. Ultimately, the ways in which each historian wrote about the Fourth Crusade are similar. Each looked down on the Romans, and by calling them “Greek,” they redefined their identity as something distinctly non-Roman and something other than Western European.

**Edward Gibbon: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**
Edward Gibbon’s 1776 *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a canonical work still studied today, and its importance to the modern study of Rome cannot be overstated. Writing three centuries after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, Gibbon traces Roman history from early on in the empire (98 CE) until the final conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans. His work, which builds on the Enlightenment tradition of objective, primary source-driven history, was a leap forward for the profession of history—indeed, his methods make him one of the first true modern historians of Rome. Gibbon’s prose is exhaustive, thoroughly researched, and his language is precise. His conclusions, however, are often reductive and unabashedly anti-Byzantine. Naturally, in any work with such remarkable breadth a historian is wont to gloss over certain details of history or to lapse into his or her particular biases. Because his work would become so iconic and widely-read, Gibbon’s obvious bias tainted the study of Byzantium for the following centuries.

Gibbon lavishes praise on the chief Venetian of the Fourth Crusade, Doge Dandolo. He writes that Dandolo was “one of the most illustrious characters of his times.”


25 Ibid., pp. 1104, 1112.
In discussing how a “great empire” could be brought to its knees by Franks and Venetians, Gibbon suggests that the Byzantines were “an unwarlike people, […] subject to the will of a single man.”

Gibbon’s assertion of the absolutism of the Byzantine basileia and the weakness and cowardice of its people would be common themes in later scholarship, though each fallacy has been conclusively disproven by modern scholars, the former most recently and thoroughly by Kaldellis.

Finally, Gibbon questions the account of the battle as recorded by Choniates. “The streams of blood that flow down the pages of Nicetas [sic.] may be reduced to the slaughter of two thousand of his unresisting countrymen.” While Gibbon is justly praised for respecting primary sources, his questioning of Choniates seems especially strange, given that this Byzantine was actually in Constantinople and saw the events firsthand. Perhaps Gibbon was so profoundly anti-Byzantine that he refused to see Choniates’s history as containing any truth.

Gibbon echoes the philosophes who had come before him in calling the conquered Romans both “Greeks” as well as “Orientals.” The latter term is of particular interest, given the baggage that it would acquire in the following centuries. By terming the Romans Orientals, Gibbon tried to conclusively separate the Byzantines from their European and Roman origins, and to denigrate their state, for which, as is clear from his prose, he had little respect. No Oriental state could be an heir of the Roman tradition that Gibbon admired. Indeed, an Oriental state would be more Asiatic and more barbaric than Roman.

Gibbon offers one solitary teardrop for the Byzantines conquered by the Fourth Crusade. As an historian who was well-steeped in the classics, Gibbon lamented the destruction of an unknowable number of ancient manuscripts and papyri in the sack of the city, perhaps including fragments from the Library at Alexandria: “We may drop a tear over the libraries that have perished in the triple fire of Constantinople.”

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26 Ibid., p. 1102.
27 I use Kaldellis’ definitions of the basileia as the official apparatus of state, including the kingship, court, and the imperial office, contrasted with the politeia, the Byzantine political community, and everything that contributes to the common good of the state, tā koivá. For definitions of these terms, see Kaldellis, The Byzantine Republic, pp. 32, 93.
28 Gibbon, The Decline and Fall, p. 1113.
29 Ibid., p. 1119.
posits several plausible reasons in an attempt to explain Gibbon’s bias. Runciman notes that Gibbon chose to use only a small number of available Byzantine primary sources, and that at the time his work was written, many more sources were available from printers across the continent—Gibbon either did not know about some of the texts, including several military histories that would have dispelled his notion of “unwarlike” Byzantines, or he chose not to read and translate those texts. Moreover, Runciman states that the author’s grasp of medieval Greek was weak compared to his ability to read Latin, and as a result Gibbon may have glossed over Greek texts or even used shoddy translations of the originals.30

In the end, Gibbon’s Decline and Fall, particularly chapter LX on the Fourth Crusade, perpetuates an anti-Byzantine trend in scholarship that has persisted in some form up to our own time. His vision of the Eastern Romans as unwarlike, autocratic Orientals separates them from their legitimate Roman heritage, and praised their conquerors as bold and noble, almost romantic European knights. In a sense, Gibbon reinforces the themes of Villehardouin and Clari’s triumphalist, apologist accounts of the Fourth Crusade, praising them while simultaneously anathematizing the account of Choniates.

The Byzantinist Backlash: Crimes Against Humanity

In the twentieth century, long after Gibbon and his contemporaries had taken their turns attacking the Byzantines, the historiography of the Fourth Crusade began to shift in the direction of pro-Byzantine sentiments. While these historians, such as Steven Runciman and Spyros Vryonis, were celebrated academics and authors, their conclusions were just as biased as Gibbon and the philosophes, albeit in a different direction.

Runciman, a prolific author on topics medieval and Byzantine, penned a multi-volume work on the crusades, with particular attention to the Fourth Crusade, in 1954. This work addresses the crusade in detail, and Runciman’s accounts of the history are nuanced. Runciman explains that the Byzantine palace and dynastic disputes enraged the crusaders, who had expected to enter in Constantinople without resistance, and that the Venetians had always wanted to attack the city.31


By suggesting that the Venetians were the antagonists and that the French knights simply went along with their paymasters, Runciman places blame for the sack of the city on the Venetians—though when it came to the actual seizure of Byzantine property and the indiscriminate acts of violence, he blames the Franks, as they were “filled with a lust for destruction.” For most of his text, Runciman remains objective and recounts the history as it was written in the primary sources; he uses Choniates, Villehardouin, Clari, and others, including the papal communications of Innocent III. Runciman wrote with an unrivaled dramatic flair that suited his hybrid academic/popular audience. But after having described the actual battle for Constantinople, Runciman sheds his mantle of objectivity and began to write as an apologist for the Eastern Romans.

Runciman writes, “There was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade.” This statement seems indefensible and bizarre, given that by the 1950s, the world knew the extent of the Holocaust. While the brutal, unjustified sack of Constantinople was undoubtedly a tragedy for civilization, it on no level parallels the crimes against humanity that had occurred during Runciman’s lifetime just a few years before this passage was published. Runciman’s scholarship can be credited for sparking a renewed academic and popular interest in the Fourth Crusade as well as sympathizing with the vanquished Constantinopolitans, who had not had their own voice in history after Choniates. However, his clear bias in favor of the Byzantines and against the crusading forces seems to lessen the value of his text.

Another Byzantinist who contributed to the Byzantine apologist backlash against older historiography is Speros Vryonis, a decorated academic and lifelong professor of the history of the Balkans and the Near East. While not reacting specifically to Gibbon or Voltaire, his work typifies the mentality that Runciman and others advanced; Vryonis and Runciman reacted to the climate of anti-Byzantinism with similarly strong rhetoric. Vryonis’s 1967 text Byzantium and Europe is a taut volume that touches on the Fourth Crusade, which he sees as directly causing the decline of Byzantine civilization. Like Runciman, Vryonis contrasts vivid language to recount the sack of the city with otherwise consistent objectivity. Before discussing the crusade, he

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32 Ibid., p. 123.
33 Ibid., p. 130.
recounts the dynastic struggles of the Angeloi and uses Byzantine poetry and chroniclers to describe the difficulties that had befallen the empire in the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{34}

He writes of the crusader conquest of the city, “The Latin soldiery subjected the greatest city in Europe to an indescribable sack. For three days they murdered, raped, looted and destroyed on a scale which even the ancient Vandals and Goths would have found unbelievable.”\textsuperscript{35} Vryonis’ portrayal of the Venetians is also of note, because he sees them as having harnessed the Frankish crusaders and used them to sack Zara for commercial purposes. Moreover, he argues that the Venetians “cleverly exploited” the situation in which the Byzantine Empire found itself as the crusade loomed.\textsuperscript{36} This portrayal of the Venetians and their leader as cunning and conniving would be picked up and scrutinized by future authors seeking to place blame for the crusade.

Vryonis, as a product of his times, reflects a Greek-cum-American perspective. During his lifetime, Greece was occupied by the Nazis, underwent several coups and revolutions, and ultimately established a stable republic. The author may have written so forcefully because he was defending his sense of Hellenic heritage as a modern Greek-American. His emotion and passion in describing the sack are clear, and this is perhaps a result of a sense of a shared Greek history with Byzantium, or that Byzantine history was a part of Greek national history and character.\textsuperscript{37} In a sense, the Byzantinists who so ferociously condemned the Fourth Crusade were as guilty as Gibbon and Voltaire for their exaggerated conclusions about the result of the events. Whereas Gibbon had valorized the crusaders and praised the bravery of the men who put the city of Constantine to the sword, the Byzantinists who wrote in the twentieth century valorized the victims of the crusade—each side deserved a fair, impartial treatment which they had not yet received in the historiography.

**The Dawn of Empiricism**

Fortunately, other historians of the crusades, writing just after Gibbon’s epoch, were more inspired by his methodology of primary source-driven history than by his spurious conclusions.

\textsuperscript{34} Speros Vryonis, *Byzantium and Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp. 149-150.

\textsuperscript{35} Vryonis, *Byzantium and Europe*, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 151.

\textsuperscript{37} Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, p. 11.
and curious biases. Charles Mills, an English author and a student of Gibbon, studied the Fourth Crusade in detail, writing in the early part of the nineteenth century. His two-volume work, *The History of the Crusades for the Recovery and Possession of the Holy Land*, is a triumph of objective history and achieves what Gibbon could not when it came to Byzantine subjects. Historians such as Mills and Edwin Pears I classify as empiricists because they used Gibbon’s methodology without repeating the prejudice he espoused. Writing in 1821, Mills sought to discern the motives of the players involved in the Fourth Crusade in a way that had not been done in previous texts. Of the Venetians, Mills suggests that their motives were primarily economic and commercial. And indeed, the Venetians used the crusader force, which was heavily indebted to their Italian paymasters, to sack Zara, a trading rival. In addition, Mills suggests that by conquering Constantinople and installing an ally as the emperor there, the Venetians were attempting to secure their trading routes along the Euxine—this effort to discern the motives of the crusaders set the empiricists like Mills apart from their predecessors.

When describing the siege of the city and the subsequent sack, Mills was capable, unlike Gibbon, of detailing both the bravery of the Latin soldiery in battle while simultaneously recognizing the brutality and cruelty unleashed on Constantinople once the gates had been smitten asunder. Further, Mills separates blame for the violence and destruction wrought by the Latin army; he claims the Franks were responsible for the lion’s share of the violence and sexual assaults, whereas the “more refined Venetians were satisfied with the milder crime of robbery.” As a student of Gibbon, Mills repeats the claim that only around 2,000 Constantinopolitans were killed as a result of the sack of the city.

In an important philological development, Mills also recognizes the Byzantines as Romans, or at least as the heirs of Rome. He describes the coronation of Baldwin of Flanders as investing “a barbarian with the Roman purple.” Whether the purple (the traditional color of the Byzantine imperial raiment and the *akakia*, a ceremonial object filled with ashes and held by the emperor during processions) was intended to refer to the transference of the Byzantine *basileia* to

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39 Ibid., p. 142.
40 Ibid., p. 142.
Baldwin or to the continuity of authority from Rome to Constantinople to the Latin Empire is unclear, but at the very least, Mills recognizes that which the Byzantines knew to be true—that theirs was a fully, inherently Roman, identity. Finally, after detailing the art, icons, and treasures lost in the looting of Constantinople, Mills closes his balanced history with an ode to soothe the pain that still lingered four centuries after the Fourth Crusade. He writes:

The misfortunes of a city may be repaired by future prosperity; the disgrace of defeat may be effaced by subsequent glory; and the sympathy of after ages for the demolition of edifices, and the waste of property, is softened by the reflection, that the tomb has long since closed upon the sufferers.  

Like Mills, English jurist and author Edwin Pears also recognized the important distinction in Byzantine identity, calling the state a “Greek-speaking Roman empire.” Pears lived in Constantinople for much of his life and published his treatise on the Fourth Crusade in 1886, just as the nascent academic discipline of history began to assert itself in the universities around the world. Using the analytical techniques of a barrister and the methods of an historian, Pears sought to “call attention to the political aspect of the conquest of Constantinople.” Pears set up his narrative to explain the irony of the Latin crusaders sacking Constantinople, as the Byzantines had restrained the Turkish and other “Asiatic” forces from entering Europe. Like other authors, Pears saw the fall of Byzantium in the fifteenth century as directly attributable to the actions of the crusaders.

Pears’s detailed history of the diversion, the siege of the city, and the sack of the city are not extraordinarily different from any other author. What matters for this historiographical inquiry is his unusual attempt to repudiate centuries of historiographical tradition. Just as Mills recognized the Byzantines as Romans, Pears actually recognized his own bias as well as the flaws of the historians who had come before him. Pears writes, “As the descendants of peoples who acknowledged the rule of the Latin church, we have taken our ideas and our prejudices from our
fathers, and are in this sense all of us the sons of the Crusaders.” He goes on to describe how an anti-Byzantine mindset had long been cultivated in Western European academe and in Western culture more broadly, writing, “Western Europe has been only too ready to find evidence of the corruption and effeminacy of the Eastern capital, to recognize that Asiatic influences had lessened the vigor which had characterized its government during the centuries preceding the Crusade.”

Pears’s perspective is that of a foreigner living in Constantinople, which had been an Ottoman city for over 400 years. During his life, the “Eastern Question” had occupied the minds of the Western European intelligentsia—indeed, Pears lived through the drama of the Crimean War, the turbulent Russo-Ottoman relations in the later 1800s, and the dramatic reshaping of the Balkan states, formerly Byzantine territory. It is not difficult to see why Pears would place blame on the warriors of the Fourth Crusade for having hobbled Byzantium to the point of its destruction, as, in his view, the Romans had served as a bulwark to prevent “Asiatic influences” and “barbarism” from spilling into Europe.

Building on the precedent established by the nineteenth-century empiricists, George Ostrogorsky, a Russian-born academic who taught Byzantine studies in Serbia in the mid-twentieth century, sought to outline and explore the internal developments of the Byzantine state during its millennium. Consequently, his history of the Fourth Crusade occupies only a small portion of his monumental work, but its perspective is one that deserves inclusion. Ostrogorsky takes a long view of the subject, examining the policies of Byzantine rulers vis-à-vis Venice and blames these, in part, for the Italians being enticed to lead the crusade. According to him, Venice sought to control the throne of the empire in order to cement its economic advantage and its trade supremacy because Venice had been given a maritime trade monopoly by the Roman emperors, which also explains the attack on Zara. Ostrogorsky paints a picture of Dandolo as a cunning politician who was the “mainspring of the whole undertaking,” and who wanted to ensure the economic surety of his republican lagoon.

44 Ibid., p. 410.
46 Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, p. 413.
This emphasis on the internal politics of Byzantium also led Ostrogorsky to the conclusion that the result of the Fourth Crusade was an inevitability, after the Great Schism with Rome and after years of hostility that had pent up during the earlier crusades. He explains that, faced with centuries of tension and more recent hostility around the crusades, “Western hatred turned to thoughts of conquest.” Ostrogorsky gave only a fleeting account of the sack of the city, but his study of Constantinopolitan court politics and policy regarding Western Europeans and his conclusion that these decisions led to Western animosity and a zeal for conquest set him apart as an historian of the Fourth Crusade. Instead of recounting the history as recorded by Choniates and the Villehardouin, Ostrogorsky researched the breadth of history that led up to the Fourth Crusade and based his reasoning on this evidence. Ostrogorsky, echoing the academic movements afoot in Europe in the postwar world, embraces the longue durée understanding of the Fourth Crusade.

In the 1980s, a prolific English popular historian aimed his gaze to the East. In three bestselling volumes, Sir John Julius Norwich studied Byzantium from the dedication of Constantinople in 330 to the fall of the city in 1453. Among his wide range of subjects was the Fourth Crusade. Norwich’s clear, dramatic, narrative prose and attention to detail make his popular history an interesting addition to the scholarship of this keystone event. For Norwich, the impetus of the sack of Constantinople was the dynastic dispute of the Angeloi as well as the role of Doge Enrico Dandolo. While other historians had discussed the various leaders of the Fourth Crusade, Norwich clearly centers his narrative on Dandolo himself, identifying him as the expedition’s leader, primum mobile, and conniving architect. Whereas Gibbon had praised him and others had decried him, Norwich tried to study Dandolo objectively to discern his motives and his remarkable role in the conquest of Constantinople.

Dandolo, likely 96 years old when the crusaders arrived at Constantinople in 1203, personally led the van of the Venetians and even planted the banner of Saint Mark beneath the walls of the city, according to Norwich. Norwich centers Dandolo in his work by arguing that his presence with the crusading army was “the key to it all,” asserting that he directed the particulars of the

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siege of the city as well as the politics of the Latin Empire, including an attempt to secure Venetian power over Constantinople and the region.\(^49\) Norwich also sought not to place blame for the destruction of the crusade but rather to identify the culprits and the leading figures who had enabled the crusade. Unlike some of the previous historiography, he firmly argues that Venice, and Dandolo in particular, deserved responsibility for the Fourth Crusade: “Just as Venice derived the major advantage from the tragedy, so she and her magnificent old Doge must accept the major responsibility for the havoc they wrought upon the world,” he writes.\(^50\)

The voluminous work of historian Thomas F. Madden will be the final point of the inquiry into the historiography of the Fourth Crusade. Madden has written extensively on the later Byzantine period, Venice, and the crusade. Madden’s 1999 volume *A Concise History of the Crusades* synthesized his existing work on the subject, and presents an overall balanced view of the crusading expedition. The author suggests that the lack of planning and preparation in the beginning of the crusade was the cause of all the maladies. Instead of Ostrogorsky’s “West hates East” model, Madden proposes that, because the Franks had brought so few knights and because they were so poor, from the beginning, the Venetians sought to recoup their investments by way of conquest. According to Madden, “The real blame lay with Villehardouin himself and his fellow envoys, who drastically overestimated the number of crusaders.”\(^51\) As a military historian, Madden also identifies that it would have been nearly impossible to summon an army of 33,500, which was the size planned for by the crusade leaders.

In his other works on the event, Madden uses rarely-seen primary sources to understand the Fourth Crusade from all sides of the conflict. His 2012 article on the Venetian perspective uncovered an historiography that, prior to his work, had largely relied on Dandolo’s letters to Pope Innocent III.\(^52\) Madden used Venetian archival records, estate records, mosaics, and primary source texts to argue that in Venice, the complicated historical memory of the Fourth Crusade had shifted over time, from a simple “good vs. evil” dynamic in the early 1200s to a

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\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 303.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 306.


“multilayered strata of competing narratives” by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{53}

Madden’s methods and conclusions seem to be the end of the arc of historiography that began with Voltaire.

The empiricists strove to write objective histories of the Fourth Crusade, pushing back against the wild biases of their own as well as previous generations. They pioneered a balanced middle path, neither praising the crusaders, as had Gibbon, nor denigrating the Byzantines, as had the \textit{philosophes}, nor describing the conquest as one of the worst crimes ever committed against humanity, as had Runciman. They sought meaning and culpability for the Fourth Crusade, and they tried to identify the responsible party for the devastation of Constantinople. More often than not, the Venetian forces and Doge Enrico Dandolo himself became the target of the empiricists.

\textbf{Conclusion: The Horses of San Marco}

Today, four horses stand guard above the arch of Saint Mark’s Basilica in Venice, solemnly watching over the hustle and bustle of tourists in the Piazza San Marco. They are replicas of original bronze statues, likely of ancient Roman origin from the second or third century, which are protected inside the basilica. This triumphal \textit{quadriga}, a remnant of Byzantine civilization, represents in many ways the tragedies of the Fourth Crusade: the statues were purloined from Constantinople by the Venetians after the conquest of the city, and their ungainly collars disguise where the horses’ heads were removed for transport to Venice. They had graced the Constantinople Hippodrome for perhaps nine hundred years when they were taken.

While Voltaire and Montesquieu pioneered new methods of writing history, their treatment of the Byzantines in the context of the Fourth Crusade was wholly negative because of Byzantine associations with the autocracy of Louis XIV as well as perceived religiosity and doltishness. The eighteenth-century \textit{philosophes} sowed the anti-Byzantine seeds that Gibbon would harvest in his canonical text. Gibbon, for his part, savaged the conquered Byzantines as cowardly, while lavishing praise on the leaders of the Fourth Crusade. The works of these early authors set the tone which later historians had to work to reverse.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 344.
The anti-Byzantine sentiment of Gibbon and the like created a backlash from some, whose conclusions were almost as spurious and exaggerated as the historians whom they tried to refute. Finally, generations of empiricists sought both to bring to light the Roman identity of the conquered Byzantines, and to find those culpable and responsible for the Fourth Crusade, whether the culpable party was Dandolo himself or the Venetians writ large seeking to cement their economic monopoly and secure their trade contracts. Their methods and search for the objective truth of the crusade revealed the tragic elements of the Fourth Crusade without the ostentatious language of those who came before them—and the tragedies of the Fourth Crusade abound.

In the end, the historiography of the Fourth Crusade reveals an important dynamic in the centuries-long study of Byzantium—that early on, the way Byzantium was studied and perceived suffered from misconceptions and outright falsehoods, which, even centuries later, historians are still attempting to repair. While the unfathomable damage done in just a few days by the Venetians, Franks, and their allies can never be repaired, the injustices done to Byzantine studies can be repaired through the writing of tireless, empirical history. Not unlike the horses of the triumphal quadriga, damaged and decapitated and now put back together, the battered reputation of the discipline of Byzantine studies can be refreshed by understanding its origins.

**Alex Johnson**

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“Musterai i mun livre”: Monastery History and Practices of Seeing in Matthew Paris’s *Vie de seint Auban*

Elizabeth Light

Abstract

This paper argues that Matthew Paris’s *Vie de seint Auban* (Life of Saint Alban) creatively reimagines the history of St. Albans abbey as a series of visual encounters. Matthew Paris, the sole author and illustrator of the manuscript (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 177), was in a unique position to control every visual effect of the manuscript’s layout, text, and image. I posit that he embeds hagiography and history into a visual narrative in order to legitimize St. Alban’s monastery’s hold of their namesake’s relics. This paper contextualizes Paris’s Anglo-Norman work in terms of medieval thought on sight and visuality, emphasizing the idea that sight could lead both to deception and to holy knowledge. Through a series of reflections, refractions, and repetitions throughout the *Vie de seint Auban*, Paris links the monastery’s visual culture to its legitimate holding of the St. Albans Cross, which appears multiple times throughout the manuscript. The history of the monastery depends upon the gaze and the desire to gaze upon this holy relic, stained with Alban’s own blood. The narrator at the end of the *Vie* promises to “display in [his] book written on vellum” (musterai i mun livre escrit en veeslin) the tale of St. Alban’s martyrdom. This emphasis on display, the layout and design of the manuscript, and the narrative attention to vision all point to the work’s historiophotic effect: it is a history bound up with the act of seeing, where the act of looking is a pathway to historical truth.

Matthew Paris’s *Vie de seint Auban*, contained in Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 177, shows his attempts to visualize and thereby secure a history for his monastery that would be simultaneously authoritative, sanctified, and memorable to his readers. Paris accomplishes this

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1 I would like to thank Thomas O’Donnell for his generous and helpful feedback on this paper, including access to his unpublished dissertation. Throughout, I use the edition by A.R. Harden, *La Vie de seint Auban*, ANTS 19 (Oxford: ANTS, 1968). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted, and excepting the *titulus* captions, which are translated by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Thelma Fenster in their edition, *The Life of Saint Alban by Matthew Paris*, with *The Passion of St. Alban by William of St. Albans*, trans. Thomas O’Donnell and Margaret Lamont, and *Studies of the Manuscript* by Christopher Baswell, FRETS 2 (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2010).
spectacular combination of effects by appealing to sensual optics and visual elements that are present both in the manuscript’s illustrations, and the textual narrative itself. With Paris as both author and illustrator of the manuscript, we can safely assume a concerted intentionality and design behind the work.\(^2\) His design included a direct effort to produce interplays of meaning between text and context, writing and image.\(^3\) Even deferring the question of intention, though, Paris’s lush illustrations and the cohesiveness of the object’s design would surely have awakened his readers’ visual senses. Drawing together manuscript illustrations and devotional contexts, including hagiographical narrative and monastery history, this paper suggests that the \textit{Vie de seint Auban} allows for this remarkable imbrication of visual and historiographic elements. I posit that the repetitions, reflections, and refractions of image and perspective throughout the manuscript creatively reimagine the history of the St. Albans monastery in its Anglo-Norman cultural context.

The abbey began its intensive revitalization project for Alban’s cult in the later twelfth century, resulting in William of St. Albans’s prose \textit{Passio sancti Albani} and Ralph of Dunstable’s \textit{Life} in Latin verse, on which Paris based his \textit{Vie}.\(^4\) The scant documentation of the abbey’s history before the Conquest, the rivalry between St. Albans and the abbey of Ely about seventy miles to the north, and the evolving exigencies and circumstances of the time all point to the need for St. Albans to authenticate and maintain the cult of its namesake.\(^5\) Ely’s rival claim to the relics could have secured them the reputation as a cult center, with all the cultural and economic benefits of a pilgrimage site, so it was more important than ever for St. Albans to maintain their status as sole holders of the relics; the martyr was said to appear to believers after his bones were officially authenticated.

\(^2\) The debate on Paris’s attribution to both the text and illustrations has been settled. See Richard Vaughan, \textit{Matthew Paris} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 168-76.


\(^5\) Wogan-Browne and Fenster, Introduction, pp. 11-12.
translated there in 1129. After becoming the abbey historian in 1236, Matthew Paris had a clear purpose in imaginatively translating William’s and Ralph’s accounts of Alban’s life and Passion: he was trying to support and secure a history for his monastery that connected it to a pre-Conquest past, which would verify beyond doubt its claim as cult center for the saint. Thelma Fenster and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne emphasize both the political necessity and collective creativity behind the crafting of institutional identity around a single martyr, noting that, after the mid-twelfth century, “the saint was promoted as the first martyr with increasing intensity in wall-paintings, new shrine ornaments, sculptures, metal, woodwork, pilgrim badges, liturgy, and narrative.” Forged charters attesting to the saint’s rightful interment, impressive new shrines, and new documentation of saintly visitation were all methods for revitalizing a saint’s cult. The Anglo-Norman present, then, depended largely on the cooperative inventions of monks, abbots, and artists to authenticate their holding of the martyr’s relics based on a pre-Conquest establishment. This work would secure the abbey a political and economic place in the local community and larger tradition of pilgrimage sites.

Paris works toward his goal of authenticating St. Albans as the proper – and historic – home of the martyr by creating a masterful interplay of visuality and hagiography within the Vie. By examining the connection of visuality to historiography, we can better understand Paris’s method as well as his relationship to his community. As Suzanne Lewis writes, Paris’s innovative engagements with visuality “inject new freshness and vigor into the writing of history,” and it is through this visuality that Paris provides an account of his abbey’s history that protects its parochial independence and establishes it as the center for Alban’s cult. He presents St. Albans as a monastery that not only has a right to its land and relics, but as a place that is deeply linked to the practices of seeing correctly.

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6 Wogan-Browne and Fenster, Introduction, pp. 12-14, esp. n. 31.

7 Suzanne Lewis, The Art of Matthew Paris in the ‘Chronica majora’ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 14. Lewis also writes that Paris revises predecessor Roger Wendover’s “stern moral tone” for history-writing, and instead develops a more “lurid picture” of the history of mankind in his Chronica majora, one that reveals the “folly and crime” alongside moral exemplum and signals to the faithful (12). She argues that Paris takes on an antipapist perspective: “Going back to Bede’s Ecclesiastical History, parochial bias inevitably became involved in setting down a record” (12). Paris’s account is a protection of the abbey’s independence in the face of growing pressure and interference from both the church and the crown.
Textual Layout and Illustration

The manuscript’s layout attests what Cynthia Hahn has called its “almost cinematic” narrative effect. The illustrated pages contain their miniatures (54 in total) usually at the top, framed neatly, with the occasional foot protruding out from or word protruding into the space of the frame. Above the frame is the titulus, an Anglo-Norman rhymed couplet that serves as a sort of caption or summary for the image. In addition to the Anglo-Norman titulus, there is also usually a couplet in Latin at the bottom of the page that describes the picture’s action (see Figure 1, where both titulus and Latin couplet are marked). A few illustrations are extratextual and do not appear in the written narrative; as I explain below, these illustrations challenge simplistic notions of text-image collaboration and complicate our understanding of Paris’s ambitions for the Vie.

Produced in double columns that march gracefully around each illustration, the written text awakens the visual sense, emphasizing at every turn the importance of sight and visual experience. Through narrative descriptions of spectacular conversion and violence, mirrored events, parallels between sight and holy knowledge, and accounts of spying and eyewitnesses, visuality takes center stage in this work. Furthermore, textual references to sight interact with Paris’s illustrations and the material visuality of the manuscript’s layout to create a product that employs the reader’s sense of sight on both physical and intellectual levels in order to revitalize St. Albans as a legitimate home for the cult. Medieval sight was itself linked to legitimacy – for example, many medieval histories and hagiographies use eyewitness testimonials to self-authenticate – and it could even lead to divine understanding, in the sense that vision relies on the individual’s ability to correctly use (as opposed to lasciviously enjoy) the world’s images as pathways to higher insight. Therefore, vision could lead to both historical authenticity and

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8 Cynthia Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart, p. 285.

9 However, as O’Donnell notes, the organization of the manuscript relies somewhat on the unity and order provided by the illustrations. While the Vie’s illustrations generally correspond with the narrated events, O’Donnell points out that the illustrations occurring after the Vie do not always match up with the page’s narration; instead, they create a unifying narrative of their own, telling the story of the foundation of the St. Albans shrine. The pictures, then, enact their own narrative momentum and hagiographical witness to the monastery’s history. See Thomas O’Donnell, “Monastic Literary Culture and Communities in England, 1066-1250” (University of California, Los Angeles: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2009).

10 On the authority associated with vision, as well as the ways in which correct seeing could lead to spiritual insight, see Barbara Newman, “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I Saw’?: The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture,” Speculum 80, no. 1 (2005): 1-43, where she reviews the contexts for medieval visions as spiritual authority, and the ways that sight was associated with the inward experience of God. See also Beth Williamson, “Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence,” Speculum 88,
spiritual knowledge. Paris takes full advantage of these associations, but as we shall see, the *Vie* treats this knowledge as difficult and complexly obtained, even through the seeming directness of sight. More often than not, sight in the *Vie* is refracted, intimate or secret, capitulated through mirror-effects and distortion. Through these techniques, Paris reveals the challenging process by which visual impression becomes the monastery’s historical past.

**The Cross of St. Alban: Cult Artifact, Visual Motif**

The *Vie* begins with a fragment that describes a cross belonging to Amphibalus, an itinerant Christian missionary who arrives in the Roman city of Verulamium, now St. Albans. The cross is unadorned, except for a wooden figure of Christ stretched out upon it, in accordance with descriptions in the Gospels: Christ is “hanged and nailed according to the law for disloyal [traitors]” (*penduz e cloufichez a loi de desloial*), and “down one of his sides streamed blood from his heart” (*avau l’un des costez raa li sanss cural*). The cross reappears at important points throughout the narrative, so it is worth spending a moment exploring its significance to Paris and to the project he undertakes in revitalizing Alban’s cult at his monastery. Paris elsewhere sketches the same cross in the margins of his *Gesta abbatorum*, so its image was evidently on his mind.

The cross’s ability to represent the history of the St. Albans monastery as a physical object and visual symbol has been noted by various scholars, although my argument focuses on the ways the manuscript is constructed around not just this sign, but several others involving visual experience and effect. The cross is only one of many visual devices, including reflection, refraction, gazing, and the rhetoric of seeing within the textual narrative, all of which exhibit the visual grammar of Paris’s work and highlight the particular craft of constructing an institutional past around a single personality. Florence McCulloch writes that the cross’s visual prevalence throughout the illustrations tells us that Paris “wishes to make sure that the viewer does not lose sight of this essential relic,” as its visibility is a response to the manuscript’s multiple important showings, including the invention of Alban’s tomb in 1257 and the visit of Henry III to St.

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*Harden, ed., ll. 6-7. In Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 177 fol.29r.*

Albans later that year. However, Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle describes a Coptic cross that St. Albans acquired under abbot William of Trumpington before Paris’s writing of the Vie, even going so far as to argue for its centrality in inspiring Paris to write the Vie initially. Cynthia Hahn confirms Kjølbye-Biddle’s reading by identifying the cross illustrated in fol. 31r as Paris’s own representation of the abbey’s newest acquisition. In analyzing the cross’s visual representation throughout Paris’s illustrations, McCulloch suggests that Paris may have originally prepared the manuscript to be shown to Henry III, who visited the monastery in 1257. This suggests that Paris uses his drawings and their rubrics as “propaganda” for the monastery’s rightful ownership of Alban’s relics.

By writing a “real-life” artifact into his story, Paris creates a tangible link between the abbey’s Roman past and its Anglo-Norman present. He describes the cross before it actually appears in the story, thus deferring the act of viewing to a future encounter that will result in conversion – a conversion, moreover, that is highly marked by spectacle and various visual encounters. Hahn writes that “the means and manner of perception of this cross becomes the frame and point of departure of the visual narrative” in the Vie. But when it does appear in illustrations, the cross does not feature Christ’s “hanged and nailed” body, but rather is portrayed as a Coptic or ferula-style cross. From the highly physical, particularized appearance of the cross at the beginning of our version of the Vie, and its reappearance throughout the manuscript in varying visual interpretations, Paris highlights both the importance of St. Albans’s Roman history (the plain

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15 Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart, p. 291.
17 O’Donnell argues that Paris writes his institutional monastic history to legitimize Offa’s foundation of St. Albans and his invention of the body around a history of physical objects. See O’Donnell, “Monastic Literary Culture and Communities,” pp. 211-13.
18 Cynthia Hahn notes that the power of this cross to convert on sight was by no means a boilerplate trope: rather, part of Paris’s innovation lies in his revision of earlier medieval ideas about seeing connected to the cross. Rather than the earlier notions (based on Gregory the Great) of momentary access to a distant divine, achieved through the “glance,” Hahn argues that Paris’s Vie relies on the prolonged gaze, the sustained experience of looking at an object. See Hahn, “Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality,” in Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), pp. 169-196.
cross with Christ’s carved figure) and its more recent acquisition of a different-looking cross (the ringed cross pictured in the illustrations). I would like to suggest that the perception of this cross is only the beginning of the manuscript’s attention to visuality, and that indeed this object-symbol is presented at the start of the narrative (with illustrative references throughout) in order to frame the narrative around a strong imaginative focal point. While the designation of illustration as visual propaganda is a useful frame for his project of authentication, the politics of looking also present new challenges for Paris, especially in the way spectacle and intimacy are linked in instances of secret looking and conversion. The visual narrative shall continue through demonstrations of looking and gazing, attention to the politics and meanings of sight, and rhetorical effects such as repetition, refraction, and repetition that happen through illustration and visual language in the narrative. Visual description, visual appearance, and the history of the abbey converge even in this first fragment of the manuscript, demonstrating the way that Paris draws his readers’ focus from the past to his present by using interplays of reading, seeing, and imagination.

The Vie’s narrative is more or less consistent with the earlier versions of St. Alban’s story produced by William of St. Albans and Ralph of Dunstable. The wandering priest Amphibalus arrives in Verulamium, where Alban, a pagan patrician, provides him with lodging. Amphibalus teaches Alban about Christianity and successfully converts him, but a Saracen spies on them as they pray before the cross, and reports them to the authorities. Alban effects Amphibalus’s escape by switching his nobleman’s clothes for the preacher’s pilgrim cloak, but the villagers find Alban and imprison and torture him. The villagers are punished with a terrible drought and a dangerous river-crossing that results in many deaths. Undeterred, they martyr Alban by tying his hair to a branch and beheading him; when he cuts off Alban’s head, the executioner’s eyes fall out. This spectacle causes multiple conversions, and many of the converted are also subsequently martyred. Amphibalus returns to the city and is himself executed by disembowelment, and the still-unconverted pagans become crippled in further punishment for their deeds. At the end of the narrative, a converted Saracen narrator introduces himself, explains that witnessing these events caused him to convert to Christianity; he vows to spread the story of St. Alban and Amphibalus far and wide as he proceeds on a penitential pilgrimage.
The rest of this paper will explore the connections between history and practices of seeing through a close reading of Paris’s manuscript text and illustrations, first turning to the intense gazes and glances between characters in the narrative. These gazes are theologically dangerous because of their potential for theological misstep and sinful looking, yet I posit that Alban and Amphibalus’s acts of looking are presented as spiritually worthy. I then develop further the theological background of vision, emphasizing both the dangerous aspects of sight as well as the linkages between sight and knowledge. These tensions, I argue, are essential to Paris’s narrative effect throughout the Vie. In the next section I explain the ways that reflection, refraction, and repetition elaborate these tensions and draw them powerfully into dialogue with the abbey’s claim to Alban’s relics. The final section focuses on the ways that Paris constructs the Vie around fraught acts of conversion, translation, and transmission, which are linked to practices of seeing in this authenticating document of monastery history.

The Secret Holy Gaze: Alban and Amphibalus Look at Each Other

When Amphibalus arrives in Verula-rium and seeks shelter with Alban, Paris is careful to note Alban’s noble Roman ancestry (Romein original). When he discovers Amphibalus’s intent to spread Christian doctrine, he expresses his desire to learn more about Christianity, being “marvelously moved” (mervelles meuz) by Amphibalus’s preaching. They retire to a “remote building where no one could see them, from neighbors to soldiers, not heard nor seen” (une maison foreine, k’i[l] n’i soient veu / De veisins u serganz, oi ne aperceu).

Wogan-Browne and Fenster note that the spot’s secrecy and seclusion is Paris’s own invention: in William of St. Albans’s Passio, for example, they do not secure a hidden meeting place until after Alban’s conversion. Their need for secrecy here begins a preoccupation with seclusion and spying that Paris carries through the rest of the Vie: the words veu and aperceu repeat in end-rhyme to give the couplet a similar meaning, the desire not to be seen.

But despite their desire for secrecy, Amphibalus and Alban’s private meeting in a remote location is exactly what the first illustration depicts (Figure 2). The viewer experiences a voyeuristic satisfaction at being able to see what even the neighbors and guards cannot. Teacher

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20 Harden, ed., ll. 23.
21 Harden, ed., ll. 75-6.
22 Wogan-Browne and Fenster, trans., p. 109, n. 14.
and pupil are seated side-by-side: Amphibalus barefoot in a brown cloak upon a squared and simple stool, Alban on a cushion, wrapped in finer clothes. They reach towards one another: Amphibalus in a gesture of explication or suggestion, Alban with his hand outstretched in protest. While their postures are nearly identical, their clothes and gestures differentiate them, as well as the darker and plainer coloration on Amphibalus’s side. The figures are separated by a pillar that creates two distinct frames in the illustration, which are in turn set off with a three-tiered arch on either side. Thus, although the men’s two figures are paralleled, they are also elaborately framed and differentiated.

The reader of this manuscript image is forced to confront the desire to witness this secret meeting between the noble Roman and the wandering preacher. We look at them, and see that their eyes are locked, despite the frame and pillar that seems to separate their gaze – the intensity and interpersonal connection of their philosophical debate is governed by this penetrating look. Alban will eventually leave himself open to conversion (though he initially disagrees with Amphibalus on the possibility of the Trinity and the Incarnation).23 This first encounter, simultaneously filled with intimacy and stateliness, is rich in visual effect: the frames-within-frames, detail, and differentiation Paris uses certainly evoke his rich artistry and innovative methods in layout and compilation.24 They further emphasize the layering of the gaze – the reader’s gaze upon the page, and the various kinds of gazes between characters – that the author-illustrator will develop throughout the Vie.

The Dangers of Looking

The intensity of Amphibalus and Alban’s gaze would have carried significant epistemological and theological implications for medieval readers. While Isidore writes that “vision is quicker and more vigorous than the other senses” (visus dictus, quod vivacior sit ceteris sensibus ac praestantior sive velocior), being closer to the brain and thus more effective in discerning experience, there also existed a strong degree of skepticism and threat to the sense of sight: its

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23 Harden, ed., ll. 77-95, pp. 191-6.
24 For more on Paris’s visual style and innovations, see Suzanne Lewis, The Art of Matthew Paris, and Cynthia Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart, esp. p. 286.
ability to deceive, to debase, to distract from contemplation and good things, was ready in the minds of religious writers.25

The difficult relationship of sight to knowledge found its roots in early church doctrine and theology. Augustine writes in his Confessions that his futile and prideful curiosity (curiositas) about the world derives from the senses, especially the eyes, and distracts him from love and contemplation of God. This happens because “although the function of sight belongs primarily to the eyes, we apply it to the other organs of sense as well, by analogy, when they are used to discover any item of knowledge” (quia videndi officium, in quo primatum oculi tenent, etiam ceteri sensus sibi de similitudine usurpant, cum aliquid cognitionis explorant).26 Sight, then, becomes a synecdoche for all sensual perception. The pursuit of worldly knowledge does not result directly in curiositas, but if entertained and continued it leads to pride, sloth, and original sin. As pleasurable and pervasive as sight may be, it is also the origin of sinful curiositas – indeed, it is exactly because of the worldly delight derived from sight that the eyes cannot be fully trusted.

In the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux continued Augustine’s association of curiositas with eyesight and vision, primarily in his treatise on humility, The Degrees of Humility and Pride (De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae). He writes that “the first step of pride is curiosity. You can recognize it by these indications. You see a monk of whom you had thought well up to now. Wherever he stands, walks, sits, his eyes begin to wander.”27 For Bernard, his monastic audience, and subsequent theologians, the loaded category of curiositas begins with the wandering eye, ascending precipitously to affect the mind and soul. The secret acts of gazing and looking in the Vie de seint Auban confront these theological dangers, but they are also in tension with acts of holy looking, knowledge through sight, and perfection of the senses that were achievable in the same theological traditions.

Perfect Looking: Holy Knowledge through Sight

These diagnoses of looking as dangerous, as leading to sin, excess, and distraction from the holy good, are based largely on the extramission theory of sight, which connects inward states to outward objects seen by the eye. According to this theory, the seeing eye emits a ray of visible light that encounters and gives shape to an object in the world. The form of the object, illuminated and brought into the field of vision by the eye’s emission, then returns to the eye and is perceived and understood. Thus, sight comes from within a person and carries all the qualities of their body and soul. This theory, commonly accepted in the medieval west since Augustine, was revitalized in the thirteenth century by theorists like Roger Bacon, who likens the perception of light to the reception of grace.28 Thus, while theology often pointed to sinful possibilities for sight, medieval optics is characterized by a search to perfect the inward self through sight.

The potential for sight to provide access to the divine depends on a perfection of mind reached through contemplation. Despite his mistrust of worldly sight in the Confessions, Augustine revisits theories of vision in The Literal Meaning of Genesis (De genesi ad litteratum), which denotes three levels of sight: the corporeal sight that he so mistrusts, that is, what is seen by the eyes of the body; spiritual sight, which includes dream-vision and imagination; and intellectual sight, which exists only in the highest levels of the mind and is of a different category of visuality than the first two, which rely on worldly images for their sustenance.29 Since intellectual vision relies on contemplation, it can lead to higher insights and indeed holds the potential for divine understanding, but this potential depends on the individual’s ability to use the world’s paltry images as pathways to grace. Medieval writing relies heavily on eyewitness accounts to obtain access to authority; visual effect is thus a strong verifier of both spiritual truth and historical accuracy.30

In this framework, sight risks being categorized as sinful or overly curious, but if properly directed and articulated, it is not necessarily so. Indeed, many acts of looking in Paris’s 

Vie seem to balance these aspects of visual experience carefully and complexly. I suggest that Paris was engaging deeply with different ways of looking – from secret peeping to human encounter to holy gaze, and everything in between – and the Vie is his document, drawn and ornamented and laid out, of the complex manners of seeing and being seen in thirteenth-century St. Albans. But these acts of looking also implicate the past and present of the monastery itself – its claim to Alban’s relics, the legitimacy of its foundations, and its evolution into a cult center. All depend on the ability of Paris’s manuscript to guide his readers visually through that history, and show to their eyes the righteous sights and visions of the abbey’s illustrious founders.

**Visual Reflection, Refraction, Repetition in the Vie**

After their secret debate, Alban brings Amphibalus back to his home to spend the night. Paris writes that Alban falls asleep while Amphibalus stays up to pray before the cross (see above); while sleeping, Alban has a dream that Paris describes using the vocabulary of vision and sight. As Alban drifts off, God decides to “reveal his secrets to him and through a vision soften his heart” (Ki li doinne sun segrei demustrer / E par avision lui esmoillir le quoe).31 God provides him a complete narrative of the life, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ, including “everything a Christian believes is secret” (quancke a crestien croire est mester).32 Paris’s poetic wordplay in lines 210-211 – mester, a mystery or secret, to mustré, to show or reveal – indicates his interest throughout this passage in states of secret, hidden vision and open, clear display (sanz ren celer).33 The importance of dream-visions as a source of knowledge is well-documented,34 but important here is the language of concealment and openness that is re-emphasized by Paris’s accompanying illustration (Figure 3).

In the image, Alban lies supine in bed, holding the covers up around his body; above him, there is a wavy line that demarcates everyday reality from the imaginative reality of dreams. As in fol.

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31 Harden, ed., ll. 204-5, italics mine.
33 Harden, ed., l. 211.
29v (Figure 1), this image is split up into series of frames that provide important information about vision, its limits, and its possibilities: as before, the characters’ line of sight is able to penetrate through the painted barrier, which should prevent clear vision into the next frame – but instead, God ensures the clarity and completeness of the dream for Alban, who is then able to retell it clearly (apertement) to his mentor. Indeed, the image itself seems to be a synecdochal representation for Alban’s telling of the dream to Amphibalus, positioning the reader alongside him as receptor to Alban’s story. Alban’s conversion, then, depends on his ability to recount faithfully the experience of the dream, to bring its imagery and impact into worldly language, to make visible and known its invisible and secret meanings. Paris likewise takes up the historian’s responsibility of painting the past using strokes and objects recognizable to his readers. Their acknowledgement of Alban’s sanctity in connection to his namesake abbey relies on Paris’s visual effectiveness in illustrating the dream, as well as his ability to enliven the old story and refocus it to involve his own place and period.

This refocusing is continued in the next illustration (Figure 4), which is Paris’s own invention and includes the earliest illustrated appearance of Amphibalus’s cross. The image depicts Alban peering through a window at Amphibalus, who kneels before the cross. It is unclear whether this scene is meant to happen in the middle of the night – after Alban’s dream, but during Amphibalus’s nightly vigil – or in the morning, just before the two convene. Cynthia Hahn notes that this scene does not appear in the written narrative: although Paris writes that Alban

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35 Harden, ed., l. 214. The picture’s caption also states that Alban’s “body sleeps, but his soul keeps watch, so that he sees the great marvel in heaven” (see Wogan-Browne and Fenster, trans., 71, n. iii). This calls to mind Augustine’s three-tiered understanding of vision and the relationship between the spiritual and intellectual fields of vision; while dreams are made up of images, their potential for divine insight is always present. See Taylor, trans., Literal Meaning, XII.21.44.

36 The importance of his illustrations to the artist seems self-evident but is underscored by the fact that, while most of Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 177 is written on relatively plain parchment, many of its illustrations were painted on much more expensive vellum and pasted in. This indication of value and specialness to the illustrations supports the idea that visual effect was generated to work out Paris’s other goals for the work as a whole. See Lewis, Art of Matthew Paris, p. 21.

37 The right-hand titulus reads, “Here Alban sees through the window what Amphibalus is doing. [Alban] wants to show him in good faith all the mystery of his dream” (Wogan-Browne and Fenster, trans., 71, n. iv). This could suggest the scene occurs in the morning. But the left-hand titulus reads, “On his knees, Amphibalus honors the cross, and he sighs and weeps: neither forgetting, nor dozing, nor sleeping keeps him from performing his customary devotions” (Wogan-Browne and Fenster, trans., 71, n. v), which seems to suggest, instead, that the scene happens at night, when Amphibalus abstains from sleep to pray. Therefore, the chronology of the illustrations is unclear; this interpretive ambiguity adds richness to the narrative.
witnesses the prayers of Amphibalus, he does not disclose that the witness was in secret, nor does he mention a surreptitious peeping through any window.\textsuperscript{38} Rather, his introduction of this scene of private devotion and voyeuristic gazing “focuses and directs the gaze of the viewer,” whose curiosity is piqued by the intimacy of looking through the window.\textsuperscript{39} We join him in gazing at the cross, which (along with the window) occupies the center space of the image. As a witness to private Christian devotion, and subsequently a motivation for conversion, this act of surreptitious spying is suggested to be virtuous, not underhanded— but it is also highly ambivalent, because the clandestine act arouses curiositas, that dangerously sinful state that originates in inquisitive looking. The fact that the scene is only represented visually—not described in the textual narrative—highlights the possible threats of this gaze, but also emphasizes the fact that Alban’s vision is inaccessible through textual description. As a private devotional activity by a future saint—indeed, the moment of the saint’s conversion—this scene carries an important weight. St. Alban’s saintly, righteous (i.e. theologically correct) looking requires no textual elaboration, and by returning his gaze the manuscript’s audience may contemplate the power of gazing itself, as opposed to language or textual description to communicate a spiritual encounter.

Alban reaches his decision to convert through the visuality of his religious experience. The divine has reached him through various levels of looking, both imaginatively and carnally (in a dream and through a hidden window). His conversion is followed, duly, by his baptism, and continued education from Amphibalus, whom he enlists as his beu maistre. However, to avoid persecution their meetings must continue in secret, and once again Paris highlights this necessity through the language of obscurity and concealment: they hold their “secret and hidden councils” again in the “secluded house” they had visited before, into the “nightfall” (segreiz e cunseilz celez; maison sutive; anoitez).\textsuperscript{40} Again, private, enclosed devotion is invaded by spies and onlookers: a Saracen comes to peer through their window and observes their secret conversations.

\textsuperscript{38} The fact that we can see, but not read about, this encounter speaks to Paris’s continual engagement with the visual sense. We are drawn into the act of looking in imitation of Alban’s eager lean towards the window. See also Hahn, “Visio Dei,” p. 176, and idem, Portrayed on the Heart, pp. 289-91.

\textsuperscript{39} Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart, p. 290.

\textsuperscript{40} The full sentence reads: D’une maison sutive, u il sunt ja entrez, / Unt fait lur escole, pur les grantz fertez / Des Sarracins feluns dunt il sunt guetez / Iluec unt lur segreiz e cunseilz celez / Des relevees, e quant fu anoitez (Harden, ed., ll. 392-6).
and rituals (Figure 5). The Saracen is a distorted mirror-image of Alban in fol. 31r: both framed by an archway, the two figures face opposite directions (as in a mirror), and lean in to peer through the windows at precisely the same angle. While Alban stands firmly on one foot with his right toe protruding slightly out of the frame, the Saracen’s feet are off-kilter, akimbo against the floor’s neat line, giving the impression of instability and treachery. While the similarity of the two figures is striking, the Saracen’s imbalance suggests a fun-house mirror or distortion of Alban’s well-intentioned spying on the previous folio. There are right and wrong ways to spy on people as they pray.

Paris employs this method of narrative mirroring throughout the Vie, constructing an elaborate system of parallel events that reappear, slightly varied, shortly after their first appearances. Paris puts in place the distorted mirror-image of the spying saint and the spying Saracen to emphasize proper and improper looking: he who seeks to worship through imitation versus he who seeks to betray through accusation. Medieval writers closely monitored their senses, especially sight, so as to avoid these treacheries; Michael Camille discusses the power of these visual encounters and the effects of images on the viewer, suggesting that certain medieval models of sight emphasize the mirror-effect that Paris is using here: the power of images themselves, rather than the dangers of vision, implied a remarkable mutuality to the objectifying gaze. After the Saracen reveals Amphibalus and Alban’s hiding-place to the authorities, the two effect Amphibalus’s escape by switching clothes; this event enacts a reversal of their appearances and a moment of identification and intimacy that recalls the remarkable painting on fol. 29v. In that image, as here, the markedly different appearances and juxtaposed seating of Amphibalus and Alban do not prevent them from sustaining direct and immediate eye contact. Their regarding gaze parallels the earlier moment of close comparison between the two men.


42 More can and should be said about the exchange of clothes between Alban and Amphibalus, and disguise in hagiography in general. While there are many resources on cross-dressing by female saints (for example Jeanne d’Arc, St. Eugenia and St. Euphrasyme), little has been said about disguises in general in medieval hagiography, as scholarship on disguise tends to focus on comic or romance literature but not on saints’ lives. The switching of appearances – and thereby of identities – between Alban and Amphibalus might be especially fruitful in a queer/homosocial reading of hagiography, or an analysis of the master/pupil relationship in conversion narratives. However, such a study is beyond the scope of this paper.
Despite his disguise, the pagan authorities find Alban before long and imprison him, placing him in a cell where he is hungry and uncomfortable. “He did not drink any of the fine wines lying in his cellar, in rich vessels by a cup-bearer; he did not have any delicious food to eat. A dark prison he had instead of a hall and an upstairs room … He was hungry and thirsty and cold” (Ne beit mais desbons vins gisantz en sur celer / De riche vaissele a servant butuiller; / N'a mais deliciuses viands a manger. / Prisun ad obscure pur sale e pur soler … Feim ad e sei e freit). Paris contrasts Alban’s present state with his former happiness, emphasizing his hunger and thirst in the bare cell. Throughout the Vie, Alban’s physical suffering is distinguished as a marker for holiness, as is typical of saints’ lives. But more novel for Paris, Alban’s punishment is mirrored a few hundred lines later, when the crowd that has come to watch his Passion suffer from extreme thirst themselves due to the extreme drought they are experiencing as punishment from the divine. However, once again the mirroring of Alban with his pagan adversaries points out crucial distinctions between them: while Alban “did not cease to pray to God,” the thirsty crowd “cried out and lamented in anger.”

Throughout the Vie, the pagans are continually defined by their clamor and noise, including animalistic noise; the ability to suffer in silence and carry on rational discourse is reserved for the suffering Christians. These episodes of thirst are again mirrored in the accompanying illustration (Figure 6), which depicts Alban’s resigned imprisonment and the pagans’ frantic thirst side-by-side, as juxtaposed visual elements that emphasize the righteousness of the saintly namesake of Paris’s abbey.

Alban once again distinguishes his holiness when God hears his prayer for the people’s deliverance and fissures the barren hillside to reveal a bubbling stream. The stream, moreover, has its own mirror-image: earlier in the narrative the “great press of people” (la presse ert grant du pueple) who cross the bridge fall into the raging water, with many drowning, but Alban’s prayers turn the river, “deep and rapid with a noisy current” (parfunde e raedde a flot brient), into a calm and shallow stream. These double streams reveal in parallel incidents the pagans’ folly and Alban’s sanctity, even while he lives. Paris achieves this rhetorical contrast by

43 Harden, ed., ll. 676-83.
44 Harden, ed., ll. 851-67.
45 Harden, ed., ll. 673, 865.
46 Harden, ed., ll. 760, 790.
repeating images and motifs as mirrored encounters throughout the narrative: for example, the thirsting bodies of Alban and the pagans, and the waters over which the saint sustains control through prayer. A saint so finely behaved under torment, and with such powerful ability to intercede, is a valuable patron and significant figure for the abbey taking his name.

Just as the spectacle of Christ’s Passion and Amphibalus’s cross inspire Alban’s conversion through visual means, the graphic details and gory illustrations of his death combine to elicit feelings of awe and visual wonder for the reader. The unbelievers threaten the very means by which Alban was converted – they plan to cut out his eyes, the organs with which he first views the cross, spies Amphibalus’s prayer, and knows his dream-vision to be true.\(^47\) Paris again utilizes his technique of mirroring Alban’s torture against the pains of his enemies when the executioner’s eyes fall out immediately after beheading his victim. Alban himself is martyred hideously and tied to a tree by his hair; the executioner’s blade-strike “made his head fly bleeding from his shoulders,” which Paris depicts in the facing painting (Figure 7).\(^48\)

The spectacle of torture here, the abundant crimson blood vibrant on the page, the emphasis on sight as a means to truth, the graphic blinding of the Saracen, and the \textit{titulus} which reads, “For the Saracen, night begins: For Alban, brightness without end,” all point to the visual impact Alban’s martyrdom is designed to create for its viewer.\(^49\) The illustration also depicts the cross being “stained” with the red of Alban’s blood, a visual reminder of the saint’s suffering.\(^50\) The cross which first he gazed upon now becomes a holy relic that is taken up by his followers. Once again, the cross is depicted as a Coptic cross, based on the cross that arrived at St. Albans shortly

\(^{47}\) “Let his eyes be gouged out and his sight taken away: that will show and signify that his eye and his heart are both blind.” Harden, ed., ll. 726-36
\(^{48}\) Fenster and Wogan-Browne, trans., 84.
\(^{50}\) Harden, ed., l. 1186.
before Paris’s writing; here in the Vie it is marked with the indelible blood of the martyr, and passes into the abbey’s reality through the recognition of its viewers.

“*I’ll display my book written on vellum*”: A Manuscript of Monastic Historiophoty

The events described and depicted in the Vie become present and relevant through visual recognition and imagination, making the work a historiophoty as much as it is a hagiography and historiography. Coined by Hayden White in 1988, the term historiophoty refers to a visual portrayal of past events, the “representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse.”⁵¹ Its anachronistic application to the Vie here signals Paris’s emphasis on ways of seeing, the value placed on pictorial as well as verbal communication as a means of representing the past. This emphasis on visual history additionally gains credence because the events are verified through the eyewitness testimony of an invented narrator – a Saracen who “of this history saw the beginning and ending” (*de ceste estoire vi le cumençail e fin*).⁵² He states confidently, “I have written this story on parchment like I saw it. Yet there will come a day, indeed I say it and predict it too, that this history will be translated into French and Latin” (*La geste ai, cum la vi, escrit en parchemin. Uncore vendra le jur, ben le di e devin, La estoire ert translatee en franceis e latin*).⁵³ The Saracen narrator then tells how witnessing the events of the story inspired him to convert to Christianity, and as he concludes the narrative he promises to go on pilgrimage to Rome to spread the news of Alban’s holiness. His prediction that his narrative will be translated of course comes true – Paris himself is the future ‘translator’ of the story into French. By situating the Vie in this forward-looking long-ago, Paris retroactively constructs a history of legitimacy for its narrative through the invention of an eyewitness testimony.

The Saracen emphasizes one last time the visual impact of Alban’s bloody martyrdom and the book it will produce: “For the sake of Alban, who first colored [the island] with his red blood and who was beheaded for God with a steel sword, I’ll display [reveal, make visibly known] my book written on vellum” (*Pur Auban ki l’ad teinte premers de sanc rosin, / Ki pur Deu decolé fu*

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⁵² Harden, ed., l. 1812.
⁵³ Harden, ed., ll. 1813, 1821-23.
The emphasis on color and display here suggests Paris’s intentions for the manuscript: its striking visuality and sensuality serves to memorialize Alban and connect the history of the British island to the martyrdom of the saint, embedding his localized hagiography into the history of the kingdom. Furthermore, the narrator’s double mention of parchment and vellum (ll. 1821, 1840) foreshadows the multimedia nature of the Dublin manuscript: illustrations on vellum pasted into a parchment manuscript. The converted Saracen narrator also serves as a mirror for Paris himself as creator, just as the earlier episodes and illustrations set up mirror-effects and distortions between Alban and the Saracens who spy, suffer, and see like (and yet unlike) him.

These striking visual reminders of the abbey’s past would be nothing, though, without a narrative linking the past to the present. Paris accomplishes this by continuing his illustrations even after the Vie concludes – he paints in succeeding rubrics the founding and chartering of the St. Albans abbey by Offa. Thomas O’Donnell records the way this organization broadens the hagiographical narrative to include a history of its institutionalization, gathering together the past and present by means of physical objects – relics and documents – that create a horizontally-organized narration of events within Paris’s sumptuous manuscript illustrations. In these subsequent illustrations Offa acts on instruction from a dream-vision of his own and discovers Alban’s relics, builds the monastery, translates and elevates the relics there, and presents the foundation charter, witnessed by the entire community. Witnessing these events through the interplay of text and image legitimizes Offa’s foundation of the monastery in the minds of the St. Albans monks, their patrons, and the neighboring community, as well as affirming the sanctity of Alban’s relics up to the present. In these post-narrative pictorial accounts, vision becomes the chief provider of knowledge for the monastery’s foundation. Paris does not need to narrate these events poetically as he did the Vie, since their authority lies chiefly in visual recognition by

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54 Harden, ed., ll. 1838-40.
56 McCulloch writes that Paris uses these drawings to “enhance the deeds of the king to whom legend … attributed the founding of the abbey” (“Saints Alban and Amphibalus,” p. 771).
57 Although Hahn notes, however, that Paris also invokes other senses, namely hearing and smell, in the Vie to “strengthen his persuasive effects.” Note that the far-right observer in fol. 59r gestures towards his nose and proclaims, “redolet” (it smells”), while another monk raises his eyes to heaven and sings “te deum laudamus.” Hahn argues that the smelling monk is commenting on the sweet scent exuded by the relics, not the stench of rotting corpse. See Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart, pp. 310-12.
their audiences, the monks and sympathetic nobles among whom the manuscript circulated.⁵⁸ Instead, Paris interweaves the images of St. Albans’s founding with hymns, liturgical lessons, and the charters themselves. His penchant for collecting evidence is most apparent here: the way he combines eyewitness account with documentation, the history of objects, and writs of authenticity culminates in his use of image and visual drama.⁵⁹ These strategies heighten the persuasiveness of St. Albans’s claim to the saint’s relics, and they emphasize its centrality in the landscape of English devotion in the twelfth century.

While visual effect is able to register changes over various incarnations of the monastery’s story, it also creates a timeline that is verifiably present both in the eyes of the viewer and on the page itself. Through directly addressing his audience’s sense of sight, Paris makes the act of looking into a pathway to historical validation. As my readings of Wogan-Browne and Fenster, Michael Camille, and Cynthia Hahn have shown, the fact that Paris’s historiography is often visual is well-established; this essay has developed the ways in which Paris’s inventive historiophoty contends with the imaginative, dramatic, and sometimes tense relationship between visual culture and monastic identity. Alban’s story, embedded in the interweavings of historical and hagiographical context, is experienced through the eyes and through visual imagination – as with the relic-shaped cross, itself an echo of a real-life and recognizable object, the history of the monastery is bound up with the gaze and the desire to gaze. As a historiophoty, the Vie works towards a revitalization of St. Albans through the vitality of its visual technologies: the mirrors, spying eyes, and holy gazes portrayed throughout the work. This mirror-hall of visions, glances, and images comes together in the final product: the book “displayed … on vellum” in the island where Alban, himself made martyr-painter with the spilling of his blood, “first colored with red blood” (musterai ... en veeslin; teinte premers de sanc rosin) the island of Britain.⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ O’Donnell argues that part of the work done by the Vie de seint Auban is to expand the St. Albans community “to include lay aristocrats sympathetic to monastic culture” (“Monastic Literary Culture and Communities,” p. 211).

⁵⁹ Paris’s tendency to hoard charters, letters, and written records together is well-documented; for example, his Liber addimentorum combines all these forms of documentation and more in order to write a “plain and full account” for posterity. See Lewis, Art of Matthew Paris, pp. 9, 45.

⁶⁰ Harden, ed., ll. 1838-40.
Figure 1. TCD MS 177, fol. 34v. This and all images throughout are reproduced from Wogan-Browne and Fenster, trans., The Life of St. Alban, FRETS (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2010).

Figure 2. TCD MS 177, fol. 29v.

Figure 3. TCD MS 177, fol. 30v.
Figure 4. TCD MS 177, fol. 31r.

Figure 5. TCD MS 177, fol. 32r.

Figure 6. TCD MS 177, fol. 35v.
Elizabeth Light

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Book Review: *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects and Practices*

Review by Caroline J. Croasdaile


This slim yet intellectually dense anthology considers medieval sensory devotional practices and their role in bridging the divide between physicality and spirituality through the use of text, images, artefacts, and instruments of piety. The book comprises eight essays that explore the ways in which Christians paradoxically engaged their senses in order to overcome them and access the divine through varied methods such as gazing at an icon, hearing the echoes of mass in a cathedral, touching the tomb of a saint, smelling aromatic myrrh, or tasting the Eucharist. In the late medieval period the senses were commonly held to be the gateway of the soul, and images were thought to leave an imprint on the brain which could then transform into memory. According to Augustine, the medieval saint and theologian, sensation dwelled in and traversed a threshold between the materiality of the body and the immateriality of the soul.\(^6^1\) This medieval understanding of the senses thus heightens the importance and impact of sensory-based religious practices and art in the late medieval era, a consideration that is seriously addressed in this book, which occupies an interesting and developing place in historical research today.

The contributors to this anthology approach their subject matter from a valuable interdisciplinary perspective, and the authors come from fields that include not only art history but also theology, ecclesiastical studies, linguistics, communications, and aesthetics. As one would expect, and in line with much of the recent historiography of the Middle Ages, the theories and methodologies that they apply are equally diverse. Scholarship in this book includes a medium-based examination on the significance and hierarchy of material applied to a John the Baptist’s head reliquary entitled “Don’t Judge a Head by its Cover: The Materiality of the Johannesschussel as Reliquary” by Soetkin Vanhauwaert and Georg Geml. Another essay is a sharp iconographical

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and etymological study of the Annunciation and its corresponding biblical text by Barbara Baert, “The Annunciation and the Senses: Late Medieval Devotion and the Pictorial Gaze.” The essays in this anthology are reliant on art and imagery as primary sources, and the contributors of this book appropriately look to and support their research with the aid of the glossy and crisp illustrations found in the centerfold of the collection.

In an anthology of this kind, the title is a key element in uniting the corresponding essays collected in the book. However, it seems not all of the authors are in complete accord as to what the term materiality entails, and this definition tends to morph problematically throughout the book. Some articles focus on the literal material nature of objects, as in the essay regarding the Johannesschussel reliquary, while other authors focus more on what seems to be the issue of immateriality, as with the articles that address medieval memory or the visions of mystics like Hadewijch and Julian of Norwich. Despite this, all the contributing essays are consistent in demonstrating the interconnectivity of the sensing body and the receptive soul, as well as engaging with the medieval understanding of the senses as faculties that can be experienced together and interchangeably—both key goals set out by the editors in the introduction.62

According to the European Network on the Instruments of Devotion (ENID), which is the scholarly group responsible for producing this volume, their mission is: “gaining a deeper insight into the mechanisms of piety and devotion, in order to understand the phenomena and their instruments as essential features in the religious and cultural development of Europe.”63 In spite of this goal, none of the essays included in this third published anthology attempt to broach the broader modern cultural impact of medieval practices in piety. ENID’s own website includes an array of journalistic articles on the transition and application of medieval imagery in modern culture with topics such as nineteenth-century cross-denominational imagery, and the fashion of devotional images on rock stars and runways. While ENID has published a book that bridges into this contemporary sphere, it would have been engaging in the context of materiality to see how

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this has developed specifically, if only to examine differences in material devotion as northern Europe transitioned into the Age of Reformation and Protestantism.

*The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe* adds to a blooming canon that emphasizes the sensorium of medieval devotional arts, building on the groundwork laid by art historians and academics such as Michael Camille, Caroline Walker Bynum, Susannah Biernoff, Christopher Woolgar, and Daniel Heller-Roazen. There has been a recent outpouring of scholarly work crosshatching this interdisciplinary topic, which includes *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West* edited by Simon C. Thomson and Michael D.J. Bintley, and the 2016 curated Walters Art Museum exhibit “A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe.” University of St. Andrews Professor Dr. Kathryn Rudy is currently engaging in a topic that unites the senses and religiosity with her research considering the use-wear analysis of manuscript material in her publication “Dirty books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts Using a Densitometer.” This growing archive of recent scholarship is indicative of the relevance and attention that materiality in late medieval studies is currently receiving. *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe* is a welcome read for scholars engaging in research on medieval history, theology, or the history of art, and hoping to add their own perspective and contribution to this cross-disciplinary subject considering the role of materiality and senses in past religious practices.

*Caroline J. Croasdaile*

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Book Review: The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe

Review by Dallas Alexander Grubbs


This volume is the result of two things. First, it is the result of an enduring scholarly interest in the writing, rewriting, and reception of historiographical texts in the early medieval world. In recent decades, Rosamond McKitterick’s and Helmut Reimitz’s works, among others, have successfully demonstrated the uses of history and memory in creating and maintaining Frankish identities. Second, and more directly relevant to this particular collection, the essays assembled are the result of a three-year collaborative research project undertaken by four European universities. The group’s goal was to shed new light on the role played by the textual resources of the past in fostering early medieval cultural memory and identity. The established authorities one would expect to find attached to such a project are all here—Rosamond McKitterick, Helmut Reimitz, Walter Pohl, Ian Wood, and Mayke de Jong. But of equal value and importance are the essays of more up-and-coming historians, many of whom have studied under these established scholars.

The real scope of the collection is much narrower than the title suggests. The “resources of the past” under consideration are predominantly historiographical texts chronicling the Roman, Frankish, biblical, and patristic pasts. The chapter titled “Early Medieval Europe” is mostly confined to Carolingian Francia circa 750-900. As the editors themselves admit, this focus on the Carolingians is unavoidable. The courts and cloisters of this period not only furnished the bulk of our sources and manuscripts but also recognized, to perhaps an even greater extent than their predecessors or successors, the value of historical writing as a cultural resource. Carolingian scribes constantly copied, adapted, rearranged, and rewrote these textual resources of the past to both sustain communal identities and to “inspire, guide, change, or prevent action,” (xv-xvi) in the present.
The book is divided into four thematic sections: “Learning Empire,” “The Biblical Past,” “Changing Senses of the Other,” and “The Migration of Cultural Traditions in Early Medieval Europe,” with significant overlaps between these themes. Each section contains roughly four short individual essays. In exploring the multifaceted ways in which the resources of the past could be reinvented to suit the present needs of early medieval communities, the authors employ two main methodological approaches. The first, which has become increasingly popular in the last twenty years, is the study of the manuscript evidence to better understand the transmission and reception of texts. The second approach stems from the assumption that these historical works do not simply preserve memories and reflect ethnic and cultural identities. Rather, they are a key component in the creation and preservation of such identities. Each author offers a thorough analysis of the different resources of the past, illuminating how these works contributed to the dynamic process of identity formation. These resources were living documents in the early medieval world. In the process of writing or rewriting them, scribes transformed them into prescriptive guides for present and future action, presenting their audiences with an authoritative vision, grounded in the past, for how political and religious communities could and should function.

The fifteen authors utilize a combination of these methodologies to bring out the lively nature of historical writing in early medieval Europe. Walter Pohl and Rosamond McKitterick focus on representations of Rome, revealing the extent to which this city dominated the early medieval imagination and proved a potent and malleable symbol. Désirée Scholten, Graeme Ward, and Helmut Reimitz investigate the reception and use of Late Antique church histories with respect to Cassiodorus’ *Historia Tripartita*, Frechulf of Lisieux’s *Histories*, and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius-Rufinus, respectively, demonstrating that early medieval writers did not slavishly copy Late Antique histories but used them selectively and in pursuit of their own distinct goals. The biblical past (especially the Old Testament) comes to the fore in the chapters by Mayke de Jong, Ian Wood, Marianne Pollheimer, and Sven Meeder, who explore the intersection between biblical exegesis and political, social, and legal thought in the establishment of cultural memory. Community and identity, especially in a Frankish sense, are key themes in the essays of Richard Broome, Robert Flierman, and Timothy Barnwell, who explore the process of “othering” in historical texts. They demonstrate that the construction of “pagans,” among other outsider groups, was not simply a matter of ‘us’ and ‘them’ but a much more complicated
development. Ideas of inclusion and exclusion are further explored in Erik Goosmann’s examination of how a controversial event, the conversion of Carloman, was transformed from a problematic memory into a valuable Carolingian resource. Finally, Giorgia Vocino and Clemens Gantner explore the legacy of St. Ambrose in Milan and the early papacy in Rome, respectively, where these early Christian memories could be manipulated to accomplish present religious and political goals.

All of the essays in this collection are strongly argued and each author does an excellent job reminding us not to take our sources for granted in the form in which they have come down to us. The past was never static and medieval engagement with the cultural resources of the past was a complicated, varied, and inconsistent process. As the editors themselves state: “Canonical versions of the past are not a given, they are the result of a process of selection, omission, and elaboration.” (290) Having accomplished the aims of the project and successfully proven these points, one would like to see these methodologies applied on a broader scale in subsequent studies. For example, while the Frankish past is by no means neglected in this volume, further studies should explore how the Carolingians engaged and utilized the cultural resources of the distinctly Frankish and specifically the Merovingian past. In addition, some of the ideas put forward in these studies should be applied to a broader range of sources that engage with the past, namely hagiographical and legal materials. On the whole, this collection will undoubtedly prove a valuable resource for historians of the Early Middle Ages in general and students of Carolingian historiography in particular.

Dallas Alexander Grubbs

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Book Review: *Vox regis: Royal Communication in High Medieval Norway*

Review by Benjamin Harrison


First beginning its life as his doctoral thesis, David Brégaint’s *Vox regis: Royal Communication in High Medieval Norway* provides an in-depth analysis of communication and propaganda in Norway during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It begins with the first ‘true’ system of communication that the Church officiated on behalf of the Crown, then proceeds to examine how conflicts between Church and monarch led to the development of a new secular model, and charts its development through various forms such as written and ritualistic communication. The overarching claim is that the consolidation of royal control was not a simple top-down process, but an extended interaction between monarch and participant. The comprehensive inspection of all forms of hierarchical communication structures builds a strong, complete picture of how the Norwegian Crown developed its own communication structure by consolidating internal control and forming the foundations of a state.

The work is divided into three core parts, which build upon each other to provide a complete picture of communication in Norway during the period. The first section focuses on the Church’s communication system, specifically in the second half of the twelfth century. This section highlights the crucial importance of the establishment of the diocese of Niðarós in 1152/3, which not only improved the organization of the Church in the country, but provided a platform to promote the literary activity and scholarship of Western European culture in Norway. The text explores this through the new responsibility of clerics for the production and distribution of royal charters, which led to their increased contextual influence. Ultimately, this lead to what Brégaint argues was a ‘political domination’ over the monarchy (32). Furthermore, he examines the Church’s new involvement in the (now religious) *konungstekja* – a ceremony where a claimant to the throne declared his right and won the support of the populace. The claimant was involved in all trials of ordeal, and all of these took place in Niðarós.
The second part addresses on a new monarchical communication that developed from the time of King Sverrir and his excommunication, stemming from their view of him as a usurper to the throne. The section primarily looks at the texts Sverrir had produced, *Grýla* and *Varnaðar-ræða* (known in English as *A Speech Against the Bishops*), both of which were political texts aimed to attack the Church’s authority. Brégaint outlines this as the determining stage of the development of royal communication, and demonstrates how this structure which had previously been exclusive to the Church now were adapted by the Crown, and how it developed into an independent communication with the ultimate goal to further consolidate the royal power.

However, Brégaint emphasises that whilst propaganda texts were created in order for Sverrir to legitimise his rule, royal communication was still strongly dependent on his oral skills and transfer – not merely focused on written texts.

Part three is the largest, and impressive section of *Vox regis*. It investigates royal communication primarily from the period of King Hákon IV Hákonarson until the turn of the fourteenth century. During this time, Brégaint explains, royal communication took on a new purpose: by highlighting the end of the Civil War Era, and how royal power was at its most authoritative point, he illustrates how communication was turned inwards, to re-affirm royal power over the aristocracy. This section is then interlaced with courtly culture and how it was introduced to the king’s liegemen to control how they appeared and acted, as well as specific efforts to change their perceptions and build a strong ideology of subordination.\(^1\) The author excellently demonstrates the use of the written word was used as a tool in this process by the example of two contemporaneous Norwegian texts specifically – namely *Hirðskrá* and *Konungs skuggsjá* – as well as translated French courtly romances commonly known as the *riddarasögur*.

Overall, the greatest strength of *Vox regis* lies in how it successively builds the development of communication systems in High Middle Age Norway. Its concise structure combines a chronological and thematic approach in order to explain how a specific royal communication structure was built, and how it was instrumental in the formation of the Norwegian state. The continued stressed importance of a model of interaction, rather than a top-down creation, allows

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\(^1\) This topic is further explored by Brégaint in his article ‘Civilizing the ‘Viking’: A Pedagogy for Etiquette and Courtly Behaviour in 13th Century Norway’ in *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles*, 2016, <http://crcv.revues.org/13719> [accessed 3rd March 2017].
the reader to easily grasp the complex evolution and co-existence of all communication structures during this period. I highly recommend the book to a large range of scholars studying not only the titular communication structures, but also Norwegian state formation. Subsections of the book will be found useful for a wider range of scholars, from ecclesiastical history with the Church’s initial monopoly on communications and charters, to those looking at political infrastructure in relation to the thirteenth century hird reforms. In addition, Brégaint’s prose flows in a beautifully clear and precise manner, and he is able to deconstruct even the most complicated notions in a simple, yet comprehensive manner, making the work a pleasant and accessible read.

Benjamin Harrison

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**Book Review: Savage Economy: The Returns of Middle English Romance**

Review by Ana Rita Martins


In *Savage Economy: The Returns of Middle English Romance*, Walter Wadiak’s first book, the author proposes a new look at late Middle English romances through the practice of noble gift giving. Wadiak examines gift exchanges and how they foreshadow violence, which he claims was key to the development of medieval warrior aristocracy. The connection between violence and gift giving is crucial for Wadiak’s argumentation as he highlights that bestowing gifts was used to set up and/or preserve feudal power. The noble gift expresses violence in the sense that it refuses “a certain and predictable return, throwing the receiver into uncertainty” and introduces a dependent relationship where the giver aimed to create a bond of subservience (12). As a result, scenes of gift exchange in medieval romance might be read as narrative strategies that mirror real life power relationships in which a lord or a king would establish dominion over others without overt violence. At the same time, the author suggests English romances in particular try to reconstitute themselves by using the gift as a way to fantasise about the past.

Chapter one, ‘The Persistence of Romance’, serves as a theoretical introduction to the analysis, laying the foundation for his study and centring his attention on key concepts such as the “noble gift”. At the same time, Wadiak poses questions that serve as guidelines for the readers, such as “What do we mean when we speak of noble gifts as symbolic violence?” (6). By suggesting that the romances written in England after the Norman Conquest can be understood as narratives obsessed with the return to a golden age of chivalry, Wadiak attempts to clarify how the gift-giving motif is employed to invoke that very return. The first chapter is a strong introduction to the topic, and a pertinent reading for those particularly interested in Middle English romance.

The following chapters mostly focus on romances produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In chapter two, ‘The Gift and Its Returns’, Wadiak examines the gift as a currency of romance, pointing out how aristocratic excess is especially explored in spendthrift knight romances (*Sir Cleges*, *Sir Launfal*, and *Sir Amadece*). Considering that gift giving has innate
limitations, the author clarifies how these are acknowledged in texts that position themselves against mercantile culture (37), while simultaneously deriving economic profit for the heroes who receive gifts that enable them to thrive. Chapter three, ‘Chaucerian Capital’, focuses on Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, namely The Knight’s Tale. Wadiak’s analysis suggests that gifts serve to impose order through the covert violence they imply, but also to limit its destructiveness (77). The construction of the amphitheatre by Theseus in The Knight’s Tale is an example of this, since it encourages violence to be performed within a given space. In this perspective, gift exchange represents the civilising potential of chivalric life, which is nevertheless enacted by means of violence. By drawing attention to the dual nature of the noble gift as a source of peace and violence which encourages alliances and at the same time promotes power struggles, Wadiak shines new light on issues frequently overlooked. However, though it is thought-provoking, chapter two comes across as perhaps the least clear of the whole, diverting into details of Chaucer’s text that do not necessarily contribute to the author’s main line of reasoning.

On the other hand, chapter four, ‘Gawain’s Nirt and the Sign of Chivalry’, offers a stimulating analysis of the Gawain romances, namely Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the later “bourgeois” romance Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle. Looking at both texts, Wadiak offers a novel reading, underscoring how the symbolic gift giving verges towards very real violence (95). Wadiak further develops the concept of hospitality and the problems it poses as a gift of impossibility and a form of possession, making every act of hospitality an assertion of mastery (109). The final chapter, ‘What Shall These Bowes Do?’, expands on one of Wadiak’s earlier essays (2012), addressing outlaw literature of the fifteenth century. In Savage Economy, Wadiak examines The Tale of Gamelyn and A Geste of Robyn Hode suggesting not only that outlawry forms of displacement and exile are central to romance (123), but also that chivalry found in these narratives is a way to persist in a world that was already aware of its own forward thought. In an intricate and well-organised assessment, Wadiak makes an enquiry into the different ambiguous representations of gift and not-gift (loan or commodity), highlighting how the two ballads are both chivalric and mercantile in nature.

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Overall, Wadiak’s *Savage Economy* offers a valuable, useful examination of the noble gift giving motif in late medieval English romance and its complex use in texts where its implicit link to violent acts stands as a symbol of a distinct class (the chivalrous nobility) and time period. Equally interesting is Wadiak’s suggestion that English romances’ ‘returns’ are intertwined with a kind of violence which is read as the founding gesture that guarantees coherence in the community (149). Yet, possibly because of the elaborate arguments the author attempts to establish, at some points the prose is dense. This makes *Savage Economy* more suitable for an academic audience, which is a drawback since there are not many studies dedicated to the significance of gift giving in Middle English romance. In fact, academic essays and books more aimed at a general audience are needed, particularly in what concerns lesser known texts such as *Sir Cleges* or *Sir Amadece*.

Some degree of familiarity with the stories looked at by Wadiak is also advisable, as a reader not acquainted with them might find the line of thought hard to follow. Furthermore, some of the author’s arguments would have been made clearer had concepts such as ‘commodity vs. gift’ or ‘not-gift’ been clarified. While it is understandable that the author may not have wanted to devote much of the book to explain specific terminology, even readers who are familiar with these terms might not make the same associations that the author does. Despite these limitations, Wadiak’s study provides a good opportunity to consider late medieval romance from a novel perspective, and it ultimately constitutes a solid contribution to the field of medieval literary studies.

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Book Review: A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy

By Sean Tandy


The topic of Ostrogothic Italy has recently seen something of a revival in English language scholarship. Since 2013, important studies reassessing major works by the period’s two biggest literary figures, Cassiodorus and Boethius; a total reappraisal of Ostrogothic legal culture; and a fundamental restatement of Theoderic the Great’s constitutional position have all been published. Given this new focus on the time period, it is perhaps unsurprising that a companion on the subject should appear, as the publication of a handbook canonizes a topic as an independent field of study. A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy commendably orients its readers to the major issues in the field and the trends of past scholarship. It simultaneously offers new interpretations of perennial problems as well as a few essays on topics previously unexplored in Ostrogothic-era scholarship, resulting in a book that appeals both to novices and experts in the field of Ostrogothic Italy.

The book is divided into nineteen chapters arranged in three larger thematic sections: “The State,” “Culture and Society,” and “Religion”. The first chapter, which sits outside of these three sections, orients the reader to the book and to the larger field of Ostrogothic studies. The front matter also includes a short foreword, a list of figures, and a helpful list of contributors that highlights past publications as well as announcing in-progress projects that should appeal to readers of this volume. The Companion ends with a “Glossary of Selected Sources,” which helpfully introduces the most important literary sources for Ostrogothic history from the Acta Synhodorum habitarum Romae to the Symmachan Forgeries, and a general index. Each chapter

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ends with its own bibliography, a wise editorial choice that allows readers easy access to the sources that interest them in that chapter.

The first section of the book, “The State,” contains seven essays beginning with Gerda Heydemann’s “The Ostrogothic Kingdom: Ideologies and Transitions.” This first essay sets the tone for the first section as it not only provides the historical introduction that a companion volume requires, but also attempts to move beyond the simple overarching dichotomies that have long dominated discussion of the period (Roman/Goth, Arian/Orthodox, etc.) and instead explores such identities as part of several competing ideological constructs that helped govern, but did not necessarily determine, political motivation in Ostrogothic Italy. This interest in moving beyond traditional dichotomies and exploring the intricacies of Ostrogothic-era ideologies are borne out in other essays in this section such as Federico Marazzi’s chapter on cities, Sean Lafferty’s on the law, Christiane Radtki’s on the role of the Senatorial Elite, Guy Halsall’s chapter on ethnicity and military organization, and John J. Arnold’s very useful chapter on Ostrogothic provinces, a subject that had previously not received such focused attention. M. Shane Bjornlie’s chapter on Government administration is particularly noteworthy as it offers a new line of argumentation about Ostrogothic-era administration. Bjornlie contends that a lack of fiscal resources and the absence of a strong capital city created a small itinerant bureaucracy that followed the Ostrogothic King. These administrators were required to perform a wide array of duties, many of which fell outside of the purview of their office, which suggests a drastically revised view of the size and work of the Ostrogothic-era administration that should spark future scholarship.

The seven essays of Part Two, “Culture and Society,” move away from politics narrowly defined and instead analyze the cultural productions of Ostrogothic Italy and some consequent political ramifications. Analyses of literary and artistic products and trends are offered by Natalia Lozovsky and Mark J. Johnson, while Deborah M. Deliyannis and Cam Grey discuss urban and rural life, respectively. This section also contains two essays about identity and ethnic perception. Brian Swain’s investigation into the topic of “Gothicness,” and Kate Cooper’s analysis of the Greek Historian Procopius’s narrative of the fall of Amalasuentha. Both of these essays examine the stereotypes that inform our sources. Cooper’s essay focuses on the Greek historian Procopius and his views not only of ethnicity, but also of gender. Finally, Paolo
Squatriti’s chapter “Barbarizing the Bel Paese: Environmental History in Ostrogothic Italy,” analyzes another hitherto unexplored aspect of Ostrogothic history. Squatriti’s article places Ostrogothic history in the wider sweep of Late Antique environmental history, using evidence outside the realm of traditional historians such as animal bones, pollen levels, and patterns of arboreal cultivation, in order to argue that demographic drops and changes in landscape patterns need not be seen as the result of catastrophic devastation, but rather inhabitants’ adaption to the landscape and to changing economic conditions.

Part Three, “Religion,” is comprised of four essays that nuance the relationship between religious institutions, cultural identity, and political activity. Kristina Sessa’s contribution focuses on the Roman see and the role of the Pope during this period, aiming to disrupt traditional narratives of papal supremacy by noting the limited jurisdiction of the Pope. This article also examines the papacy’s political relationship with both Theoderic and Justinian. The first of Rita Lizzi Testa’s two chapters examines the relationship between the Ostrogothic state and ecclesiastical institutions, concluding that Theoderic granted new temporal powers to ecclesiastical authorities. Lizzi Testa’s second contribution maps the development of episcopal sees and monastic centers. The section’s final chapter by Samuel Cohen again treats a previously underexplored topic in Ostrogothic Studies — religious diversity. In this piece, Cohen examines three religious groups, Jews, Arians, and pagans, demonstrating the variety of ways these groups interacted with each other and the dominant Orthodox Christian culture of sixth-century Italy.

The Companion to Ostrogothic Italy has a great deal to commend it. Perhaps the most admirable feature about the book is its comprehensiveness. The work covers nearly every topic that one could want in a companion. Even those topics to which there is no dedicated chapter are explored in other chapters in the book. For example, though there is no chapter specifically dedicated to the Ostrogothic economy, the Ostrogothic fisc is discussed in the context of the administration, the financial situation of the cities is discussed in the chapter on cities, and the financial yields of the countryside are discussed in chapters on the rural economy and environmental history. Another useful aspect of the book and one that further highlights its completeness is the book’s self-referential notes that direct the reader towards other chapters in the companion to explore a particular issue more in-depth. This feature adds to the practical usability of the companion, as readers are more likely to start with the chapter most relevant for
them. The notes will thus provide them other avenues of inquiry within the book itself. A final strength of the book is the diversity of viewpoints. Not all scholars agree with one another on major issues of interpretation, like Theoderic the Great’s “constitutional position” vis-à-vis Constantinople. Far from being a weakness of the volume, however, the contrasting viewpoints allow the reader to tease out current areas of debate in the scholarship; the self-referential footnotes enable the reader to pursue alternative interpretations. Readers can easily learn the state of the debates, learn more information, and make their own decision on the matter. In a similar vein, several of the articles summarize divergent opinions before presenting their own arguments. Swain’s chapter on Gothic identity, for instance, summarizes the major strands of the debate about Gothic identity, whether it was “real” or merely a cultural construct, before presenting his own view. The companion also offers nineteen different bibliographies that introduce the reader to important primary and secondary sources and give direction for further study. Thus A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy admirably provides a comprehensive overview to the state of the field, including the field’s conflicts, contradictions, and unresolved issues.

Criticisms of the volume are few. A few of the essays read too much like a list of facts rather than an essay with an argument, but in a companion volume such chapters are still of great value to the novice. A few comments here and there seem to miss the mark. For example, Lozovsky’s claim (p. 331) that Boethius kept aloof from politics until the consulship of both his sons in 522 elides the fact that he was consul himself in 510, and was asked by Theoderic to perform a number of tasks for the central government (Cassiod. Var. 1.10, 1.45, and 2.40). Such missteps are rare, however, as are typographic errors. A few editorial oddities are distracting, such as the lack of primary sources in the bibliographies of some essays, references in the main text to statements only made in footnotes, and irregular spacing between paragraphs in the appendix, but these are not serious enough to frustrate most readers. The one major drawback of the book that should be mentioned is the price tag. At $237 directly from the publisher and not significantly less expensive for an electronic version, the work is well out of the average scholar’s price range (and certainly not affordable to the average graduate student!). The best option for those interested in this volume is to convince your institution’s library to subscribe to one of Brill’s subscription services.
In the end, though, Brill’s *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy* exemplifies the handbook genre by successfully providing the reader with an understanding of the basic facts of the field and ongoing scholarly controversies. The book is a perfect introduction to the field for graduate students or scholars in other fields. The text also offers several essays on new topics that should extend the volume’s appeal to experts in the field of Ostrogothic Studies. As the editors note in the introduction, the Ostrogothic era is often invoked to explain the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, and as such, the companion should also appeal to general scholars of Late Ancient and Early Medieval History. Moreover, individual chapters in the volume are sure to be welcomed by scholars and students in Boethian Studies, Ethnicity Studies, Environmental Studies, Disaster Studies, legal scholarship, Religious Studies, and Art History. In these ways, the companion should aid in further canonizing and promoting the field of Ostrogothic Studies.

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