



Medieval Venice under Siege

Elfdalian - Ancient Norse Dialect or Language?

The Wall in Visby on Gotland and other stories about medieval building materials

Medieval Histories

2015 May - No. 14

Medieval Histories

-a weekly magazine about new exhibitions, books, research and much more

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Photo (frontpage):

Procession of the True Cross in Piazza San Marco, 1496; Tempera & oil on canvas; Accademia, Venice. Source: Wikipedia (Public Domain)



Source: *Avaaz.it*

Medieval Venice under Siege by Cruise Ships

Italian big business and – probably – corrupt politicians wish to dig a canal in the Venetian Lagoon, enabling gargantuan cruise-ships to hover over the skyline of the medieval city

Venice is a small and very precious city with a population of no more than 57.000 people in the inner city. Nevertheless, each day 80.000 visit the city. In 2013 more than 60% of these people spilled off the large cruise-ships, of which more than a 1000 visited the city that year. In September 2013, 26 ships entered the Lagoon inside one week in September.

Now lobbyists for the tourism industry in Italy wish to dig a deep canal through the lagoon in order to enable gargantuan ships of twice the size of the Titanic to be able to stand on the ancient quays of the medieval merchants.

Venice of our medieval dreams

No wonder, the Italian campaigner Avazz.it got more than 50.000 signatures inside a few days; at the time of writing this article it has risen to 113.781. This initiative was presented to the Italian president, Matteo Renzi when he visited the city a few days ago. The petition is still open.



Source: melusina.altervista.org 2012: Blog: Aqua

The Italian government is obviously under pressure from the cruise lobby to give the green light to the construction. However, the dredging of the channel has been emphatically criticised by the Italian Centre for Protection and Environmental Research. According to a survey carried out by the Institute, the ecological balance of the Lagoon is bound to be seriously compromised, if the plans are carried through. The scientific community is unanimous in its opinion that the lagoon, the only thing that defends Venice from the fury of the sea, simply will not exist if the project is approved. Another challenge is the well-known fact that tourists, who arrive on cruise-ships, seldom leave their “comfort-zone” for long. At the most, they take a short ride on a Vaporetto and grab at sandwich at a bar in St. Marco’s square. As a consequence, hotels and restaurants have been suffering for years.

It is hoped that the current initiatives of the Italian government to curtail corrup-

tion will help to stop the project. As late as in March the Italian transport Minister had to resign in the wake of the arrests of four people as part of a continuing investigations over corruption in connection with public contracts. A year ago the Mayor of Venice, Giorgio Orsoni, had to step down when he and 34 other Venetian officials were arrested in connection with a wider investigation into alleged corruption over the new flood barriers.

According to Avaaz, two alternative plans for hosting such large ships have been suggested.

The lagoon as well as Venice is protected as World Heritage. In 2012 a detailed protection plan was agreed upon between UNESCO, Citta’ di Venezia, UNESCO Veneto and other stakeholders in the region. A keyword in this plan is of course sustainability and the management of tourism flows. Other nice initiatives planned are routes for cyclists, encouragement of tour-

ists to visit the periphery of Venice etc. Since then the number of cruise ships entering the lagoon has quadrupled!

Sign the Petition!

SOURCES:

Salviamo Venezia dalle Grandi Navi

The Merchants are Killing Venice

Venice is Sinking Under a Tidal Wave of Corruption

The Sunken Dream of Venice

No-one in their right mind travels to Venice these days. Overcrowded with tourists and emptied for local Venetians, it does not inspire to any sort of slow travel. However, one is allowed to dream...

A few years back the Venetians staged a dramatic burial of their city. Officially the

number of inhabitants had sunk beneath 60.000 and a group of concerned citizens rigged a gondola with a traditional casket and organized a funeral procession down the Canal Grande. More than 300 boats and gondolas took part in the funeral procession, which ended in front of the Palazzo Cà Farsetti, where a funeral prayer for the "Serenissima" was offered in the Venetian dialect.

The Funeral of Venice 2009. Source: Venessia.com





The earliest map of Venice. Brother Paolino, Map of Venezia, 1346. The map is included in Fra Paolino's manuscript. Chronicon a mundi initio ad annum Christi circiter MCCCXVVI. Biblioteca Marciana Venice, cod. marc. Lat. Z. 399 (=1610), f. 7r.

This was no idle joke. Venice is threatened; and more so, today, when more than 80.000 tourists visit the city every day, many of them arriving on gargantuan cruise-ships, for which plans are currently underway to make further room (see above).

We, though, may well ask, what the city would be like, if “the others” had to queue for years (which may in fact be the only solution in the future, when a billion Chinese and Indians are expected to roam the world each summer). The answer is of course, that it might once again be the city of our youth: Medieval Venice.

Early History

Venice was built on the archipelago in the

centre of the extensive Venetian Lagoon in the 7th century as a refuge for Roman citizens fleeing the barbarian invasion of the Lombards. One of twelve such settlements in the lagoons, it was not a particularly important partner in the first confederation. In AD 810 strife and flooding led to a relocation of the central government of the confederation to Venice. At the beginning the centre was no more than a small chapel dedicated to S Todaro. However in AD 829 the body of the Evangelist, St. Mark, was brought to the city from Alexandria.

The archipelago on which the city was constructed measured no more than 1.5 X 5 km with two centres around S. Marco and Rialto, with the latter functioning as the market and the former as the guardian of the entrance to the Canal Grande. But other islets were also settled with churches, monasteries and palaces at this time. S. Pietro di Castello, S. Zaccaria, S. Gioglio Maggiore and SS Apostoli are but a few of the better-known examples. As the city grew the number of these parishes exploded and around 1200 there were more than 70 such parishes or local centres around the city. Each was built around

Marco Polo leaving Venice in 1271. MS. Bodl. 264, fol. 218r. Source: Wikipedia (Public Domain)





*The famous columns erected by Ziani to mark the central pier and gate of Venice AD 1175. © Janmad.
Source: Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 2.5)*

a campo with a well and with an adjoining palace and church and linked by bridges to the other islets.

As the Venetians had little access to timber, buildings were soon constructed from spoliae from nearby Roman cities like Altinum and further away. Later Mestre on the mainland functioned as a supplier of building bricks, sourced inland. When buildings grew in the height, foundations of solid timber became necessary. This was sourced as far away as Friuli and the colony of Istria.

Trading Hub

By the 10th century Venice had established itself as an important trading hub between Eastern and Northern Europe. Commercial links secured trading privileges from the Byzantine Emperors and the huge shipbuilding enterprise was placed

under state control at the Arsenal in the eastern part of the city, which was founded in 1104. Venice became de facto the capital of a huge trading empire with S. Marco as the spiritual and political centre and Rialto as the commercial hotspot. Symbolic were the two famous columns erected by the Doge Sebastiano Ziani (1172 – 78) after he had reclaimed the inlet, which today forms the piazzetta San Marco. At the same time the market was moved to the Western bank of the Canal Grande and the first bridge was erected.

City of Dreams

In 1204 the Fourth Crusade resulted in the taking of Constantinople and a vast booty of relics, sculptures, arts and other valuables were brought to the city; most famous, are of course the four horses, which were placed on the terrace of S Marco in 1254 and whose replicas still reigns over



Palazzo Bernado a San Polo © Didier Descouens. CC By-SA 4.0

the city. (The originals may be admired in the basilica). At the same time the piazza was paved for the first time, while the mint was moved from the market to the centre of government. Nearby huge granaries were erected to secure the city in times of hunger and a series of civil works were commenced, basically resulting in the present palace complex, which may be enjoyed today.

By 1200 the population of Venice had risen to more than 100.000, literally turning it into one of the largest cities in Europe at that time (London could only master ca. 40.000). Venice was simply a metropolis, surrounded by a string of satellites, working to provide the city with its necessary victuals and daily supplies. While Torcello

thus functioned as a spiritual centre, Chioggia produced salt and furnished the city with fish, and Murano produced its famous glass. Around the lagoon, wine, fruits and vegetables were produced and send to market every day.

Plague and War

In 1348 plague swept through the city and killed half of the population. This was followed by war (1378 -80) against Venice's great rival, Genoa. It nearly resulted in a violent conquest. Although the Genoese were repulsed, it took centuries for the city to reclaim some of its former vivacity. Around 1420 Venice is reckoned to have been top of the list, once again. At that time Venice governed not only the city and

the surrounding Lagoon, but the whole republic including Vicenza, Padua and Verona.

Palaces

Once again a series of palaces and public constructions were initiated. Built on timbers driven into the underlying ground and built of bricks, they were decorated with details made of white Istrian stone – windows, balconies, doorways came to embellish these magnificent buildings, of which many of course may still be seen in the cityscape.

Characteristically they were constructed around the *Androne*, the large hall, which ran from the central entrance opening up from the canal and all the way through the house. On either side of this hall were the offices and stocks. On the first floor was the apartment of the noble family. Further up were the kitchens and the servants' quarters. Towards the rear of the palace was a

courtyard with a well and an external staircase leading to the apartment above.

The most famous of these palaces is of course the 15th century *Ca' d'Oro*. Earlier examples are the *Donà* palaces (one of which is a hotel) and the *Ca' da Mosto*.

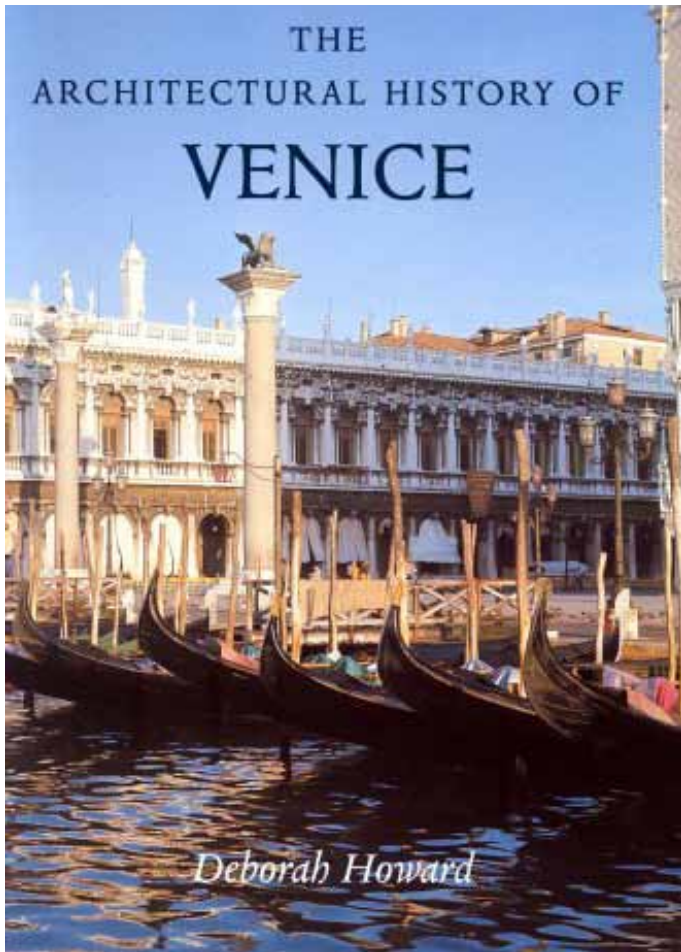
Most of these medieval palaces, which still line the *Canal Grande* were rebuilt in the early modern period. Later they were turned into hotels. While several palaces are dedicated to tell the story of daily life in 17th and 18th century Venice, the city museum curiously enough do not have at its disposal a palace, which may showcase the daily life of a medieval merchant. (The two most famous examples: *Ca' Farsetti* and *Ca' Loredan* are used for municipal administration).

Courtyard of the Ca' d'Oro in Venice. © Godromil. Source: Wikipedia (Public Domain)



READ MORE:

The Architecture of Venice



The Architectural History of Venice

by Deborah Howard

Yale University Press; Revised and enlarged edition 2004

This book is the indispensable guide to the history of architecture in Venice, encompassing the city's fascinating variety of buildings from ancient times to the present day. Completely updated, this edition of Deborah Howard's classic volume (first published in 1980) is filled with splendid illustrations, most of them new and reproduced in full colour. Howard writes in a highly accessible style, inviting those who visit Venice in person, armchair travellers, and all students of Venetian art and architecture to look more closely at the unique architecture of one of the world's most beautiful cities

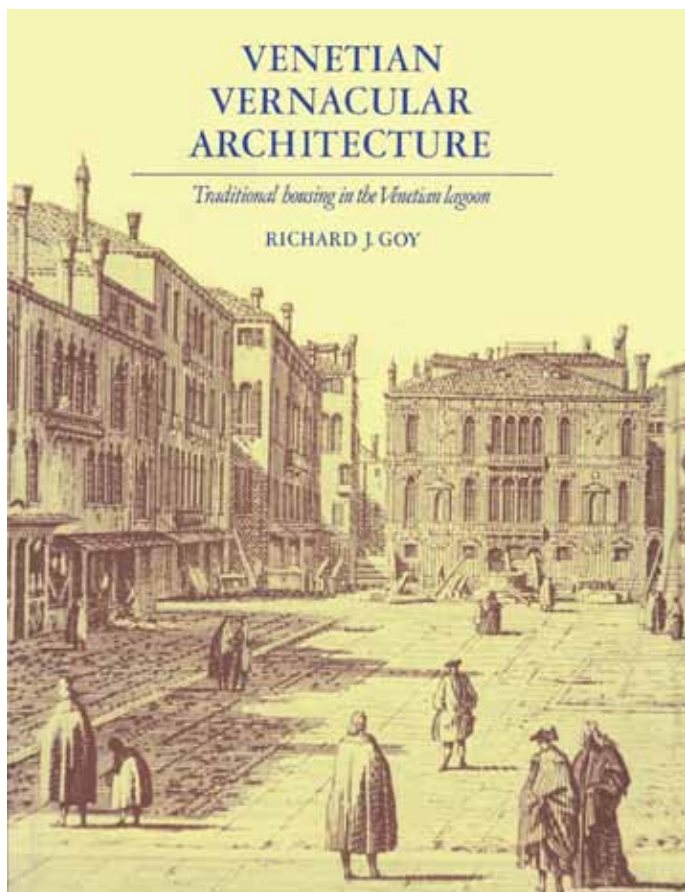
Art & Architecture: Venice

By Marion Kaminski

Ullmann Publishing 2013

Designed to provide a detailed exploration into the exceptional array of art and architecture in Venice, this captivating volume will surely enthrall anyone interested in the city's buildings, paintings, sculptures and history. This brand new edition is in lightweight softcover and features over 600 full-colour illustrations and town plans.





Venetian Vernacular Architecture: Traditional Housing in the Venetian Lagoon

by Richard J. Goy

Cambridge University Press; Reissue edition 2011

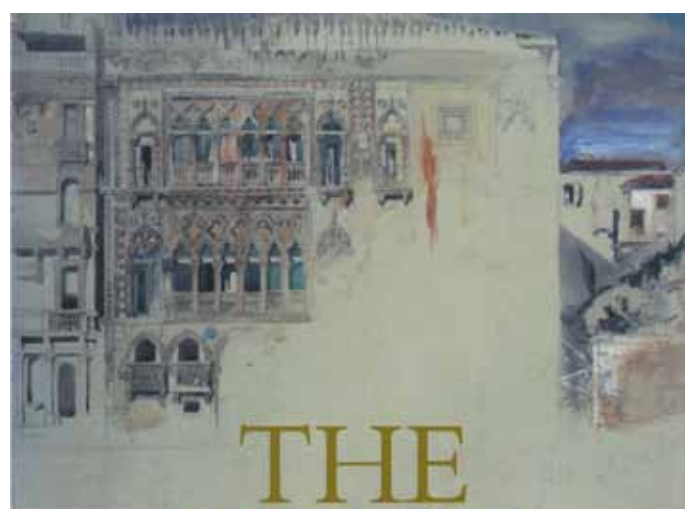
This book is an introduction to the vernacular or 'minor' architecture of the villages of the Venetian lagoon, excluding the historic centre of the city itself. In a broadly based and fully illustrated discussion, the author aims to show how certain, often palatial, architectural forms found in the Venetian metropolis were modified when transferred to the outlying, 'suburban' communities of the lagoon. The book offers an encyclopaedic guide to almost all aspects of the building process, paying particular attention to materials, motifs, decoration and the organisation of labour.

The House of Gold: Building a Palace in Medieval Venice

by Richard J. Goy

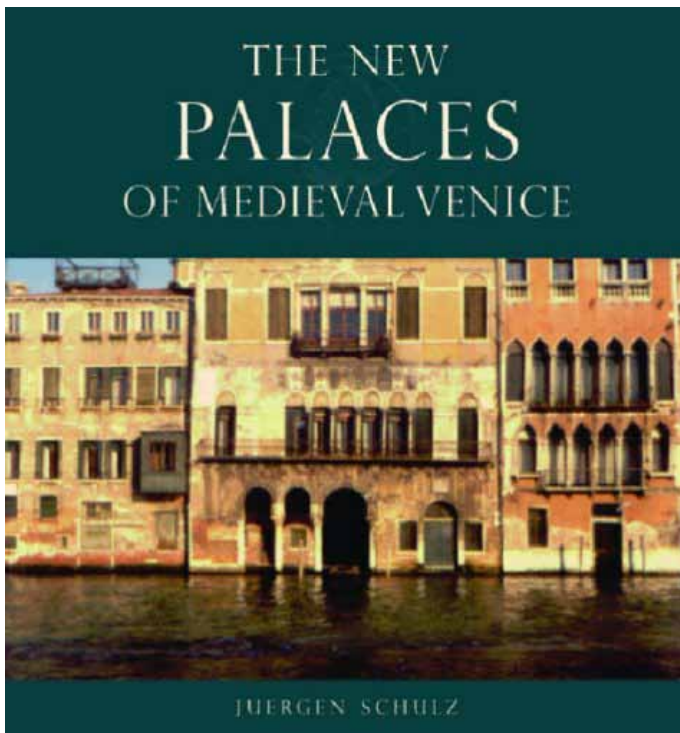
Cambridge University Press; Reissue edition 2011

In 1406 a young Venetian nobleman, Marin Contarini, married into another ancient patrician clan. His wife's family owned an old palace on the Grand Canal. Contarini demolished the old palace and, in 1421, he began to build the Cà d'Oro, his 'House of Gold'. This 1993 book tells the history of the building of the palace over a period of nearly twenty years. Dr Goy discusses the background to the building of the palace and presents a discussion of the building industry in Venice in this flourishing period, and of the functions of the three chief building crafts. In the latter half of the study, the whole building process is recreated in detail.



THE HOUSE of GOLD

BUILDING A PALACE IN MEDIEVAL VENICE
RICHARD J. GOY



The New Palaces of Medieval Venice

by Jürgen Schulz

Pennsylvania State University Press 2004

ISBN-10: 0271023511

ISBN-13: 978-0271023519

The palaces of Venice have long excited the wonder of visitors. These grand, ornate

buildings seem to float on the water of the city's canals like the sea castles in a mariner's dream. But Juergen Schulz demonstrates that the origins of these residences lay on terra firma, in a widely disseminated building type that, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was adapted to the special circumstances of an Adriatic lagoon and the needs of the merchants who were turning this environment into a center of trade.

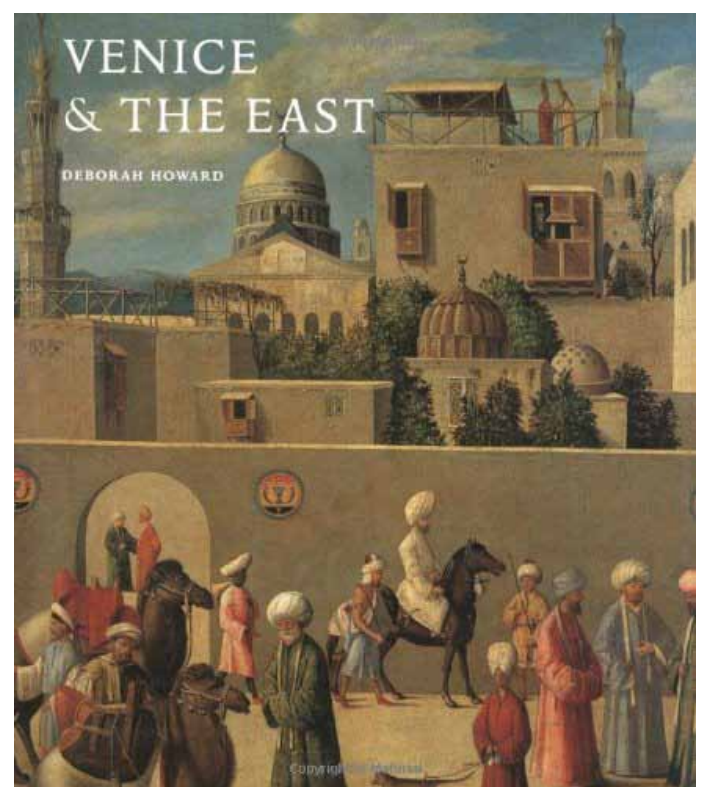
The book, based in both archival research and first-hand knowledge of Venice, reconstructs the original appearance of the city's oldest surviving residences, such as that of the Corner and Pesaro families, and traces the many later modifications made to these buildings. Further, Schulz's book breaks new ground by presenting a systematic discussion of the use of sculpture in Venice's early palaces, famed for their "exhibitionistic" ornament and scale. Illustrated with numerous photographs and plans.

Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100--1500

by Deborah Howard

Yale University Press 2000

Venice's merchants imported more than material goods from the East. They also acquired also a wealth of visual ideas and information from Muslim culture. This lively and richly illustrated book investigates the influence of oriental trade and travel on medieval Venice and its architecture. Howard explores a range of building types that reflect the impact of Islamic imagery, paying special attention to San Marco and the Palazzo Ducale.



NEW BOOK:

Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade

SACRED PLUNDER

VENICE AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE FOURTH CRUSADE

DAVID M. PERRY



Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade

by David M. Perry

Pennsylvania State University Press 2015

ISBN-10: 0271065087

ISBN-13: 978-0271065083

In *Sacred Plunder*, David Perry argues that plundered relics, and narratives about them, played a central role in shaping the memorial legacy of the Fourth Crusade and the development of Venice's civic identity in the thirteenth century.

After the Fourth Crusade ended in 1204, the disputes over the memory and mean-

ing of the conquest began. Many crusaders faced accusations of impiety, sacrilege, violence, and theft. In their own defense, they produced hagiographical narratives about the movement of relics - a medieval genre called *translatio* - that restated their own versions of events and shaped the memory of the crusade. The recipients of relics commissioned these unique texts in order to exempt both the objects and the people involved with their theft from broader scrutiny or criticism. Perry further demonstrates how these narratives became a focal point for cultural transformation and an argument for the creation of the new Venetian empire as the city moved from an era of mercantile expansion to one of imperial conquest in the thirteenth century.

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- Interpretations

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- *Translatio* and Venice Before and After 1204
- *Translatio* and the Myth of Venice

About the Author:

David M. Perry is Associate Professor of History at Dominican University. He is a frequent contributor to CNN.com, the Chronicle of Higher Education, the Atlantic, and Al Jazeera America.



Medieval boat is lifted from the ground near the river stella – Foto: Turco Massimo

Medieval riverboat found in the Grado Lagoon

Medieval riverboat from the 10th century has been discovered in the river Stella near the Grado Lagoon close to Udine in Northern Italy

The river Stella was one of the most important inroads to the Roman city of Aquileia. For some years an international group of scientists, archaeologists, historians and others have worked to map the historical river and its fluvial delta. During this work a number of exciting finds have been made; many from Roman Antiquity,

but also from the Middle Ages. Already in 1981 a group of divers discovered a unique boat from late Antiquity, which had sunk together with its full cargo of tiles and amphorae. Since 2012 a group of archaeologists – the Anaxum Project – have worked to register this find and do a full report on the cargo.

Working the area, the archaeologists struck luck in 2012, when they found what appears to be an abandoned medieval riverboat from the 11th century. Preservation of the boat is still going on and publication of this find is pending.

However, at this point we know that:- the boat has been dated to the 11th century (radiocarbon).

- it measured app. 8 m x 1.86 m
- its construction differs from the late antique boat found in 198.

In fact, it seems to represent an intermediate type between boats from the Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

It appears to have been used both in the river and in the lagoon.

The find helps to understand the historical context of the River Stella, which appears to have been a dynamic traderoute connecting the lagoon with the commandery at Precenicco, which was run by the Teutonic order from 1210 – 1623. The knights

used the location to organize part of the maritime traffic to the Holy Land in the time of the crusades.

The plan is to build an eco-historical museum around the finds, which have been made not far from the natural park of Riserva Naturale Foci dello Stella. Exactly where this museum will be located is at present unknown.

SOURCES:

A new shipwreck of XI AD from Stella river

Waterlands. The eco-historical landscape of the Stella River (2014)

Medieval ship from River Stella near Friuli © Anaxum



Is Elfdalian an Ancient Norse Dialect? Or language?

Is Elfdalian a dialect? Or a distinct language? Whichever way it is characterised, it is a very old variety of a Swedish dialect, Dalecarlian

Elfdalian or Övdalian is a North Germanic language spoken by about 3 – 5000 people in the Älvdalen Municipality in Northern Dalarna in central Sweden.

Elfdalian is considered to be a separate language by some linguists, but many others believe it to be a dialect of Swedish. It has developed in relative isolation since the Middle Ages and maintains a number of features of Old Norse not found in other

Northern Germanic languages, not even in Icelandic. As a result, Elfdalian differs markedly from Swedish and can be difficult for other Swedes to understand.

The dialectal position of Elfdalian within the Scandinavian continuum lies in the middle between East and West Nordic. Certain linguistic features indicate the language split from its Norse neighbours in the early Old Norse period; perhaps around the 8th century.

One of the interesting features is the nasal sounds, which were documented in an Icelandic manuscript from the 13th century. However, this was generally believed

The local museum, Rots Skans on a winterday. © Rots Skans





Bowl from the 1608 with a carved inscription in runes © Rots Skans

to be a “misunderstanding”. Now, however, scholars have found the phenomena in Elfdalian and believe it was very widespread.

One scholar has measured the vocabulary of Elfdalian and found that it is in fact closest to Icelandic. However, it does contain a distinct number of words with very ancient roots.

Runes

Runes were used to write Elfdalian until the early 20th century. Carved on small sticks, people used the runic alphabet to send small messages to each other; just like the tradition must have been in the Middle Ages in the rest of Scandinavia.

However, a new standard orthography for Elfdalian was devised in 2005 by Råðd-järum (The Elfdalian Language Council), and accepted by Ulum Dalska (The Organization for the Preservation of Elfdalian). Up to the 50s Elfdalian was used as the medium of instruction in schools in the

Elfdalian-speaking region. Since then Swedish has been used, however since the 80s some Elfdalian has been reintroduced in schools and there has been a revival of interest in and use of the language.

HEAR MORE:

Elfdalian Song

READ MORE:

Studies in Övdalian Morphology and Syntax: New research on a lesser-known Scandinavian language

By Kristine Bentzen, Henrik Rosenkvist, Janne Bondi Johannessen

John Benjamins Publishing Company 2015

This week the ‘Third International Conference on Elfdalian’ took place in Copenhagen

Medieval Mortar

Which organic additives did medieval people use to get their mortar to bind?

Medieval mortar was traditionally made of slaked lime, sand and an additive or binder. These binders were added in order to improve the durability and hardness as well as reduce shrinkage and traction. Further, the binders helped to facilitate adhesion and increase plasticity and workability.

For some time restaurators have been interested in studying the different kinds of medieval mortars in detail, in order to be able to approach the restoration of old buildings with the original materials (see next article about the use of ancient types of lime used in connection with the rebuilding of the medieval wall around Visby on Gotland).

The most common additives were animal glue, casein and other dairy products, beer,

animal fat, linseed oil, albumen, blood and natural resins.

Recently a group of scientists have studied the mortar used in the old medieval military shipyard in Amalfi from the 9th century (but renovated in the 13th century). This particular mortar was made of lime, volcanic rocks and halite (rock salt). The last ingredient was probably caused by the nearness to the sea. Finally the scientists were able to identify a binder with a plant origin, echoing the ancient recipe of Pliny consisting of wine, hog's lard and fig-juice.

Technology of Medieval Mortars: An Investigation into the Use of Organic Additives

By L. Rampazzi¹, M. P. Colombini, C. Conti, C. Corti¹, A. Lluveras-Tenorio, A. Sansonetti and M. Zanaboni

Archaeometry 2015. Article published online: 20 JAN 2015

DOI: 10.1111/arcm.12155

The wall in the medieval Arsenale in Amalfi is seen in the background





The Wall in Visby on Gotland

February 2012 more than 90 m² of the wall around Visby crumpled to earth. Now the wall has been repaired using medieval techniques, kept alive in the countryside.

When part of the medieval wall around Visby slid to the ground in February 2012, it felt like a foreboding of worse to come. The impressive wall, which is a long medieval defensive wall from the 13th century, is World Heritage and is constantly monitored by the Swedish National Heritage Board. When the collapse took place, archaeologists had recently examined the wall. Nevertheless, this particular weak part had not been discovered. It is generally felt, that more will come.

This is one of the reasons why the rebuilding was carefully thought through from the beginning. How to proceed was also a matter of gaining valuable experience in order to be prepared for the next time.

The Construction of the Wall

The city wall as it stands today is 3.44 km. long (originally it measured 3.6 km. Originally there were 29 large towers and 22 small wall-towers riding on top of the wall. Today 27 large towers and 9 of the smaller ones remain. Essentially begun in the 13th century it was finished in 1361, when the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag defeated an army in front of the gates and conquered the city.

The City wall around Visby was thus an on-going building-project. The first wall



was made as a lower three-leaf wall with two shells built of limestone and fat lime mortar and a soft and porous rubble core of limestone and clay mortar. The second wall was built higher and on top of the old wall. Materials were mainly limestone and lime mortar. However, in the 20th century a number of restorations had taken place, using strong cement mortar. It soon became apparent that the collapse of the wall was a reflection of the use of these modern materials and techniques.

In order to describe and analyse the construction a number of modern techniques were applied: laser-scanning, 3D-reconstruction, microscopic analysis of specimens. To this should be added a careful and detailed examination of the wall.

During this exploration of the properties of the wall, a number of restoration techniques were tried out. However, in the end it was decided to simply use the ancient materials, the local limestone from nearby (as is a series of other medieval stone-

buildings on the island of Gotland.) The reason was that the archaeologists discovered that the more modern materials (cement mortar) were less porous. Thus moisture had tended to be caught in the recesses of the wall. In the weeks leading up to the disaster there were a series of shifts in the weather alternating between freezing and thawing. Ultimately this led to the crumbling wall.

The reconstruction of the wall, which officially began in 2014, thus led to a “rediscovery” of the ancient medieval techniques, which luckily were still applied by locals today. For instance, mixing quicklime (burnt lime) with sand and fat according to ancient recipes produced the mortar, which was used in the reconstruction.

Medieval Quicklime

Production of quicklime had been going on at Gotland well into the 1950s and ethnologists, trying to document the old techniques, had a series of films made.

These films document how quicklime was produced. First you dig a whole in the earth and line it with boards. Next step is placing the burnt limestones in the grave. Afterwards it must be covered with a layer of boards and on top of that a layer of fresh horse-manure. It takes about 2 – 5 years to get quicklime out of this. This produces a rather coarse-grained lime, which has to be “whipped” in order to be so smooth that it can be mixed with sand.

These – and other – discoveries have inspired the project to run a series of workshops, teaching building restorers from all over Europe how to explore and use old limekilns and techniques.

The reconstruction of the wall has cost €950.000

SOURCE:

Construction and Materials of Visby medieval city wall – risk of damage.

By Kristin Balksten and Carl Thelin

Paper presented in Guimarães at the 9th International Masonry Conference 2014

READ MORE:

Visby Ringmur – Kulturarv som rasar och återuppbyggs

(Visby Wall – Heritage which collapses and gets rebuilt)

By Kristin Balksten and Ulrika Mebus

Published by the Swedish National Heritage Board 2015-05-04





Maria Annunziata di Monte Sorbo

Along a small scenic route leading into the hilly countryside not far from Sarsina on the motorway between Ravenna and Citta di Castello lies a small church. Although secluded it is well worth a detour

Maria Annunziata di Monte Sorbo – or Pieve di Monte Sorbo – is a beautiful Romanesque church, originally founded in the 8th century. It lies in the Valley of Savio, which was an important thoroughfare for people travelling to Rome from Ravenna.

Early on, it must have been an important local centre, for – apart from the fancy construction and architectural grandeur

- we can read on one of the tombstones in the church that a bishop from nearby Sarsina by the name of Florentius was buried there in 995. It has been speculated that the church was part of a local hospice or pilgrim-centre, located on the road between Ravenna and Rome; a road, which may have run another course than today.

Or it may simply have been located near a hermitage of a local saint, Vicinius of Sarsina († AD 330). Even today, there is a local cult around San Vicinius and a dedicated pilgrimage-route – **Il cammino di San Vicinio**. It leads from Sarsina via Musella (the traditional location of the ancient hermitage) towards Monte Sorbo.

However, no written documentation of the

foundation of the church have been found and archaeology points to a construction between the 8th and 9th centuries. The church is built like a Greek cross, probably inspired by the Byzantines in Ravenna. Its Romanesque look is due to a heavy restoration, which took place in the 12th century.

Recently the church has undergone a careful restoration and a group of scientists, historians and archaeologists has studied the church and its historical context in detail.

Columns

One prominent detail is the columns and other building materials used in the construction of the church. These were obviously spoliae from Antiquity. Each element, which differs from the others, has been carefully studied under the microscope. Until now, the presumption was that the spoliae were taken from the Ro-

man city of Sarsina and that is perhaps also the most straightforward explanation. This city was endowed with a series of monumental buildings like for instance a temple dedicated to the Oriental Gods and a public bath. Not far from Sarsina was located the famous Bagno di Romagna, an extra-urban sanctuary and spa facility (still running its business today). Most of the columns at Monte Sorbo dates from the 2d and 3d centuries, when building activities in the region were vibrant.

Another explanation, though, for the presence of the exotic marbles in the church is that they may have been sourced either at Ravenna or Rome. After the destruction of the imperial palaces both places had been literally turned into gargantuan quarries. One way, of deciding this, might be a detailed examination of the actual spoliae in order to decide where they were originally sourced. Such an analysis has recently been carried out.





ing, skilfully constructed out of a diverse set of spoliae sourced either in the local city of Sarsina or further away (Ravenna or Rome – with Ravenna the obvious choice because of the possibility of dragging the columns up the river Savio), writes the authors.

SOURCES:

The Architectural reuse of Roman Marble and Stone Spolia in the Early Medieval Monte Sorbo Church (Sarsina, Central Italy)

By F. Antonelli, P. Santi , A. Renzulli and S. Santoro Bianchi

In: Archaeometry 2015

Early View: 30.04.2015 DOI: 10.1111/arcm.12170

READ MORE:

The article is an English presentation of a monograph published by the interdisciplinary team of historians, art-historians and archaeologists, who have studied the important church for a period of three decades.

Monte Sorbo: la pieve singolare.

Ed. by M. Mengozzi

Cesena: Editrice Stiligraf 2012

Photos: www.mercatosaracenoturismo.it and M. Mengozzi

What has been discovered is, that the columns, carved stones and other fragments have been sourced from a wide variety of quarries. To sum just some of the results up

- The fossiliferous limestone used to manufacture the gravestones and one pillar seems to have come from Aurisina, a village west of Trieste, which was a well-known quarry in Roman Antiquity and later. (For instance the stone was used for the huge slab, which covers the grave of Theoderic in Ravenna).
- The marble for the columns was originally sourced in either Greece or Turkey (probably near Ephesus).
- Capitals seem to have been sourced in a diverse set of locations both in Greece and Turkey.

What this amounts to is, that the church in Monte Sorbo must be characterised as a typical example of a early medieval build-



NEW BOOKS:

Review:

The Ransom of the Soul. Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity

The Ransom of the Soul. Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity

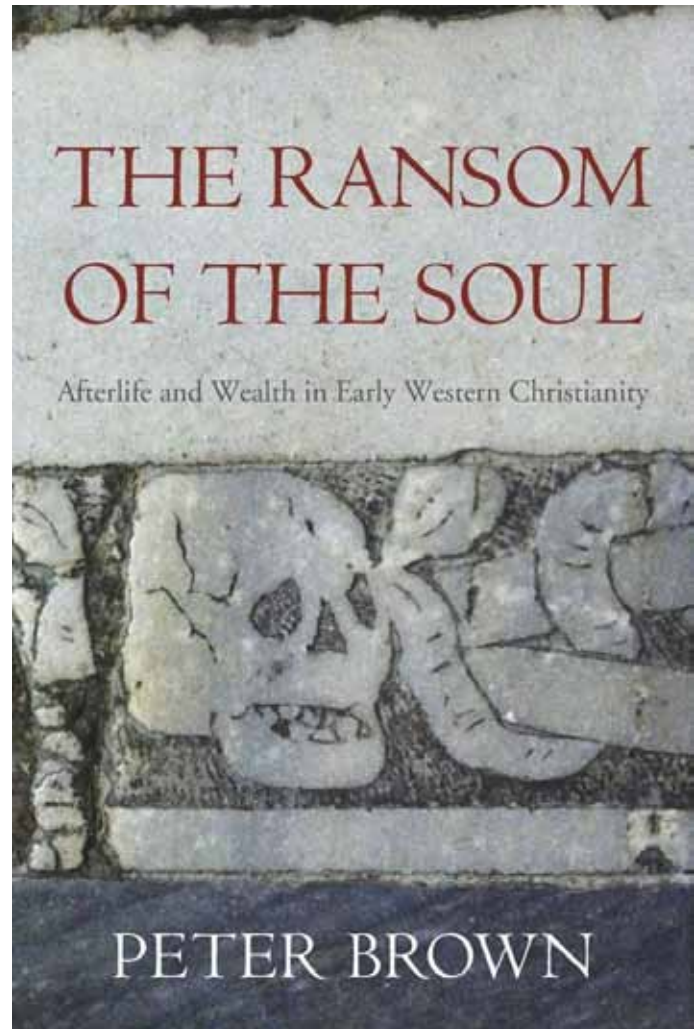
By Peter Brown

Harvard University press 2015

ISBN: 978-0-674-96758-8

Around AD 600 a Visigoth, Trasemirus, from Mandourelle in the region of Aube was commemorated by an oblong slab, measuring 33.8 cm x 51.4 cm. The main part of the memorial plaque is covered with three carved processional crosses and two facing doves. The inscription is relegated to the frame above and to the right of the central carving and seems to have been something like an afterthought. However, quite innovative, the inscription contains a phrase, which came to resound for the rest of the Middle Ages: "In the name of Christ, all men pray for the soul of Trasimeus, who came to rest [at this time?]. His body lies in this tomb. May he live eternally in Christ" [1]

There are several interesting features connected with this slab (the roughness, the manner of carving etc.) However, as Peter Brown points out in his latest book, this is one of the first instances from the continent, where the deceased is no longer praised or - so to speak - raised to the skies - but rather envisioned as a participant in a procession moving towards God. On this spiritual journey the soul of Trasemirus most of all needed our intercessional prayers. According to his world-view, his journey through afterlife was a long and dangerous pilgrimage on which



he would – without doubt – have to move through a terrible harsh wasteland, meeting an assortment of devils and angels, each metering out the exact penance he owed for his transgressions committed in his earlier life. In front of him and his fellow pilgrims would be carried the three procession-crosses depicted on the slab.

As medievalists, we know this nether-world so well, that we are not really struck with its formula nor its stark and scary character. What, perhaps, we do not know as well is how this world-view came about.



The memorial slab of Traseminus is kept in the Musée Archéologique de Narbonne (no. 198/4168)

Luckily Peter Brown has once more come to our help. In a new book “The Ransom of the Soul” (Harvard 2015) he once again delights us with one of his exquisite readings of the writings of the series of learned theologians and intellectuals, he has so often visited in his life’s work. Augustine, of course, figures; but so does also the bishops of Arles (Honoratus, Hilarius and Caesarius) as well as more obscure persons as Leudegar, Barontus and finally Columbanus and Trasemirus (from the 7th century). Those of us, who are familiar with the work of Peter Brown, will have met them before.

However, here we meet them as proponents of a sort of “side-story” to (although emphatically not a spin-off of) his latest book: *Through the Eye of a Needle*, which dealt with the question of the use of wealth in the Christian churches and how

ideas and practice about this embarrassing issue changed over time, reflecting the changed circumstances of people from the 4 – 8th centuries

Thus, this story is not about the wealth itself and the Early Christian ideas of how to deal with it – how to invest in “Heaven” and be saved - but rather the very specific ideas about the “other world”, which fueled these changes in the lifestyles of the Early Christians. Guided by the pen of Peter Brown we thus accompany Romans in Late Antiquity, who believed that they would enter the Milky Way and a starry afterlife, according to the precise status, which they had accrued in this life. And we meet them, when they are busy sharing meals and holding funeral feasts next to the graves of their family-members; or when saving up in heaven through alms-giving in Hippo at the time of August-

tine. But we also learn how these rather pleasant ideas of a Heaven consisting of a shaded and cool refrigerium, where the dead would spend their time in leisurely pursuits while awaiting the second coming, changed from AD 250 – 650. Too placid and not enough mindful of our sinful nature and daily transgressions, another view of the next world surfaced in Early Christianity. Gradually the impending judgement entered the scene more forcefully, forever changing the elegiac tone into a sombre hue. “A new gripping sense of peril” came into being, writes Peter Brown, while exploring the many stepping-stones towards the finale in the 7th century, when all that mattered was to try as best one could to settle the score while alive through incessant almsgiving, soul-searching, prayer and penance; and at the same time seeking and securing future intercessions of others through constant praying (saints, family, friends, or just passers-by).

His aim, though, has not been just to tell the story of how different theological discourses on the afterlife and pending judgement fed on each other and the wealth of the future Catholic Church. The idea has much more been to explore the way in which these changes were directly caused by the changing political circumstances in the transition from Late Antiquity to Early Medieval Europe. This is not a “how-book” but a “why-book”, writes Peter Brown.

This makes the book especially valuable. It should be able to inspire archaeologists, who have long toiled with debates on how to understand shifts in burial practices and funeral memorials in this period; but who do not quite know, what profound theological and ideological debates framed and fed these changes.

In this sense it is very pertinent that the

book ends with Peter Brown recounting the memorial of Trasemirus. Hopefully, the book will inspire readers from a wide spectrum of academic disciplines working on this period. Not least archaeologists!

This book is based on lectures delivered at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna 2012.

Karen Schousboe

NOTES:

The memorial slab of Traseminus is kept in the **Musée Archéologique de Narbonne** (no. 198/4168)

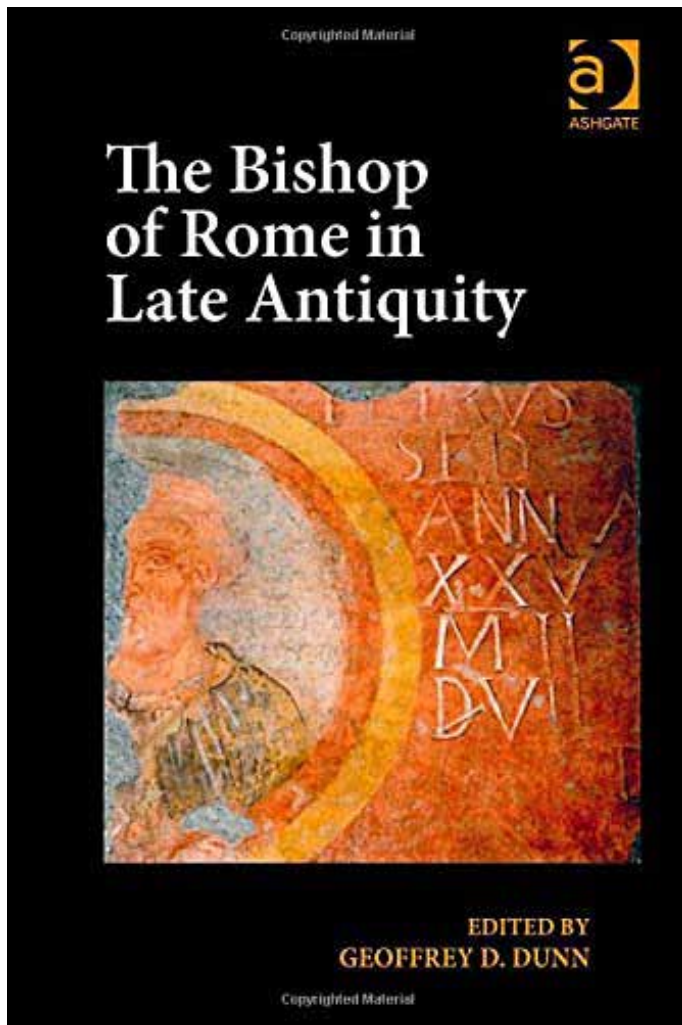
El epitafio de Trasemiruas (Mandourle, Villesque des Corbières, Aude)

By Gisela Ripoll López and Isabel Velásquez Soriano

The tomb of Bishop Agilbert may present us with one of the earliest Last Judgement Scene - Meaux, France ca. AD 690. Source: Wikipedia



The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity



The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity

Edited by Geoffrey D. Dunn, Australian Catholic University, Australia
Ashgate 2015

ISBN: 978-1-4724-5551-2

ISBN: 9781472455512

ABSTRACT:

At various times over the past millennium bishops of Rome have claimed a universal primacy of jurisdiction over all Christians and a superiority over civil authority. Reactions to these claims have shaped the modern world profoundly. Did the Roman bishop make such claims in the millennium prior to that?

The essays in this volume from international experts in the field examine the bishop of Rome in late antiquity from the time of Constantine at the start of the fourth century to the death of Gregory the Great at the beginning of the seventh. These were important periods as Christianity underwent enormous transformation in a time of change. The essays concentrate on how the holders of the office perceived and exercised their episcopal responsibilities and prerogatives within the city or in relation to both civic administration and other churches in other areas, particularly as revealed through the surviving correspondence. With several of the contributors examining the same evidence from different perspectives, this volume canvasses a wide range of opinions about the nature of papal power in the world of late antiquity.

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Skies of Parchment, Seas of Inc

Skies of Parchment, Seas of Inc

Edited by Marc Michael Epstein

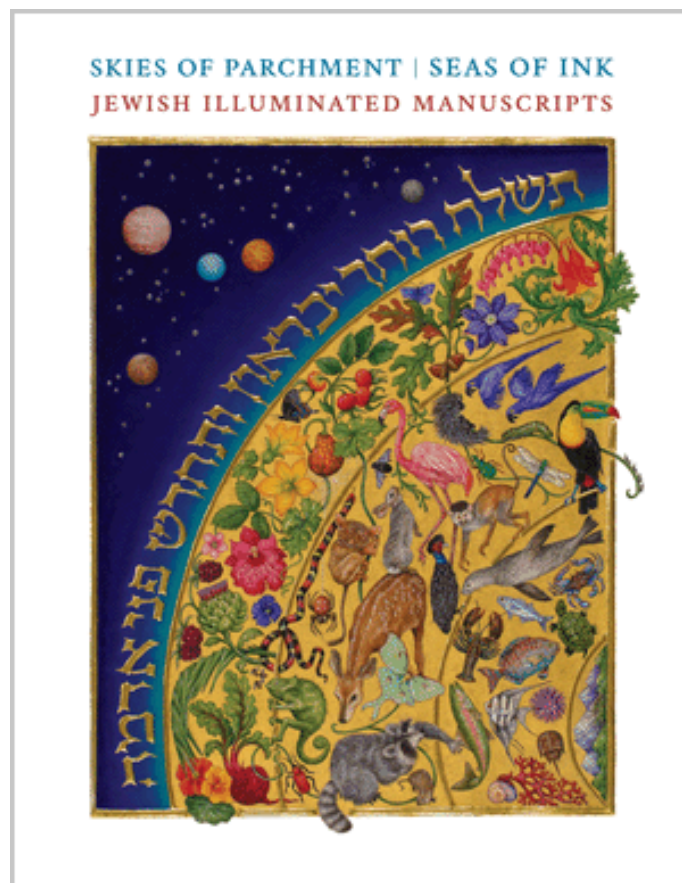
With contributions by Eva Frojmovic, Jenna Siman Jacobs, Hartley Lachter, Shalom Sabar, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Ágnes Vető, Susan Vick, Barbara Wolff & Diane Wolfthal

Princeton University Press 2015

ISBN: 9780691165240

ABSTRACT:

The love of books in the Jewish tradition extends back over many centuries, and the ways of interpreting those books are as myriad as the traditions themselves. *Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink* offers the first full survey of Jewish illuminated manuscripts, ranging from their origins in the Middle Ages to the present day. Featuring some of the most beautiful examples of Jewish art of all time—including hand-illustrated versions of the Bible, the Haggadah, the prayer book, marriage documents, and other beloved Jewish texts—the book introduces readers to the history of these manuscripts and their interpretation.



Edited by Marc Michael Epstein with contributions from leading experts, this sumptuous volume features a lively and informative text, showing how Jewish aesthetic tastes and iconography overlapped with and diverged from those of Christianity, Islam, and other traditions. Featured manuscripts were commissioned by Jews

and produced by Jews and non-Jews over many centuries, and represent Eastern and Western perspectives and the views of both pietistic and liberal communities across the Diaspora, including Europe, Israel, the Middle East, and Africa.

Magnificently illustrated with pages from hundreds of manuscripts, many previously unpublished or rarely seen, *Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink* offers surprising new perspectives on Jewish life, presenting the books of the People of the Book as never before.

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From: The Bird's Head Haggadah, the oldest surviving Ashkenazi illuminated manuscript (S. German, c. 1300). It derives its name from the birdlike human figures illustrated in the manuscript's margins. © Israel Museum, Jerusalem



Michael Epstein

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