

The New Middle Ages

Series Editor

Bonnie Wheeler
English & Medieval Studies
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas, USA

The New Middle Ages is a series dedicated to pluridisciplinary studies of medieval cultures, with particular emphasis on recuperating women's history and on feminist and gender analyses. This peer-reviewed series includes both scholarly monographs and essay collections.

More information about this series at
<http://www.springer.com/series/14239>



Exhibitionist monk. © The British Library Board. Gorleston Psalter, London, BL, MS Add. 49622, fol. 61r (detail), 1310–1324.

Thomas A. Fudgé

Medieval Religion and its Anxieties

History and Mystery in the Other Middle Ages

palgrave
macmillan

Thomas A. Fudgé
School of Humanities
University of New England
Armidale, New South Wales, Australia

The New Middle Ages
ISBN 978-1-137-57077-2 ISBN 978-1-137-56610-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-56610-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016950222

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover illustration: © Classic Image / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Nature America Inc. New York

For Trish Wright.... after 38 years, a long overdue recognition

PREFACE

This book reflects my idiosyncratic approach to university teaching, in which I have tried to follow the observation of the British medievalist R.W. Southern who noted, we “learn after all by being puzzled and excited, not by being told”.¹ I did my first PhD at Cambridge with Bob Scribner. He prompted me to look carefully at the margins of the medieval world. His own work on visual images is well known.² I accepted a number of Bob’s methodologies including the preoccupation with religious mentalities, the need for adopting wider paradigms for understanding religion and culture, and the importance of religion in its varied manifestations. The idea that religion was not defined by adherence to particular theological convictions but by the shape of popular practice presented new avenues of exploration while prompting new questions. I also learned that messages of all types, including religious and theological ones, underwent transformation, especially in the hands and minds of the audience, between utterance by a leader and reception by the masses. Above all, Scribner underscored that primary sources comprised the weight of evidence and did not require the flimsy thread of theoretical approaches either for nurture or support. I became a believer.

Historical investigation exposes those seeking to control rather than participate in history. Examples include the Roman *damnatio memoriae* policy. This condemnation of memory was a Roman Senate directive mandating that certain persons were not to be remembered, meaning total erasure from historical records.³ The Soviet practice of airbrushing photographs to eliminate all trace of those expelled from the party, and considered *personae non gratae*, is also germane.⁴ A third example was

the 1970s vitriolic controversy surrounding the holocaust museum in Washington, D.C.⁵ Another example is the revisionism of the Christian faith of the American founding fathers.⁶ Intellectual stagnation is also revealed. One theologian bragged that during his long tenure at Princeton of nearly sixty years his colleagues “were not given to new methods or new theories. They were content with the faith once delivered to the saints. I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this Seminary. Their theological method was very simple. The Bible is the word of God. That is to be assumed or proved. If granted; then it follows, that what the Bible says, God says. That ends the matter.”⁷ Charles Hodge was not alone. Testifying under oath, three-time nominee for the presidency of the USA, William Jennings Bryan, asserted “I have all the information I want to live by and to die by...I am not looking for anymore.”⁸ Liberal thinkers like William Cowper Brann deplored the approach claiming such men “could look thro’ a keyhole with both eyes at once” while characterizing Baylor University as a conglomeration of “intellectual eunuchs, who couldn’t father an idea if cast bodily into the womb of the goddess of wisdom.”⁹ What a predicament!

The *other* Middle Ages will seem strange to modern readers. Historians are like archaeologists who dig up buried treasure and bring it into the light of a new era. In this way, we are forced to reconsider assumptions and judgements about the past, human civilization, truth, the future, and the meaning of human existence. In this manner, it is possible to avoid the “enormous condescension of posterity” and escape to some degree the confines of the intellectual prisons we have built which determine our appreciation of truth and reality. The past is the future of the world to the extent that history provides new possibilities and perspectives.¹⁰

If we accept that people took seriously the things discussed in this book, matters we might consider odd, misguided, or dangerous, surely we can learn that historical context shapes assumptions we hold to be inviolable and true in our own liberal, western democracies. For example, draconian drug laws and judicial sentencing guidelines handed down in the 1980s, based upon prevailing wisdom at the time, sent people to prison in the USA for fifty years for simple possession of a restricted substance. Few would support such measures now, yet some jurisdictions remain unchanged. Views on sexuality today are considerably different from the Middle Ages or even the 1960s.¹¹ The severity of judicial punishment in the aftermath of moral panics associated with alleged ritual child abuse in the 1980s and 1990s in the UK, the USA, and New Zealand is now properly regarded

as misguided.¹² Nevertheless, people like the American Kelly Michaels and the New Zealander Peter Ellis endured prison terms having been convicted on highly suspect evidence. If medieval beliefs, once held as divinely inspired and immutable, can be set aside, is it not possible that a fresh critical approach to contemporary challenges may produce another paradigm shift enabling a re-evaluation of personal truths, social realities, legal policies, and cultural practices? If medieval religion and society cannot be privileged as something absolute and binding for all time, then what basis exists for regarding our policies, practices, and assumptions as normative for everyone for the foreseeable future? There is no epistemological basis to support such arrogance or intellectual certainty short of subjective personal belief systems predicated on notional pre-determination. Such claims are breathtakingly ambitious.

The *other* Middle Ages are filled with extraordinary history and mystery. In those days, we find priests wearing masks, running through church choirs, laughing uproarishly, celebrating the Feast of the Ass. We encounter fortress-churches, images of judgement, punishment, torture, and hell. We see men and women stripped, burned alive, and miscreants dragged naked into churches by ropes fastened around their necks. We learn of men standing on pillars in wildernesses for decades on end and women willingly walled up in churches and convents. What are we to make of women on medieval churches who invite us to look closely at their fully exposed genitals? Or sodomites on church corbels engaging in anal intercourse? Or the man on an Abbey Church fellating himself? In these *other* Middle Ages we observe the piety of honey bees, animals occupying court dockets, the skin of a dead man made into a drum, and thousands of Christians walking pilgrimage paths to sacred sites. We encounter perverts, murderers, and a serial killer who hears Mass and kneels to receive the sacrament. We observe religious women tasting the foreskin of Jesus, others whipping themselves until the blood flows, bishops biting off bits of relics with their teeth before fleeing with their sacred treasures. We read of religiously generated orgasms, deep faith, extraordinary post-mortem instructions, more relics than mathematically possible, and communities practicing their religion in forests completely nude. We enter churches, religious houses, towns, latrines, prisons, cemeteries; we are taken into deserts, to islands, mountains, along roadways from one end of Europe to the other. With R.W. Southern we are startled, amazed, puzzled, and excited.

The investigations which follow are not definitive assessments but interim suggestions requiring further reflection and modification. As the medieval Czech chronicler Petr of Zittau wrote: “Someone will come after me who will refine this roughly written material with a file of subtlety.”¹³ Instead of attempting some grand metahistorical explanation for the curiosities of the past, I have indulged the possibility of less spectacular causal factors. By introducing the idea of *other* Middle Ages, the study of topics outside the mainstream calls into question the historiographical construct of the Middle Ages itself and suggests the medieval world is still not adequately understood. The incompleteness of this endeavour is part of the obligatory humility of the historian who must consider his or her researches as works in progress.¹⁴ The *other* Middle Ages were rooted not in crowns and kingdoms nor yet in prelates or politics but rather in the mentalities of ordinary people living their lives in a sort of inchoate religious anthropology which shaped the multiple medieval worlds in profound and lasting ways.¹⁵ Those who lived so long ago, so far away, in such strange and wonderful worlds, slumber in silence until they are given the power to speak once more. For it is true “the dead have no existence other than that which the living imagine for them.”¹⁶ Those men and women of the *other* Middle Ages all require “a little of our blood to return to fleeting life, to speak to and through us. For they do wait for us, you know, not as the faint spoor of long-vanished existence, but as real persons, real yet speechless until some questioning voice dissolves the spell of their silence.”¹⁷

My indebtedness to many people goes back, in some cases, twenty-five years, reflecting personal or professional relations or the influence of their work and ideas. The list includes Bob Scribner, František Šmahel, Howard Kaminsky, David R. Holeton, Malcolm Lambert, Gail Solberg, Charles Zika, Jiří Kejř, Helmut Puff, Marcia Colish, Anne Hudson, Larry Silver, Peter Dinzelbacher, Constant Mews, Ben Parsons, James Penney, Cary Nederman, Vincent Orange, Claire Daunton, Irv Brendlinger, Franz Bibfeldt, my students especially at Canterbury University and the University of New England, the anonymous readers for Palgrave Macmillan, and Bonnie Wheeler for including the book in her series *The New Middle Ages*. My son Jakoub assisted with photographing gargoyles and Last Judgements. Ian Campbell read the entire text making cogent comments towards clarity and improvement. At Palgrave, I am grateful to Brigitte Shull, Ryan Jenkins, and Paloma Yannakakis for attending to the usual myriad of technical and administrative challenges required in turning a typescript into a book.

This book is dedicated to Trish Wright, my secretary (or so I think of her), whose real job is Academic Manager of the School of Humanities at the University of New England. Her virtues are many. She is enthusiastic, professional, energetic, humourous, supportive, competent, reliable, and willingly accepts “other duties as required.” Her office radar detects passengers a mile away, can scotch MBA and deflect AP without batting an eye, and even quicker than a rat up a rafter in the unplumbed and plumbingless depths of Café 39. Further, she knows more about corn than any agronomist. Beyond this, she has rescued this hopeless Luddite from numerous small catastrophes. With fortitude suggesting the Stoics of antiquity, she heard the entire text orally performed and with much forbearance listened to indelicate ranting and raving on the part of its author. As I mentioned recently to one of my Canadian colleagues, “everyone needs a Trish.” This book is offered as a token of genuine and lasting gratitude.

NOTES

1. R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 47.
2. R.W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, 2nd edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
3. Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and the Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Boston: Leiden, 2004).
4. David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997).
5. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 216–220. See also Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996) and Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 2003).
6. Among many examples is David Barton, who possesses only an earned undergraduate degree from Oral Roberts University, who has written many self-published books. *The Jefferson Lies: Exposing the Myths You’ve Always Believed in* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012) was withdrawn by the publisher four months after release over serious concerns of scholarly integrity.
7. A.A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (New York: Scribner’s, 1880), p. 521.
8. *The World’s Most Famous Court Trial: A Complete Stenographic Report of the Famous Court Test of the Tennessee Anti-Evolution Act at Dayton, July 10–21, 1925* (Cincinnati: National Book Company, 1925), p. 294.

9. William Cowper Brann, *The Complete Works of Brann, the Iconoclast*, 12 vols (New York: The Brann Publishers, 1919), vol. 10, pp. 80 and 82.
10. Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 112–117.
11. For example, in July 1965 Charles O. Cotner was arrested, prosecuted, and remanded to serve a prison sentence of between two and fourteen years for violating the Indiana Sodomy Statute. His offence was having anal sex with his wife. Though his wife declined to press charges, the state of Indiana prosecuted Cotner. Jon D. Krahulik, “The Cotner Case: Indiana Witch Hunt” *Indiana Legal Forum* 2 (Spring, 1969), pp. 336–50.
12. J.S. La Fontaine, *Speak of the Devil: Allegations of Satanic Abuse in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker, *Satan’s Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), and Lynley Hood, *A City Possessed: The Christchurch Civic Creche Case* (Dunedin: Longacre, 2001).
13. *Petra Žitavského Kronika Zbraslavská* (Chronicon aulae regie), ed. Josef Emler, in *Fontes rerum bohemicarum*, vol. 4 (Prague: Nákladem musea Království Českého, 1884), p. 4.
14. I am again indebted to R.W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), pp. xi–xiv.
15. Outlined adroitly in R.W. Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400–1800)*, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
16. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 1.
17. Arthur Quinn, *A New World: An Epic of Colonial America from the Founding of Jamestown to the Fall of Quebec* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 2.

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
List of Figures	xvii
1 The Feast of the Ass: Medieval Faith, Fun, and Fear	1
2 Prosecuting Animals as Criminals in Medieval Europe	13
3 Piety, Perversion, and Serial Killing: The Strange Case of Gilles de Rais	51
4 Gargoyles and Glimpses of Forgotten Worlds	89
5 To Hell with the Theologians: Doctrines of Damnation in “Last Judgements” in the Medieval Latin West	119
6 Sensuality, Spirituality, and Sexuality in the Religious Experience of Female Mystics	157

7	Demonizing Dissenters: Patterns of Propaganda and Persecution	183
8	The Stripping and the Shaming of Heretics	203
9	Surviving the Middle Ages: The Extraordinary Pursuit of Salvation	229
10	The Fickle Hand of Fate	253
	Bibliography	269
	Index	287

LIST OF FIGURES

- Exhibitionist monk. © The British Library Board. Gorleston Psalter, London, BL, MS Add. 49622, fol. 61r (detail), 1310–1324
- Fig. 4.1 Female gargoyle with elongated waterspout. St. Vitus' Cathedral, Prague, Czech Republic 90
- Fig. 4.2 Male and female figures displaying their genitals. Corbels, Collegiate Church of San Pedro de Cervatos, Campoo de Enmedio, northern Spain, 1180–1199, north apse wall 93
- Fig. 4.3 Contorted male gargoyle with animal claws. The Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Saint Peter, York, England 95
- Fig. 4.4 Gargoyle displaying his arsehole. Münster Unserer Lieben Frau, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Germany, south side 103
- Fig. 4.5 Male angelic gargoyle urinating in a jug. La Lonja de la Seda. Valencia, Spain, 1483–1498, southwest corner 105
- Fig. 5.1 The damned bishop. The medieval Doom painting over the chancel arch in the Parish Church of St. Thomas and St. Edmund, Salisbury, England, after 1470 121
- Fig. 5.2 Satan eating and defecating sinners. Giovanni da Modena, The Inferno, fresco, detail. Bolognini Chapel, Basilica di San Petronio, Bologna, Italy, 1410 129
- Fig. 5.3 Last Judgement. West tympanum, painted limestone relief, Abbey Church of Ste-Foy, Conques-en-Rouergue, France, first half of the twelfth century 132
- Fig. 5.4 Punishing sodomy. Taddeo di Bartolo, Last Judgement, fresco, detail. Collegiate Church of Santa Maria Assunta, San Gimignano, Italy, 1410–1415 136
- Fig. 5.5 Terror in hell. Last Judgement (detail), Flemish School. Cathédrale Sainte Cécile, Albi, France, 1474–1484 139