UCL HISTORY SOCIETY JOUNRAL

Issue I: Traditions, Superstitions and Myths

Image by Clker-Free-Vector-Images from Pixabay

PREFACE:

The historical examination of *traditions, superstitions and myths* offers a fascinating window into the ways human societies have understood the world around them, constructing meaning and passing on cultural knowledge across generations. From the ancient mythologies of gods and heroes to everyday customs and faiths, they shape how communities navigate life, death and everything in between. This theme displays the richness and complexity of the intrinsic human imagination and experience. It seeks to explain the unknown, find order amongst chaos and express collective fears, hopes and values. Within this Autumnal Issue we invite you to explore this theme in a season of long nights and ancient traditions such as Halloween, Diwali, Mabon, Rosh Hashanah, Moon Festival and Christmas.

This volume will bring together a range of interdisciplinary perspectives that examine the enduring power of *traditions, superstitions and myths* in shaping all aspects of life. We invited our contributors to explore these themes within diverse historical contexts - how mythological narratives have reinforced political authority, how superstitions have shaped daily practices and rituals, and how traditions have both preserved and adapted cultural identities.

Image by Gordon Johnson from Pixabay

As we engage with these themes, it is pertinent to understand that traditions, superstitions and myths are not static relics of the distance past, rather they are evolving and reshaped by forces of modernisation and continuous cultural exchange

We hope that this collection will deepen our understanding of the human connections between belief, practice and identity and inspire new questions surrounding the roles that traditions, superstitions and myths play in shaping the human experience.

Contents:

Message From The Editor:

We hope you are all doing well and enjoying this Autumnal Term. With the Christmas break upon us, we wish you all a restful festive season with friends, family and a happy new year.

The topical theme of this issue is 'Traditions, Superstitions and Myths'. To begin we have final year history student Euan Toh who explores themes of myths through the illusive tale of a legendary sword which has been missing for two-hundred years. The next entry comprises of an examination into the origin of the commonplace superstition *'knocking on wood'*, final year history student Eleanor Pole explores the mythic theories and traditions surrounding its conception and its enduring popularity. A further entry comes from second-year history student Mae Brand who explores traditions surrounding saint-worship, stressing the importance of personal meaning over that of religious institutions, specifically in the post protestant reformation period. Following that, final-year history student Madysson Weatherford provides an entertaining exploration into the traditions surrounding honey and its varied usage, primarily within the medieval period. The next entry comes from a collaboration between final-year history students Euan Toh and Ben Scanlan who provide an intensive examination into the history video game *Pentiment* and its potential use as an academic resource. The final entry comes from third-year history student James Yu who provides an examination into the myths surrounding the militarisation within the Chinese Revolution from 1933-1937.

I would like to thank all who have spent time and energy writing these insightful articles for our inaugural issue of this new academic year. I think the variety of articles that have been submitted reflects the diversity and creativity that the members of the History Society at UCL possess and I look forward to what this originality will bring in the next academic term.

We hope that you find these articles as insightful as I did in putting them together. Whether you want to engage in rigorous academic discourse or simply explore a historical interest through this issue, we are so proud to provide this platform to see what historians at the UCL History Society have to say.

Eleanor Pole (Editor, History Society Journal)

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Wanted: The Sword of Murad Bey

By: Euan Toh Yu-Yuan (Third-Year BA History)

Last known location: Abdication Room, Palace of Fontainebleau in the hands of Marshal Jacques Macdonald

Remarks: The Sword of Murad Bey has been missing for 200 years and investigations are ongoing as to its whereabouts.

Origin: The sword was initially used by Murad Bey, the Mamluk warlord and ruler of Egypt until 1798.

Disclaimer: This sword is not the actual Sword of Murad Bey, but is expected to have a similar design. Image: Sally Antiques. *Rare European, Early 19th Century, Childs Mameluke Sword and Original Brass Scabbard*. Photograph. https://sallyantiques.co.uk/product/rare-european-early-19th-century-childs-mameluke-sword-and-original-brass-scabbard

Looted by French troops during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign and possessed by Napoleon Bonaparte, future Emperor of France.

Accompanied Napoleon across his long military career until his defeat in the War of the Sixth Coalition, 1812-1814.

Upon signing his abdication and in the presence of witnesses, Napoleon gifted the Sword of Murad Bey to Marshal Jacques Macdonald.

Profile of the object's last confirmed owner:

Image: Gros, Antoine-Jean. *Français : Mac Donald, duc de Tarente, maréchal de France*. Oil on Canvas. Public Domain https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MacDonald_par_Antoine_Jean_Gros.jpg

Napoleon's supposed parting words are as follows...

'I did not know you well; I was prejudiced against you. I have done so much for, and loaded with favours, so many others who have abandoned and neglected me; and you, who owe me nothing, have remained faithful to me!'

This was the last time Napoleon and Macdonald would see each other in person.

Etienne Jacques-Joseph-Alexandre Macdonald, Duke of Taranto, was the descendent of a Jacobite Scot who emigrated to France after the Battle of Culloden. He was a relative of Flora MacDonald, the same woman who aided the escape of Charles Edward Stuart, also known as 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', after Culloden.

Macdonald enlisted in the Irish Brigade during the Revolutionary Wars and distinguished himself at the Battle of Jemappes 1792. Like Napoleon, Macdonald would later lead a daring march across the Swiss Alps into Italy. Unlike Napoleon, his army was faced with additional challenges faced by his army due to crossing during the winter months.

In 1804, Macdonald was disgraced after defending his friend and traitor to France, general Jean Moreau. For his involvement in conspiracies to restore the royalist government, Moreau was banished from France and Macdonald was relieved of his command and sent into early retirement.

Macdonald returned to active command in 1809 due to Napoleon's pressing demand for experienced commanders. His dauntless conduct at the Battle of Wagram encouraged his promotion to the prestigious rank of Marshal of France.

Macdonald was subsequently been given heavy responsibilities in Spain and the War of the Sixth Coalition but was repeatedly defeated in many battles. He earned a reputation for being a principled commander and frequently executed looters.

He participated in the 1813 Battle of Leipzig, the largest battle ever fought on European soil until the First World War. During the French retreat, Macdonald failed to cross the Elster River before its bridge was accidentally blown to smithereens. He was forced to swim to safety, being one of the few who successfully escaped capture or death.

Macdonald encouraged Napoleon to abdicate following imminent defeat in 1814 to avoid further destruction to France. For his blunt but honest personal conduct to Napoleon, he was awarded the Sword of Murad Bey before Napoleon left for exile on Elba.

For the rest of his life, Macdonald would serve the restored Bourbon monarchy faithfully Macdonald embarked on a genealogical trip to Scotland in 1825 where he visited Clan Macdonald's family home on South Uist in the Hebrides.

Macdonald died on 25 September 1840, two months before the body of Napoleon was returned to France with great fanfare.
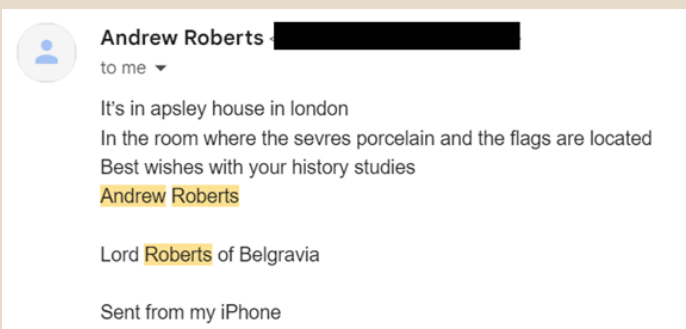
Note: This is from the public e-mail address of Andrew Roberts who I actually emailed to ask if he knew where one hyper-specific sword was located

Image: Author. *Screenshot of email from Sir Andrew Roberts.* Photograph.

Caution: It has been over 200 years since the last confirmed sighting of the sword as far as the records indicate. Historian of Napoleon Andrew Roberts has been consulted through e-mail and has suggested it is located in Apsley House in London after falling into the possession of the 1st Duke of Wellington.

However, a site visit to Apsley House and conversation with the museum curators has yielded no definitive sword that fits the description.

Furthermore, the supposed possession of the sword by Macdonald needs to be verified as the main source behind this evidence comes directly from Macdonald's memoirs published in 1892, 52 years after his demise.

Macdonald's former country home the Chateau de Courcelles-le-Roy in Beaulieu-sur-Loire has been converted into a luxury hotel.

Any information on the sword's whereabouts and the Macdonald estate's current property is appreciated.

<div align="center">

No Reward

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'Knocking on Wood' - Exploring the Origin of a Superstition

By: Eleanor Pole (Final-Year BA History)

Superstitions are myriad, however one of the most commonplace within the Western world would be the tradition of 'knocking on wood' with other iterations being 'touching wood' or 'touch wood'. This apotropaic superstition, often said verbally then followed by literally 'knocking, tapping or touching' a wooden object, or even one's head is carried out to avoid 'tempting fate' after making a boast or favourable prediction, or even commenting on something concerning such as death. The act is so common that we often don't even think about it; a habit that comes naturally when anything fate-tempting slips out.

Image by Quin Benson from Pixabay

Within the western world there seems to be many origins for this unusual universally accepted ritual. The first, and oldest is the idea that there is an ancient connection between spirituality and trees, influencing one's fortune. This comes from pre-Christian beliefs. For example, in Ancient Greece the oak was considered sacred to Zeus. Another instance was in Northern Europe, with the most obvious example being Yggdrasil – the Ash tree within Norse mythology that contains the nine realms and makes up the cosmos. In Egypt the Sycamore was said to be sacred to the Goddess of Hathor. It is clear to see that trees have mythically held immense power as ancient markers on landscapes across the world. The presence of the 'ancient oak' as a dominant force within mythology has been traced to the belief that it was the dwelling of the Sky and Thunder God, which has been explained as it is the tree most commonly struck by lightening (Marmor, 1956, p.120). This meant that to avert the Sky God's wrath from boasting, one could touch the oak and have this protection bestowed, thus making one immune to his vengeance.

Another common origin can be traced to the ancient pagan culture of the celts, who were said to believe that spirits and gods resided in trees, thus when knocking on tree trunks they could rouse the spirits and call on their protection. This would demonstrate a more direct link with the action of 'knocking' subsequently calling on a mystic being to keep them from ill-fate and spare them the supposed bad consequences.

However, a further tie between protection and wood can be drawn from Christian beliefs surrounding the sacred wood of the cross of crucifixion. Something than many Christians still follow – the sacredness of Christ and the protection that the Trinity can bestow can be channelled through the holy crucifix. A further addition of Christianity to the saying of 'knocking on wood' would be the idea that in medieval times, sinners could find sanctuary in a church, once they could touch the wood of the church doors, they knew they were safe and protected. This illustrates that by knocking on wood, it is not simply limited to trees, but many objects such as ecclesiastical doors, the holy cross, or in everyday life - a nearby table or chair.
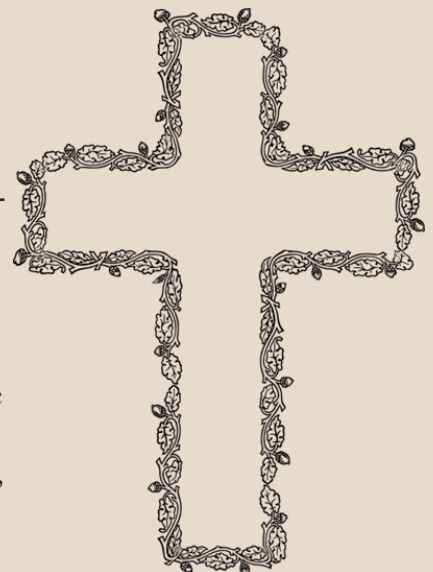

Image by Gordon Johnson from Pixabay

A more modern theory of origin of the tradition comes from folk-lore researcher Steve Roud who suggests in his book *The Lore of*

Image by Gordon Johnson from Pixabay

the Playground (2010, p.34-35) that the widespread use comes from a childhood game of 'Tiggy Touchwood' where children are only safe from being tagged if they are touching wood. I am sure that many people have played such a childhood game and it could be logical to draw the formative game of tig to adult life, trying to illicit some childhood comfort. Roud heavily criticises the theory that the superstition goes back to when we believed in tree spirits as "complete nonsense". However, he does not reference the sources from which he has obtained this belief meaning we cannot explore this line of argument. This then leaves the reader guessing what to believe and continues this thread of mystique that has, and continues to, surround this superstition.

The use of such an apotropaic tradition is not solely associated with the English-speaking world. For example, in Turkey, there is a superstition of touching wood, it is performed through gently pulling one earlobe and then knocking on wood twice to ward off bad luck and stop the devil from hearing about good fortune. There are also several other variations on the theme of bad omens or fate through knocking, especially within European culture. One example would be Portugal and Brazil where *bater na madeira* (knock on wood) occurs with three knocks, often after saying a bad thing that could eventually happen. They do not need a verbalization, simply three knocks on the closest wooden object within their vicinity. In Italy *tocca ferro* (touch iron) is used often after seeing something related to death such as an undertaker or a coffin. In Norway, the saying is *bank i bordet* ("knock on the table"), which are traditionally made of wood. There are more examples than the one's listed, but they provide us with a small sample of the extensive variations of this superstition which continues to maintain its popularity against evil.

While the origins of this widespread superstition remain uncertain, the act of 'knocking on wood' maintains its popularity across the globe to this day. I, myself, always feel compelled to cast this superstition of supposed ancient protection, as it gives a small sense of comfort in the face of uncertainty, and who would risk that?

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Institutions and the Personal in the Tradition of Saint Worship

By Mae Brand (Second-Year BA History)

Holy Body of St Valentinus, Paul Kou-
dounaris, 2013, The Guardian

Saint worship is a deeply personal tradition. Simultaneously, it is also subject to a massive amount of bureaucracy and policing. The official attitude of Western Christianity towards the practice is prone to change depending on politics, pressure, and the European theatre. What I would like to bring to the front here, however, is the consistent devotion of everyday people, especially in the special veneration of 'holy bodies', and the involvement of the common laity as petitioners and witnesses. Cases will be taken from the period after 1588, when canonizations resumed after being paused in reaction to the Protestant Reformation. Records after this time are fuller and more accurate, both due to generally improved bureaucracy and increased pressure from Protestant groups.

Trevor Johnson in his *Holy Fabrications* demonstrates that the term 'holy bodies' was a distinct term used in official documents for a whole skeleton of a martyr. This is a significant anomaly in language, and shows that the category was viewed as distinct from and superior to other forms of relic.

For our purposes, this superiority demonstrates that people placed more value on saints that they felt more personally connected to. Johnson discusses how a decorated skeleton creates a more stable location of worship than a smaller fragment, and therefore encourages pilgrimage and community surrounding the saint. What should also be considered is that it is easier to feel a sense of reverence and connection to a recognisably human skeleton than a scrap of cloth, even if they technically retain the same religious power.

This was a reality that was recognised and used by local authorities. The Abbey of Asdsassen had a collection of ten holy bodies, and optimised their individuality in the way they were presented. The Reliquary of St Ursa formed the shape of a pyre, because she had been martyred through burning. Such measures promoted the personality and life of the saint, and an intimate relationship between them and the laity.

The role of the community in holy bodies cannot exist in isolation. It was dependant on wealthy benefactors and the willingness of central authority to recognise their need for relics. Their impact can clearly be seen, however, in the role that holy bodies took when the grounding influence of local laity was removed. Excavations like that the of Catacombs of Priscilla were driven by the need for massive amounts of relics to combat the iconoclasms of Protestant movement. The discovery of 174,000 martyr skeletons at Priscilla allowed local landscapes to be flooded with strongly Catholic visuals, which was a political necessity. That only forty had been listed as martyrs in the 14th century could not take precedent over the desperate need for new relics felt in many areas.

The role of the laity is also more visible when not directly in coalition with the church. This was the case in the production of secondary relics. At certain points of ceremony when receiving a new relic, the laity could touch a separate object to the relic and imbue the new object with the same holy power. Such an object was outside of church records or knowledge and would mostly be a small object to be carried on the person. This practice is radically individualistic in how it decreases the centrality

and necessity of the church, and gives individuals increased freedom over their worship.

Hand in hand with secondary relics was unofficial veneration, in which people treated as a saint, yet were a figure who were not officially sanctioned as such by the Catholic church. In many cases, local culture and history would venerate a figure unacknowledged by Rome. In others, a holy figure would be rejected by the canonization process, and involved individuals would continue their veneration regardless, due to the personal nature of their connections. The practice was so inevitable that the Tridentine Council decreed that such veneration was permissible in private, which I will take as an admission of the impossibility of banning the practice.

Why unofficial veneration might continue after an unsuccessful canonization inquisition is easily seen in how heavily involved the community was in the process, both emotionally and practically. For a papal delegation to be sent to inquire into whether a saint could be made, enough pressure must be made by the petitions of the laity for the papacy to notice. Although the wealthy and noble classes were disproportionally those who contacted officials, they could only practically do so with popular support.

Once an inquest was prompted, the laity's support remained crucial in their role as witnesses. What Ronald Finecune calls a built-in 'wait and see' process delayed the inquisition long enough that the interest of the people must be genuine and unwavering enough to survive months of delay surrounding a potential saint. In an extreme example of how long that wait could be, Joan of Arc was only canonized in 1920. The implication of this measure is that successful canonizations had the strong support and involvement of the community.

Further, as part of the interview process, there was a consensus that if a witnesses' answers were too short then they must be lying. Taken from this, then, the most trustworthy witness is one who demonstrates an excitement in the unfolding events, which can only realistically be done when one is genuinely personally invested. Notary records, having been translated from the vernacular into Latin, often do not capture this, due to the limitations of the formal language. It can be easily imagined, then, that an interview was a much more excitable process than records make out. The strong support of the whole community can be seen in every part of canonization.

Holy bodies aren't unique without the encouragement and engagement of the congregation, and canonizations are similarly dependant on popular support. Their enthusiasm is shown to be strong enough that it can survive largely independently of the church, as shown in secondary relics and unofficial veneration. At its core, these personal meanings are what lends these traditions their power. Saint worship will have its survival guaranteed not in institutions but in people.

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The Traditional Uses of Honey in the Middle Ages: Alcohol, Sweetener, Cooking and Medicine

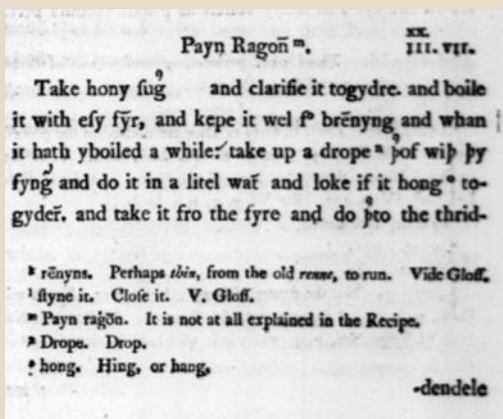Madysson Weatherford, (Final-Year BA History)

Honey was a crucial ingredient and played a prominent role in medieval cooking, dishes and drinks. Although its uses trace back to ancient civilizations, its importance grew in Europe as a sweetener in the Middle Ages before the widespread accessibility to sugar. Honey is produced from the evaporation of nectar in honeycomb collected from flowers and plants by bees through the process of pollination (Davidson and Jaine, 2014, pp. 1134). Although the assumption is that honey was a valuable product for only the wealthy, it was accessible and produced

Bees pollinating and flying in and out of a skep, British Library Manuscript Royal 12 C XIX f.45

abundantly for most people in England (Davidson and Jaine, 2014, pp.1135). Honey's importance in Medieval society stretches beyond its uses as an ingredient and sweetener to medicine and alcohol.

Although Medieval England's honey imports were considered a luxury food product, it was produced locally in gardens, manors, and castles. However, cold and wet temperatures in Northern Europe restricted the production of honey due to the inability for the flowers to pollinate (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.254). Although beekeeping was an industry that fought for land space against farming and gardens, it was considered a fundamental ingredient for households and locals in villages and communities (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.254). Hives or wicker skeps were maintained at manors, castles, and for traditional uses at monasteries and abbeys. Monasteries and abbeys viewed bees as selfless workers doing their job for the better of the world which closely aligned with the ideology of many religious communities (Allsop and Miller, 1995, pp.517).

Foodstuff

Payn Ragon Recipe from the Forme of Cury, 1390, from 1780 version by Gustavus Brander, Internet Archive

Honey had numerous uses as a foodstuff, depending on its desired purpose and role in dishes. It was consumed raw, implemented into recipes for cooking, brewed to create mead and used as a preservative (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.267-268). Found throughout medieval cookbooks and recipes, honey was added to both savory and sweet dishes. In the medieval cookbook, Forme of Cury from 1390, recipes with honey can be found in all sections such as Payn Ragon, a sweet dish with pine nuts and ginger (Pegge, 2005, XX.III.VII.). Honey could also be found in confections and preserves as a sweetener and in recipes such as Pokerounce, a medieval sweetmeat (Woolgar, 2016, pp.95-99).

While domestically produced honey had traditional uses within England, there existed a specific industry surrounding the trade of honey across Europe for the consumption by the wealthy. Depending on where it was produced there were differences between varying types of honey based on quality, purity, and taste (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.268). For households and elites able to afford to import honey, they did so from Southern Europe and the Atlantic Iberian area as it was considered more palatable (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.263). Floral and herbal plants provided a certain sweet flavor and proved to be the most popular types of honey (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.274).

Forme of Cury, 1390 from University of Manchester John Rylands University Library

Alcohol

One of the most important products of honey in the Middle Ages was its role as the main ingredient in the production of mead. As a popular alternative to wine at the time, mead is produced from the final washings of fermented honeycomb in a solution with water (Allsop and Miller, 1995, pp.517-518). Mead had a significant role in the Middle Ages and was well documented in famous literature such as the section "Scyld's Successors Hrothgar's Great Mead-Hall" in *Beowulf* (Hall, 2005, pp.3). Although it was known to be consumed in monasteries for monastic and ecclesiastical purposes, it was also drunk by the laity alongside other honey based alcoholic drinks (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.271-272). These other drinks include *Bragot, Burgerastre, Metheglin* and *Ysopatum*, a herbal drink containing hyssop and honey (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.271-272).

Medicine

Honey was not just relegated to its role in the kitchen. Despite being an important ingredient for cooking, honey had known healing properties that supported the established link between food, medicine, and the body in the Medieval world. It was commonly used for the purpose of burns and wounds as it created an antibacterial and sterile environment, notably for military medicine (Krug, 2015, pp.197). Its healing properties include reducing inflammation, providing a binding agent, reducing hoarseness, tumors, and gout (Krug, 2015, pp.199). In traditional medicinal recipes, it was known to help remove negative humors from digestion when mixed with *fenugreek* or help consumption when mixed with chamomile and mallow leaves (Jotischky, 2011, pp.64,68). Its healing properties have lasted through time and continue to be found in modern medical home remedies and treatment as a soothing therapeutic product.

Honey would continue to have a prominent role in cooking, medicine, and cuisine beyond the Middle Ages. However, its role as the main sweetener in cooking during the Medieval period would come to an end with the introduction of sugar. Although sugar was not a new product, it was a luxury and not easily accessible as it needed to be imported to Europe. The replacement of honey started in the 13th century with sugar seeing wider use amongst wealthy households (Allsop and Miller, 1995, pp.519). By the 14th and 15th centuries honey was largely phased out as the main sweetener with the discovery of North America and sugar from the West Indies (Scully, 1935, pp.52). However, honey was not abandoned as its differences with sugar were clearly recognized and it was acknowledged that both ingredients were not always interchangeable (Sapoznik, Sales i Favà and Whelan, 2023, pp.273). This allowed traditional uses of honey to continue and it to find other uses in ever-changing cuisines.

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Pentiment as an Exploration of the Historical Method: Why every historian must play this game.

By Euan Toh and Ben Scanlan (Final-Year BA History)

Image credit Microsoft https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/games/pentiment

Take the premise of *The Name of the Rose*, mix in the central narrative of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, sprinkle in a few Pieter Bruegel paintings here and there, and for good measure, copy-paste the final scene from Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*. Surprisingly, the finished product is not a Frankenstein's monster of historical fiction, but arguably the best depiction of the act of creating history itself.

Many video games that profess a historical setting or historical accuracy are released every year. Seldom do these works of public engagement actually reflect on how history itself is written. *Pentiment* (2022) is a video game, but as we would argue in this quick article, deserves to be recognised as not just a fantastic work of public history, but a groundbreaking entry point towards historiography the philosophy of history. How is history written? What methodologies are used? What limitations exist? For the many first years at University College London exposed to E. H. Carr and Hayden White in their first few weeks of term, we would argue this game should be recommended 'reading'.

Pentiment as a recreation of Medieval life

Pentiment is firstly a labour of love. Its director Josh Sawyer, known for his work on *Fallout: New Vegas*, majored in history at Lawrence University, and his blog posts demonstrate his love of the subject. Most reviews of the game focus on the historicity of the setting. Sawyer and the rest of the development team cut no corners when it comes to painstakingly recreating daily life for the inhabitants of Tassing, the fictitious Bavarian village that serves as the game's setting.

Image credit Microsoft https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/games/pentiment

The in-game clock follows the 8 canonical hours of the medieval church, meals consist of medieval staples such as rye bread and quark, and characters often discuss important events occurring during the game's early 16th-century setting. Hanjun Shi from UAL Elephant and Castle has noted the in-game meals as a key way in which *Pentiment* creates empathy for its characters and builds itself upon micro-historical foundations.

The village of Tassing and the adjacent Kiersau Abbey are the primary locations of the game, and the player character investigates crimes in both. The inclusion of both locations forces the player to move between the secular and religious worlds nearly constantly. The disconnect between these two worlds is emphasised by a hinterland containing mysterious Roman ruins that the player must cross every time they move between the two.

Uploaded by DanniRuthvan to https://pentiment.fandom.com/wiki/ Brother_Sebhat_of_Sadai?file=Sebhat%27s_Book_- _Feeding_the_Five_Thousand.png

Perhaps one of the most interesting and creative stylistic choices the game makes is depicting characters in the dominant art style of the period and location in which they are born. Brother Sebhat, an Ethiopian monk staying in Kiersau Abbey, is depicted in an Ethiopian medieval art style. Furthermore, elderly residents of Tassing appear as characters from a late-medieval illuminated manuscript, while children are shown as woodcut prints, reflecting the emergence of the printing press.

Throughout the game, emphasis is placed on communication with the colourful residents of Tassing and Kiersau Abbey. In an interview with *WIRED* magazine, Sawyer mentions Umberto Eco's *Baudolino*, a novel told in the first person about a medieval traveller who encounters historical figures both legendary and real, as an inspiration. (Wired) During gameplay, the player character also encounters famous mythological characters in dream sequences, such as Prester John and Beatrice Portinari. UCL's own Danielle Kleinerman and Chiara Haynes have also investigated the game through the lens of art history scholarship, citing the influence of Umberto Eco's intertextuality within the game.

In the same interview, Sawyer asserts that the primary focus of the game was empathy, rather than pure historical fact. In allowing empathy and emotional truth to shine through while encountering these characters, Sawyer is able to do what many medieval historians have previously found difficult: he allows the subaltern voices of medieval Europe to be heard, those whose lives often go unmentioned outside of court records. Luke Hernandez has spoken about how the game reflects a surprising diversity and inclusivity through its critical view of oppression.

It is easy to see the influence of microhistorians such as Carlo Ginzburg in the creation of *Pentiment*. For example, the discovery that a seemingly illiterate peasant in the village can read and write changes the font of their dialogue from a scrawl to a manuscript font, challenging the player's own biases and opinions of medieval peasants. The focus of Ginzburg's landmark *The Cheese and the Worms*, a key work in the development of microhistory, is a peasant miller named Menocchio, a voracious reader with plenty of heterodox opinions, just like a number of villagers in the game including town carpenter Otto.

Pentiment is an incredibly faithful and nuanced depiction of late medieval life, with care and precision informing every detail. Its narrative structure, writing, and art design reflect the intellectual tenac-

ity and genuine human empathy that drove the project. And yes, you can pet the cats and dogs.

Pentinent as a recreation of the historical Process

So far, the two most common ways reviewers have sold the game is either a) *Pentiment* is a murder mystery, similar to *The Name of the Rose*, or b) *Pentiment* is a game about the spirit of everyday life in the transition between the Medieval and Early Modern worlds. There is in fact a more nuanced way of summarising the gist of this game: *Pentiment* is about investigating and fashioning the 'history' of a town and its people.

Image credit Microsoft https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/games/pentiment

In many ways, the art of making history is very much like the work of a detective investigating a murder. The historian conducts an autopsy on a rotting historical body and is expected to discern the killer, or at least, a factor remotely culpable for the body's fate.

Sawyer himself is very conscious of this comparison and has stated the link between the game's mystery narrative and the metatextual depiction of the historical process was intentional. (Wired) In the same interview, Sawyer paraphrases Hilary Mantel's approach to history.

> '*history isn't even what's left of the past. It's what is left of records that people put down, which may or may not be even correct by their own reckoning'*. (Wired)

Actually, the original quotation from Mantel is phrased a bit differently.

> '*Facts are not truth, though they are part of it – information is not knowledge. And history is not the past – it is the method we have evolved of organising our ignorance of the past'*. (Guardian)

Without spoiling the biggest surprises of the game, *Pentiment* presents many facts that are often contradictory, and sometimes outright absurd, in your quest to discern the truth. There is as it turns out, no right or wrong answer to the many mysteries presented your way. Each path the player can choose to take, each accusation the player can choose to make, or withhold, is equally sensible and unsatisfactory in the context of the game. By the final act, not only is the player trying to uncover murders, but they are also trying to uncover the historical identity of the town of Tassing itself, and your investigations will force you to create a narrative that determines the way characters remember the past.

Cardiff University's Esther Wright has argued in her article '"Layers of History"' that it is this very characteristic which separates *Pentiment* from other video games based on history. Rather than playing a game with the intention of 'reconstruction', players are forced into a 'deconstructionist' approach much like how historians often cut through established paradigms to reveal something new. (Wright, pg 2)

Wright is in fact critical of the game's marketing claiming historical authenticity when this is exactly what *Pentiment* aims to deconstruct. (Wright, pg 15) It is regrettable that many reviewers do not focus on this particular theme that would immediately jump out to academics in the historical sciences. This proves that *Pentiment* works on two operational levels. The first is an entertaining piece of public history that can educate and inspire the uninitiated towards Medieval history, and the second is a commentary on the way academics in the historical sciences write histories.

Conclusion

At the 84th Annual Peabody Award for achievements in media, *Pentiment* won in the category of 'Interactive & Immersive', with the following citation.

> *'With great historical accuracy, the game intricately weaves period art and print styles into its visuals while delving into the region's evolving political, economic, and spiritual landscapes. It unearths the town's pagan origins, portrays struggles over historical narratives, and examines the gender, class, and ethnic dynamics of this period of European history. Beyond that, though, Pentiment showcases the power of interactive storytelling. Every choice in this game matters, with each replay revealing the consequences of player actions. The game's refusal to dictate a "correct" path or allow players to see in totality amplifies its unique storytelling.'* (Peabody)

Perhaps with time, *Pentiment's* recognition will prove a lasting achievement in public history. Perhaps with time, *Pentiment* would become recommended 'reading' for history students. It is unfortunate that even for a small video game production, there is still a not-so-modest rough cost of entry of £15. It also takes approximately 15 hours to complete the game. The authors of this article argue every hour was worth it.

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The Militarised Republic: Nationalist China, 1933-37

By James Yu (Final-Year BA History)

Militarism greatly influenced the Kuomintang's state and social policy in the Nanjing Decade; imported ideals of Prussian militarism and regional developments dating from the late Qing period substantially impacted the politics, society, and culture of Kuomintang China. This essay will evaluate the claim that Republican China was a militarised state from the perspective of the Nationalists between 1933 and 1937. It will be argued that the Nationalists' ideological doctrine had placed centrality on the military and militarisation as an instrument to achieve domestic social and political goals. This will be analysed in terms of the Nationalist Revolution and the New Life Movement.

Firstly, since at least 1926 the Kuomintang had established the goal of a National Revolution; establishing a unified China under a centralised party-state. The Kuomintang had strong Leninist influences, which called for establishing a party-state and party-army (Esherick, 1995); two consequences emerged from this Leninist system. The first was that the party's doctrine and state policy became intertwined; the second was that the politicised army was given political primacy and thus politics became militarised. The militarisation of politics was multidirectional; both Kuomintang and CCP ideology had been heavily influenced at the very least from the experience of the Warlord Era, with the understanding that the military was the 'midwife of the revolution' they sought to achieve (Waldron, 1993). The constant state of war observed in the early years of the Nanjing decade demonstrates this intertwining of ideology and military; consistent warlord revolts and the Encirclement Campaigns against the CCP saw military affairs take centre stage in the nationalist government's policy, such that 85% of state expenditure between 1928-45 was on the military (van de Ven, 1997). All Kuomintang politics were intertwined with the Nationalist's centralisation efforts, which ultimately led to the military; Chiang Kai-shek's support base ultimately relied upon Whampoa military academy-trained cadets, while state-building efforts were tied to entrenching the government's ability to achieve military strength. For instance, measures to deal with Nanjing's seasonal refugee population were intrinsically tied to the Kuomintang's military and state modernity projects. At every stage of Nanjing's refugee policy from 1933, for instance, the military was involved; the army became an instrument of public social policy. The crackdown on the masses of refugees arriving in Nanjing in the Winter of 1933 initially began with the stationing of troops in the exterior of the city, to direct refugees away from the city and maintain order of those within; shortly after, the refugees underwent categorisation; the young and strong were immediately conscripted into the army, while all others were sorted into aid shelters or retraining zones (Lipkin, 2005). Meanwhile, state-building efforts of the Nationalists (in part urged by the League of Nations) saw the formation of state organs such as the National Resources Commission; industrial and communications development in the Nanjing decade carried important military dimensions, as the nationalists perceived autarkic military production and connection of major political hubs as critical in modernity efforts, while the National Resources Commission ultimately led to the creation of a military-industrial complex by the Second Sino-Japanese War (Kirby, 2000). The military's involvement in social policy was twofold: the first was the expansion and security of the state—part of the Nationalists' revolutionary project—which necessitated military might for its fulfilment. The second was the overarching view of state

and society which believed in order as a symbol of modernity, styled on militaristic goals and socio-cultural foundations. As such, the nationalists viewed militarisation as the core of their revolutionary aims, thus creating an effectively militarised state.

Secondly, the militarization of the Republic could additionally be seen in social policy in terms of the New Life Movement. The Nationalists' most prosperous city of Shanghai had long been an area of permissive social, political, and cultural activity in China; the existence of foreign concessions and the urban proletariat and bourgeois populations in the city continued this sociocultural permissiveness, while the city's intellectuals were often engaged in leftist activities, agitation, or artistic output. As an attempted response to the city's culture, the Kuomintang government launched a top-down effort to engender a mass movement, the New Life Movement. Given the Kuomintang ideology was heavily inspired by militarism, militaristic solutions were sought in all aspects of governance, including in the organisation of society (Van de Ven, 1997). With the government requiring (but lacking) a mass support base, the New Life Movement sought to engender a mass base for the Kuomintang in urban areas, combating elements deemed undesirable in society; these elements ranged from the sociocultural permissiveness surrounding prostitution and gambling to political dissent. An initial 5000 registered with the Kuomintang in April 1934, claiming to follow new standards of social morality following the movement's aims, while extremist factions (one example being the ultranationalist Blue Shirts Society) comprising of Whampoa cadets and political elites were more than willing to glorify and use violence to achieve their aims, raiding film offices and bookstores believed to be linked to underground communist movements in Shanghai (Wakeman Jr, 1995). The movement initially had substantial momentum in some metropolitan areas, but failed to attract any prolonged support. However, it was indicative of the Kuomintang's willingness to introduce militarism into society as an instrument of social control and fulfilment of revolutionary aims. Therefore, the Kuomintang infused social policy with militarist qualities in addition to the aforementioned political and industrial policy.

In conclusion, Republican China under the Kuomintang had created a fusion of the party, army, and state on a Leninist model. Militarism substantially impacted the form and nature of Kuomintang rule in the years preceding the Second Sino-Japanese War. The military took primacy in political and industrial policy, and social policy often had militaristic influences under the Kuomintang. Therefore, Republican China between 1933 and 1937 had a substantial militarist character to its state, especially as the war with Japan loomed.

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Closing Message From The Editor:

We hope you have enjoyed these insights into the interests of UCL's student historians. From medieval honey making to lost Napoleonic swords, this issue has displayed a variety that I could not have imagined when setting out the theme at the beginning of this academic year in September. I want to whole-heartedly thank all those that have contributed and given their time to this issue in a busy term of deadlines and events.

Our next issue's theme will be announced in January for the Springtime term (January-April). While I do not want to give too much away, we have a very exciting collaboration coming with the **British Online Archive.** I am looking forward to the new avenues of research, exploration and archival exposure that this will provide for all those wanting to take part!

If you are sad to have missed out on contributing to this edition, do not fear, at the end of the academic year we will be hosting a competition for best entry, judged by several UCL history academics and a journalist, with a cash-prize! The next issue's theme will be one to get the pens scribbling!

I now would like to wish the contributors, editors and you, the reader, a very happy festive period, hopefully getting a well earned break (if the coursework essays don't drag on too long).

Festive wishes,

Eleanor Pole (Editor, UCL History Society Journal)

Image by Violka Art from Pixabay

UCL HISTORY SOCIETY JOUNRAL

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Join us as a writer!

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