



Medieval Histories

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St. Nicolas Chapel in Assisi
A Peytrel from Caherduggan
Medieval Rowing Boat
Martinmas - a European Feast

2012 11:2

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News from the medieval world about
exhibitions, archaeological finds,
books, films, music, travels
and new research

Le Roman de la Rose

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St. Nicholas in Assisi

- The “forgotten” chapel of St. Nicholas in the Cathedral of Assisi, having been closed for almost a century, is reopened to the public after restoration...

Peytrel from Caherduggan

- Unique find of a chest-girth, also called a breast-band or peytrel from the harness of a horse.

Rowing Boat from the Moat

- Rowing boat appeared from the mud in the former moat at the Castle of Vordingborg

Martinmas - A European Feast

- Martinmas was a European feast filled with merriment and roasted geese

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Photo (frontpage):

The carole, manuscript from the
15th century
© BnF

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Le Roman de la Rose, le Carole, manuscript from the 14th century © BnF

Le Roman de la Rose

100 manuscripts of the medieval bestseller - le Roman de la Rose - are on show in Paris at the Bibliothèque nationale Française.

Le Roman de la Rose was a medieval allegorical bestseller. Like a versified play it invited readers to ponder the drama of courtly love, while at the same time diverting them with pure unadulterated pornography.

The story is not very simple. It is told by a 25-year-old narrator, who recounts a dream he once had. In this dream he journeys to a walled garden, where he stops to refresh himself at the fountain of Narcissus. In the stream he sees a bed of roses, one of which he through the machinations of the God of Love comes to lust for. Trying to lay his hand on the prize, the guardians are however alerted. The rest of the poem tells the story of their defence and the attacks of the young man until in the end he succeeds in deflowering the prize.

Two virtually unknown authors

wrote the poem in old French. In around 1230 Guillaume de Lorris began. His part of the poem (4000 lines), which ends at the time when the lamenting lover sees his rosebud ensconced in a fortified tower, is a fairly ordinary

handbook of courtly virtue and vices. However, the second part (12000 lines), written by Jean de Muen around 1270 has quite another character: more like a philosophical and literary comment on the politics of his day, it

The Rose in the Fountain of Narcissus, 15th century © BnF





The attack of the castle of jealousy, end of the 15th century © BnF

includes a series of personified characters – Lady Reason, The Lover, Nature, Genius etc. Often in lengthy debates we hear about such contested issues like free will versus determination, influence of heavenly bodies, the base nature of women and the growing power of the mendicant orders.

Foremost though the poet leaves the reader with a poetic pleasure coupled with a number of coarse and lascivious hints as to what it is all about: to get at the rose and have sex with her. In fact the end is a beautiful description of

an intercourse, where the lover spreads his seed after having been forced to “break the bark a little” and having touched the “inside of the rose-bud” and “explored all its little leaves”...

The exhibition

More than 320 manuscripts exist of the Roman de la Rose, many of them luxuriously illuminated. Of these Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris houses more than 120.

This winter a grand exhibition at the library has placed a hundred manuscripts on show together

with pertinent objects from the Louvre, Musée de Cluny and other collections.

Visitors are first invited into a long gallery emanating a sense of spring time. Here they are introduced to the different personified characters in the allegory. The object is to give a feeling for the poem and its main plot.

Next – in the large hall of exhibition – the visitor is invited to feel as a guest in the enclosed garden. Here 30 of the most magnificent manuscripts are on show, presenting the development of the reception of the poem. At the same time, however, the visitor is guided to an understanding of the intricacies of the medieval art of love with its ideas of chaste friendships, vile women, hateful marriages and lustful affairs.

Finally in the small salon – organised as a medieval office or scriptorium – the story is told about the aftermath of the poem: how it was read aloud, how it was reproduced, illustrated and commented upon, and finally how it became the centre of a very famous literary quarrel.

The Quarrel

The Roman de la Rose is actually – especially its second part – quite amusing to read. The poem is obviously burlesque and full of fun and irony. It was generally admired by a number of intellectuals and poets like Dante, Chaucer and Boccaccio.

However, a number of people – prudes, some might term them – took offence of its playfulness and its use of “shameful words”. One of these was Christine de Pizan. She was venetian-born but had moved to Paris around 1364,

when her father took up a post in Paris as physician, astrologer and alchemist at the court of Charles V of France. Here she was able to pursue her intellectual interests, immersing herself in the study of languages and literature of the time. Through her studies she turned into a remarkably accomplished woman for her time.

At the age of 15 she was married to Etienne du Castel, who was a royal secretary. In 1390 he was suddenly taken ill at Beauvais and she, her two children and the rest of her family were left in straitened circumstances. In order to support herself and her family she turned to writing. By 1393 she was busy writing love ballads and handing them over to benefactors and wealthy patrons at the court. They were intrigued by her work

and the fact that she – a female writer – composed poems about their exploits. Her literary output ended up being quite impressive. From 1393 to 1412 she composed over 300 ballads plus a number of smaller poems and writings.

In 1401 she became embroiled in the famous “quarrel” about the *Roman de la Rose*. Apparently around 1401 she had taken part in a conversation about the merits of the romance; partners had been a royal secretary, Jean de Montreuil, an unnamed “notable clerk” (maybe Jean Gerson) and herself.

As a result Jean de Montreuil wrote a laudatory treatise, the *opusculum gallicum*, on the *Roman de la Rose*. Unfortunately this text exists no more and we only know of it, because it triggered

WHERE TO GO:

L'Art de l'aimer au Moyen Âge – le Roman de la Rose.

Exhibition at Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (Bibliothèque nationale Française)

Paris

06.11.2012 – 17.02.2013

Christine de Pizan into a lengthy reply in the form of an epistle. Her main object of contention was the obscene language in the *Roman de la Rose* as well as the defamation of women in general. Back and forth the letters went.

However, at some point Christine collected the different texts and dared to publish the correspondence. This - in the eyes of her male contenders - infamous act truly made her reputation.

Commissioned by Queen Isabeau of France, the collection was planned, copied, decorated and corrected under Christine's direct supervision, before being presented to Queen Isabeau early in 1414.

The original manuscript, partly penned by Christine herself, still exists and is in the care of The British Library, (Harley MS 4431).

This particular manuscript has been extensively analysed in a collaboration between a number of scientific institutions – apart from the British library, the university of Edinburgh and the CNRS in Paris as well as the University in Nancy.

Unfortunately it is not on show in Paris this autumn (2012). but so many other delightful treasures are.

Christine in her scriptorium © BnF



Read More:

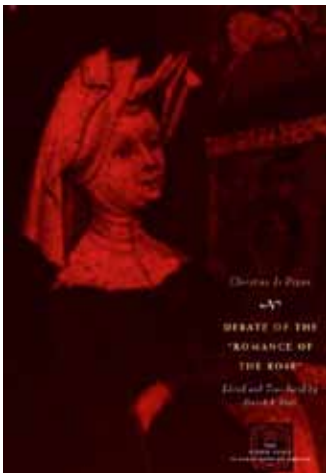
The literature about this masterpiece is enormous. One place to start is the dedicated site www.romandelarose.org, which is a joint project of the Sheridan Libraries of Johns Hopkins University and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The goal of the Roman de la Rose Digital Library is to create an online library of all manuscripts containing the 13th-century poem. Apart from the digitised manuscripts, the resource is filled with detailed introductions and long lists of literature. Below are listed a classic translation into English plus some of the latest editions of the texts stemming from The Quarrel.



The Romance of the Rose
Guillaume de Lorris and
Jean de Meun
Translated and edited by
Frances Horgan.
Oxford University Press
1994.



Debating the Roman de la Rose. A Critical Anthology.
Christine McWeeb (ed)
Routledge 2007.



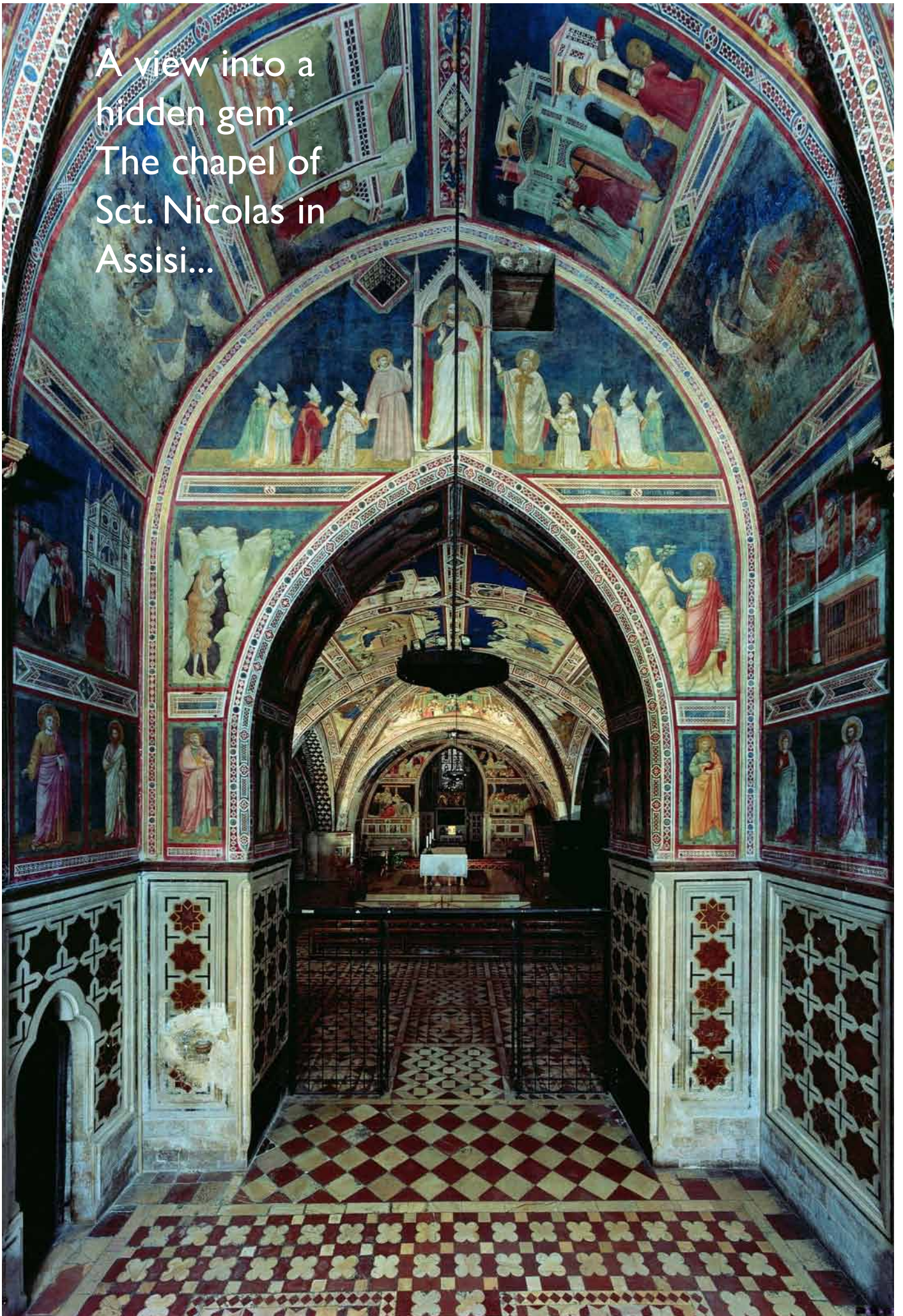
Debate of the Romance of the Rose (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe)
Christine de Pizan
(Author), David F. Hult
(Translator)
University Of Chicago
Press 2010



La Roman de la Rose. L'Art d'aimer au Moyen Âge.
By Nathalie Coilly and
Marie-Hélène Tesnière.
Edition BnF 2012.



A view into a
hidden gem:
The chapel of
Sct. Nicolas in
Assisi...



Worth a detour:

St. Nicholas in Assisi

The “forgotten” chapel of St. Nicholas in the Cathedral of Assisi, having been closed for almost a century, is reopened to the public after restoration...

In 1997 a devastating earthquake hit the Cathedral in Assisi. Literally millions of fragments of some of the most venerated frescoes in the world fell to the earth. For years volunteers and restorers worked together in order to do the puzzle.

At the same time art historians began (once again) to try and understand the magnificent circles of frescoes produced by some of the most venerated artists of the 13th and 14th century, foremost Cimabue and Giotto.

Especially the paintings by Giotto were examined in order to decide to what extent, the artist or his followers painted them. A highly contested issue amongst art historians.

The Chapel of St. Nicholas

One of the hidden gems of the cathedral have been the chapel of St. Nicholas, decorated with a circle of frescoes unseen by most as it was used only by the friars and even by them very seldom.

Equipped with the experience from the post-earthquake restoration, the process began in 2010, to restore the chapel of St. Nicholas of Bari at the Northern end of the transept in the lower basilica.

This chapel was commissioned by

the papal legate, cardinal Napoleone Orsini to house the tomb of his brother, a deacon, who died between 1292 and 1294. His funerary monument was placed in a niche above the altar. Between the tomb and the stained glass window a frescoed triptych was painted, representing the Madonna and Child with St. Nicholas and St. Francis. To this was added a cycle of frescoes comprising twelve scenes from the life of St. Nicholas.

But who painted the frescoes? For along time it was considered from “the school of Giotto”. Recently, however, a signature “GB” was found placed at a strategic point on one of the vaults. It is believed that the signature refers to Giotto di Bondone (1266- 1337). And that he in fact painted the frescoes early in his life.

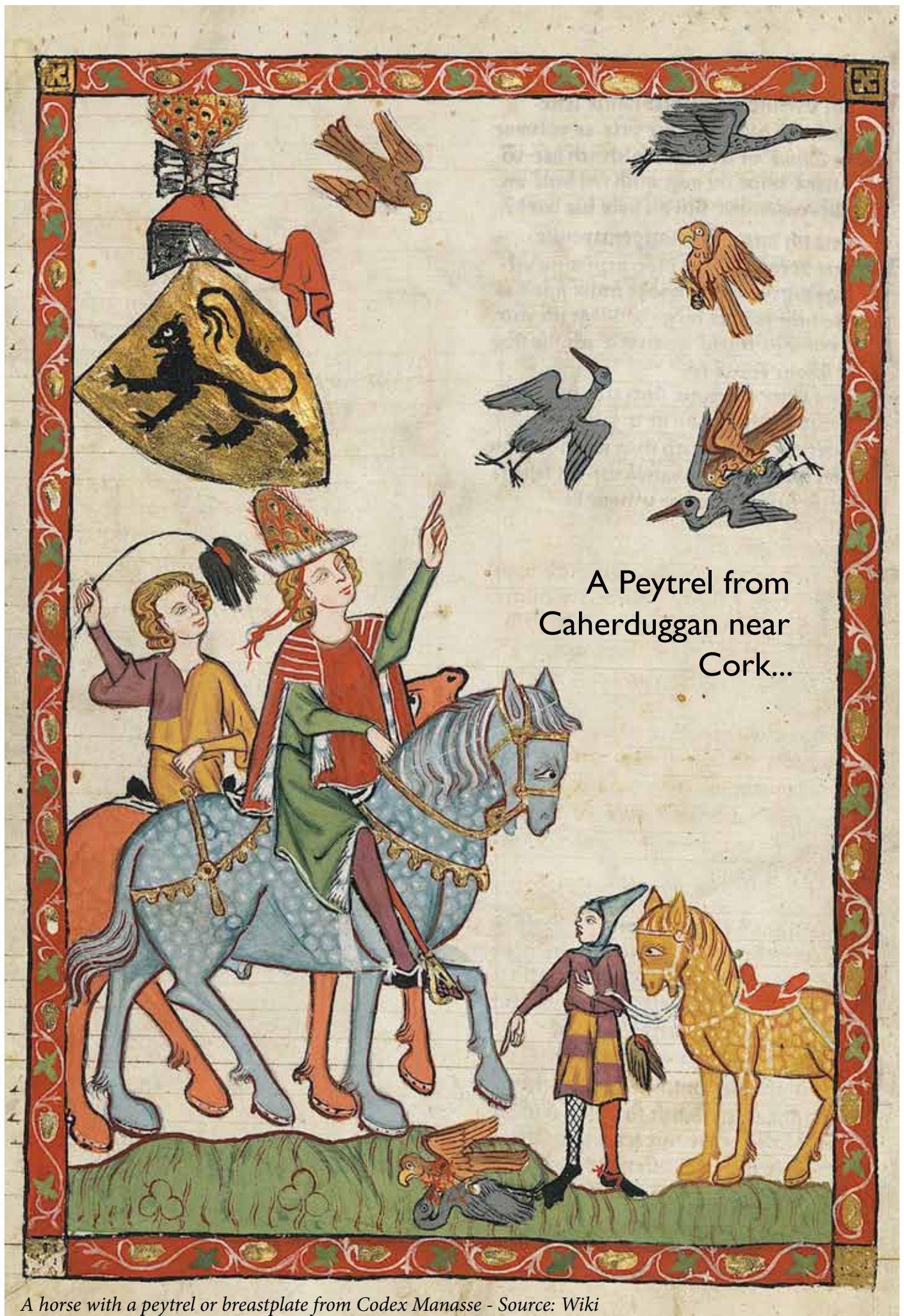
It is hoped that this might once and for all end the debate to what extent Giotto took part in the famous decoration of the Basilica.



“This is one of the first works of (Giotto’s) artistic life and is of great importance to reconstruct the chronology of his work and that of his workshop,” the chief restorer, Sergio Fusetti, told the Italian News Agency ANSA.

The Italian Minister for Culture, Lorenzo Ornaghi, will officially open the chapel on the 6th of December.





A Peytrel from
Caherduggan near
Cork...

A horse with a peytrel or breastplate from Codex Manasse - Source: Wiki



A Peytrel from Caherduggan

Last year, when archaeologist from Rubicon Heritage Services on behalf of Cork County Council, dug out a remarkable leather strap at Caherduggan Castle near Doneraile in Cork County, they thought it was a belt meant to sit on the hips of a knight and holding a scabbard.

After conservation and detailed examination, the find is regarded as even more exceptional. It tran-

spired that the leather strap, which is nearly one meter in length must have been a chest-girth, also called a breast-band or peytrel from the harness of a horse.

The leather strap holds 36 surviving gilt, hinged, copper-alloy suspension-mounts and pendants, each of which portrays a shield with a lion, counter-rampant, in relief. At each end is a buckle.

Due to its relative short length the archaeologists believe that it was one of two, which might have been fastened to a breast-plate in the front of the horse. It is quite normal to find so-called horse pendants made in all sorts of metal and often very rough. Literally thousands have been discovered; not least in recent years by metal- detectors. The find of an actual (part) of a peytrel with pendants still attached is simply unique. According to Damian Shiels from Rubicon heritage it is not yet known, who may have owned the peytrel and whose arms it portrays. The fact that the lion faces to the viewer's right – described as "counter-rampant" or "rampant to sinister" – is rare and the office of the Chief Herald in Ireland is currently exploring potential parallels.

Caherduggan Castle

The archaeological dig at Caherduggan revealed that the medieval castle had consisted of a rectangular tower, 12.5 m x 8.5 m. The





Castledonovan near Cork gives an idea of what the castle at Caherduggan looked like

READ MORE:

The archaeological investigation has been carried through by Rubicon Heritage, a major archaeological firm serving UK and Ireland.

Rubicon Heritage
www.rubiconheritage.com

The Rubicon Blog
rubiconblog.com



Preliminary plan of the castle

Photos: John Nicholl

walls were app. two meters wide and “very well built”. It is believed that the castle might have belonged to an important lord of possibly Anglo-Norman descent. It might have stood three or four storeys high. Documents show that a family called Symons may have been responsible for building the castle. Later it passed into the

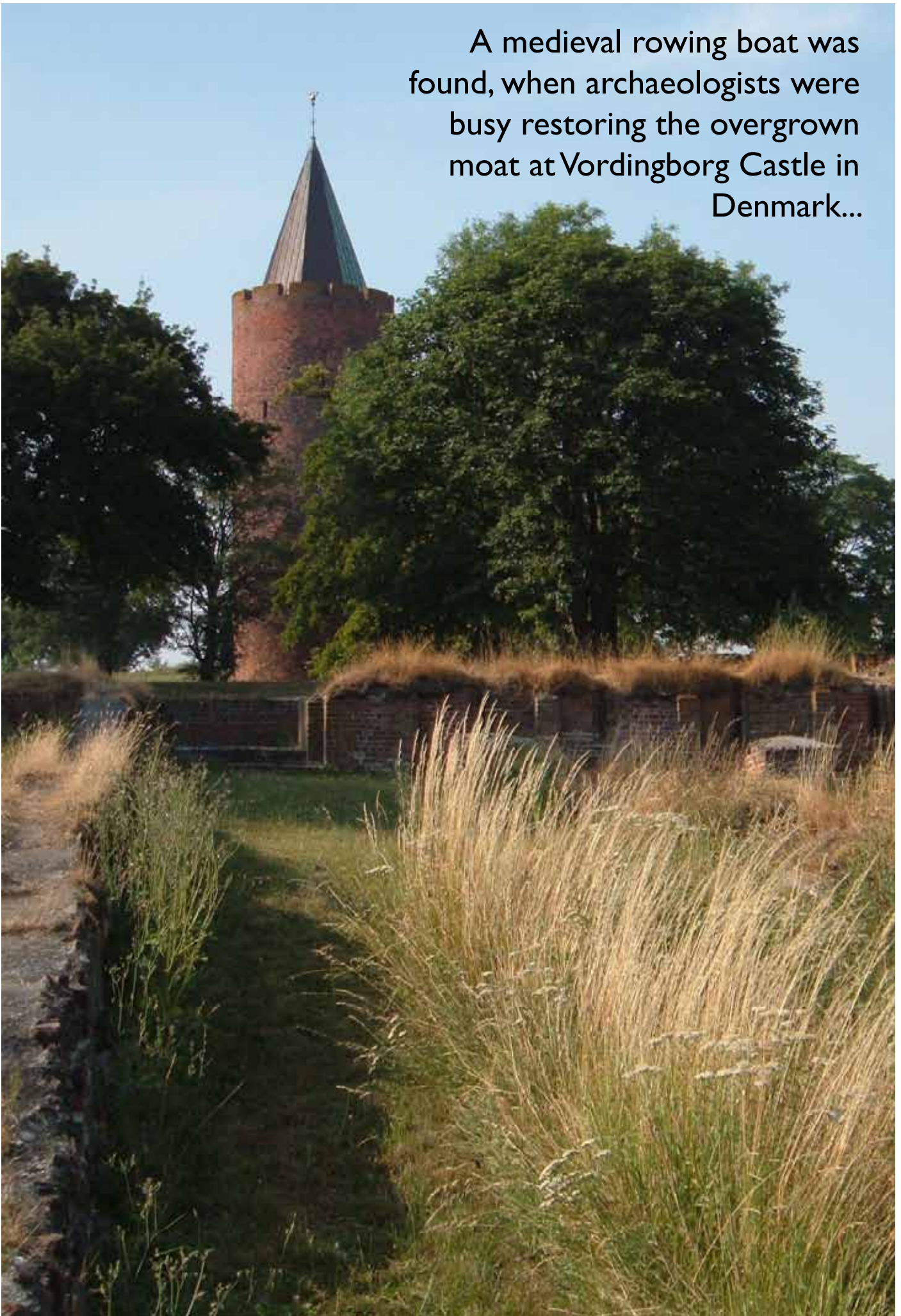
property of a family called Roches. The castle or rather tower was surrounded by a big ditch or moat. This moat had been lined with stones on the inside, probably with some sort of revetment giving the inhabitants an added protection. Inside this wall was a well, which have been excavated. Apart from the peytrel, a medieval die and

leather shoe were found there.

The findings from last year’s excavation are still being analysed and more about the life and times of the inhabitants may be known later.



A medieval rowing boat was found, when archaeologists were busy restoring the overgrown moat at Vordingborg Castle in Denmark...



An important find:

Medieval Rowing Boat

Moat at Vordingborg Castle revealed a medieval rowing Boat

Around 1160 the castle at Vordingborg in Denmark was built on top of a manor dating from the 11th century. This castle was circular and surrounded by a moat. All in all it covered an area 30 x 40 meters.

The next 200 years the castle was continuously expanded until a total renovation took place during the reign of Valdemar Atterdag (1320 – 1375). This radical remodelling resulted in a layout measuring app. 185 x 240 meters. It consisted of a castle with a bailey surrounded by a 740 meter long curtain wall, encircled by a 35 meter broad moat at the front. It played an important role in the constant warring between the Danish Crown and the North German Hanseatic League

The castle, though ruined, is still an impressive edifice. 2011 the Castle was endowed with more than \$13/€10/£8 mill in order to renovate the castle and build a new visitor-centre.

Part of this project is a reconstruction of the moat; naturally extensive archaeological excavations accompany this. The other day the archaeologists struck – if not gold – then something much more rare: a medieval rowing boat. Approximately 6 meters long it dates to the late 14th century and must have been used as a small fishing vessel in the moat. It carries signs of extensive use.



READ MORE:

The Royal Castles of Denmark During the 14th Century.

By Vivian Etting

University Press of Southern Denmark 2010

Serving roast goose at
Martinmas is documented
from the 14th century...



The recipe:

Martinmas - A European Feast

Martin of Tours (c.316 -97) was a soldier in the Roman army, when he decided to convert to Christianity and afterwards was imprisoned for his refusal to fight. He later became a monk, founded a monastery in Gaul at Marmoutier and became bishop of Tours, a career choice he according to legend vehemently tried to avoid by hiding in the goose-pen of the monastery. However, the geese barked loudly and he was discovered by the people, who carried him in triumph to the throne in the cathedral. It is believed he built the monastery after his appointment to bishop in order to have a secluded place to withdraw to. We eat geese at Martinmas in order to help St. Martin punish the animals!

The date – the 11th of November – has its own roots in the Eastern Byzantine Church, where the fast before Christmas – the quadra-

gesima Sancti Martini still measures up to 40 days. And begins the day after the feast of St. Martin. From this stems its somewhat carnivalesque character with different traditions of merrymaking documented from all over Europe: processions of children carrying lanterns, people eating goose or other meaty delicacies or just – as in Portugal – gathering at the fireplace eating roasted chestnuts and drinking the new wine.

Martin Walsh, who surveyed a huge amount of very diverse source-material, were able to demonstrate that the celebration of Martinmas in England can be documented back into the 14th century and was at that time accompanied “by conspicuous feasting supplemented by musical entertainment”. In England and elsewhere the tradition was to have blood-puddings and freshly roasted meat stemming from the

READ MORE:

Eine Unheilige Liturgie. Zur karnevalesken Poetik des Martinliedes des “Mönchs von Salzburg”.

By Andreas Krass

In: Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 2009: Vol 121, no. 1, pp. 75 – 102.

Medieval English Martinmesse: The Archaeology of a forgotten festival.

By Michael W. Walsh.

In: Folklore, 2000, Vol 111, pp. 231 - 254

slaughter of what cattle and other animals which had to be culled in November. At the same time it was “settling day” when servants might





Birds roasting on a spit. Source: The Luttrell Psalter

leave in order to take up new employments while peasants paid their dues to their lords and the tithe to their church; often partly paid in birds like hens, ducks and geese, the tradition grew to eat these birds roasted at the end of autumn and beginning of winter. However, roast goose at Martinmas do not seem to have been ubiquitous in an early English setting.

European Traditions

Quite the opposite is the case in continental Europe, where the same elements of the feast may be found. Here, however, the goose is definitely on the table very early on as is witnessed by some very

charming “Martin-Ballads” composed by an otherwise unknown monk, who lived at the court of the Archbishop of Salzburg 1365 -1396.

The Martin Ballads

The monk composed two secular ballads. The first one – Martein lieber herre – is a vernacular translation of a Latin hymn asking the saint to present the company with roast goose and new wine. Another poem – Wolauf, lieben gessellen unuerzait – has more the character of being a subversive form of Eucharistic liturgy, complete with a chorus and a tenor singing intermittently. The poem consists of 70 lines divided into four verses and

the text for the tenor.

The song starts with an invitation to form a company where social differences are laid aside in order to create a sympathetic society. However the joy is decidedly coupled with the introduction of (lots) of wine into the company. To this is later added dishes of beans, apples and roast goose. The job of the tenor is to invite the Saint – “Lord Martin” - to this joyful occasion as king of the merriments – and to deliver all the goodies: wine and delicacies. It is obvious the text was meant to be performed among a group of (celibate) men being able to appreciate the definite Eucharistic connotations of the text.

A Recipe for Roast Goose

There exist a number of recipes for roast goose stemming from the Middle Ages. The following one might have been served in the home of Martin Luther who was born on this day and named after the saint.

Make a mixture of crushed garlic, salt, pepper, honey, speck, dry bread, grapes and pears cut in pieces. Salt the

goose on the inside and stuff it with this mixture. Roast it in an oven until tender. Serve it with a sauce concocted from the drippings, from which some of the fat is scooped off. The sauce should be thickened with breadcrumbs and tasted with garlic, wine and honey. To live up to the words of the traditional Martin-ballads, it might be served with beans.

From:

“Wild du machen eyn gute essen...” Drei mittelhochdeutsche Kochbücher. Edited by D. Aicholzer. Wiener Arbeiten zur Germanistische Altertumskunde und Philosophie 1999, Vol 35.

Reproduced in:
Zu Tisch bei Martin Luther.
By Alexandra Dapper.
Theiss 2008