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The Reality Behind the Myth of

King

Arthur

by Cynthia Breeding

From the time I was a small child envisioning a beautiful princess riding a splendid horse on her way to meet a king, through teaching Mallory, Tennyson and T.H. White to high school sophomores, and finally to doing serious research on the non-fictional aspect of the Matter of Britain, I have always loved the Arthurian Legends. Did the main characters actually exist? Well, in my mind they did, to the extent that I have written a series of four historical romance novels about the legends. Here's what international scholars have to say.

Lancelot ~

In researching the Arthurian legends, controversy has arisen over whether or not Lancelot really existed. Some scholars say that the French, namely Chrétien de Troyes in *Prose Lancelot*, invented him. Dr. Norma Lorre Goodrich, in her book, *King Arthur*, offers another explanation. Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions a King Anguselus of Albania, who was equal in status to Arthur and attended his coronation. As Dr. Goodrich explains, the name 'Anguselus' was Latin and when Chrétien translated it into Old French, it lost its middle syllable and the consonant group 'gu' dropped out, leaving the word 'An+sel+o' ('o' or 'ot' being the masculine ending of the name in French). This gives us the name 'Anselot' or, as Chrétien referred to him, 'the Anselot'. The 'L', she believes, came from a copying error with the use of the article 'l' in front of the word Anselot, thus becoming Lancelot.

Gwenhwyfar ~

Dr. Norma Lorre Goodrich, in *Guinevere*, depicts Gwenhwyfar as a Pictish queen, born in Stirling, Scotland, whose function was to serve as

both judge and priestess. As such, she would remain virginal and Lancelot would serve as both her acolyte and her champion, protecting her from the following taboos: A high-priestess must shed no blood, must not touch base metals, the parts of her body which had been anointed at her coronation may not be touched and her hair must not be cut.

Mr. P.F.J. Turner also places Gwenhwyfar near Scotland at Carlisle. Her father was a Roman *Magister Militum* for Arthur and the marriage of a very young Gwenhwyfar to a much older Arthur was arranged for political reasons. Mr. Laurence Gardner mentions Gwen de Bretagne (of Brittany) whose father was Leo de Grance. She married Arthur, but bore him no children.



**King Arthur,
Queen Guinevere & Lancelot**

Arthur ~

Dr. Goodrich investigated Arthur's military career, including the twelve battles that end with Badon Hill and the halt of Saxon advances for twenty years. She places his major fort/home at Carlisle, which is in keeping with the whereabouts of Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot. After 542 AD nothing is heard about Arthur, so she theorizes that this is when he died, after the battle of Camlann.

Mr. Turner gives an explanation as to Arthur's title and rank, particularly regarding the term, 'Uther Pendragon' who was not Arthur's father at all. The term 'Uthr' meant 'terrible' (as in awe-inspiring) and 'Pen' meant chief. The Dragon standard was a common one for Roman war leaders. Mr. Turner states that Arthur began his career as a young military officer under the leadership of Cadwy who was in charge of the large fort called Cadwy's Bury (Cadbury). As Arthur gained experience, he rode with Aurelius, the *Regissimus Britanniarum*, and helped defeat the Saxons. He was appointed to the highest officer rank of *Magister Militum* which was the Roman equivalent of 'Uthr Pendragon'. Eventually, he became the *Imperator Britanniarum*.

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Byzantium

Light of the East

by Kathleen Kirkwood
aka Anita Gordon

As the Roman Empire slipped into decline during the late third and early fourth centuries A.D., barbarian hordes stormed across Europe, devastating all in their path and plunging it into what has been called the Dark Ages. But if the light of classical civilization and learning flickered precariously in the West, it yet shone brightly in the East, in a place possessing the most magical of names—Byzantium.

The Byzantine Empire was one of the most brilliant civilizations ever to endure, flourishing without interruption for eleven hundred years. Direct heir to the Roman Empire, Byzantium preserved Roman law and state organization, as well as Hellenic culture and literature. It was also the first Christian empire. Her capital, Constantinople, owing to its strategic position on the Bosphorus where Europe and Asia converge, became a major crossroad for trade and, subsequently, the richest port in the world—her wealth beyond imagining.

While researching my first book, *The Valiant Heart*, I became fascinated with the Viking trade routes to the East. *The Defiant Heart* (my second book) blossomed to life in my heart right then, and I knew my characters would, unquestionably, one day sail for Byzantium.

My enthusiasm grew. I envisioned the book to be a contrast of cultures, sweeping from the shores of rustic Ireland to the bustling Danish slave market of Hedeby, down the mighty waters of the Dnieper river through hazardous lands, and on to the Black Sea and the glittering capital of Byzantium—Constantinople. There, my hero and heroine would walk in marbled halls and dine on plates of gold with little silver forks. Adorned in silks and jewels, they would stroll amidst imperial gardens where ibis and peacocks roamed, and where silver fountains were filled with almonds and flowed with wine—an exotic, opulent world. Ah, yes, this was a grand scheme and an adventure worth the journey; one I would savor right

alongside my characters, every word of the way.

On completion of *The Valiant Heart*, I launched headlong into *The Defiant Heart*. Impassioned with the scope of the project, I shared my excitement with others. Nods and smiles accompanied my mention of Ireland, Denmark and Russia. But, when I announced Byzantium to be the high point of my destinations, all too often, my words met with blank stares.

"Byz—what?" a few asked outright. Very few, actually, for more typically, my listener would quietly go still, very still, except for their eyes which would begin to roam, if not cross or glaze over altogether. As this phenomenon recurred time and again, I realized with sadness that a vast number of people have little or no knowledge of this great civilization or of our indebtedness to her.

But, even for those acquainted with the Byzantine Empire, there are some notably confusing aspects to its culture. For one, Byzantium claimed to be the continuation of the Roman Empire, yet its capital was located at the eastern most part of Europe, and its people spoke Greek. On the other hand, while the citizens considered themselves Rhomaioi (Romans) and fervently embraced their Classical heritage, the city was founded from the very beginning as an Orthodox Christian capital (this following one of the most severe eras of Christian persecution under the Romans). And consider, while the faith of its people was profound, steeped in religious mysticism and ritual, Byzantines were known for



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RIn The Name of Reconquista

by **Carrie Lofly**

Anglo-Saxon law and custom so thoroughly informs our culture that we can occasionally forget how other nations developed different practices. In medieval Castile, situated in the heart of present-day Spain, the Christian monarchs' plan of Reconquista—the process of reclaiming the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors, by force or by cultural influence—created an ever-changing frontier. Miles of territory remained contested for centuries. Towns fell to the Christians and were reclaimed by the Moors, then back again.

This state of cultural flux diminished the Catholic Church's ability to remain rigid with regard marriage, inheritances, sexual taboos, and relations with Jews. To the Christian kings and their subjects, locked in a centuries-long struggle against their contentious Islamic neighbors, every law existed to further Reconquista; little else mattered.

Men greatly outnumbered women in frontier towns, and bachelor knights were considered as great a threat as Moorish invasion. Itinerancy and irresponsibility would not promote Reconquista, neither militarily nor culturally. Thus towns enacted *fueros*, or laws, to promote stability among these rogue, potentially dangerous knights, namely time off from military service after marriage, financial rewards for bearing children, and even the social acceptance of illegitimate sexual relations.

A knight's official mistress was called a *barragana* and was afforded almost all of the rights of a wife. If the affair came to an end, the woman was not ruined. Frontier fathers wanted their daughters to secure reputable matches, and frontier suitors did not want the (relatively) small issue of an affair to remove a possible mate from the market. Maintaining a mistress, although not ideal, at least meant that bachelors would behave as more stable guardians of frontier society. Any children born to such unions were legitimate.

Numerous records exist of so-called kidnappings, where an amorous knight would abduct a willing woman from her home and spend the night out on the frontier. These kidnappings did not hold the official status of a *barragana* arrangement, so families relented and let the young couple wed. In some communities where *fueros* were most lenient, a couple needed only to declare their state of marriage—no priest, no banns, and no witnesses required. Again, this

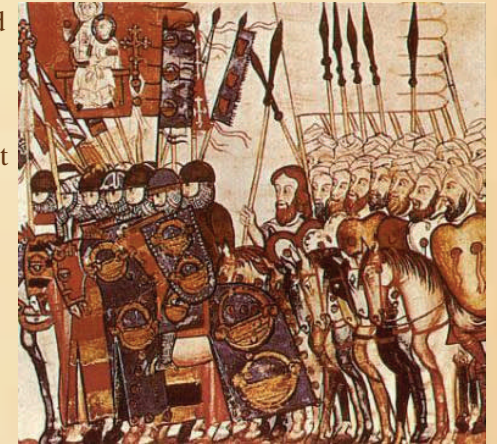
returns to the issue of stability. If the young knight actually volunteered to enter into matrimony, no matter how dubious, who should try to deny him? However, this unspoken tradition also made proving charges of rape incredibly difficult.

Because the ultimate goal of Reconquista was to take back Iberian lands from the Moors, the most heinous crime a Christian could commit was to engage in sexual relations with a Muslim. Islamic women were executed for having sex with Christians, and Christian women with Muslims. Even prostitutes had to stay with men of their own religion. Men were generally given a warning—the removal of a hand, for example—but they were also put to death after repeated transgressions.

But even these harsh laws could be mediated in the name of Reconquista. Because the need to secure tenuous Christian bloodlines was of paramount interest, and with Christian women so scarce on the frontier, provisions were made for mixed-race children. If a Christian man fathered a baby on a Muslim slave, and then that baby was baptized, the man could name the child as his heir—anything to continue at least nominal control over acquired lands.

The other class to suffer under these customs were known as *covigeras*: illegal matchmakers. On occasion, a man developed a fancy for a married woman. He sought a *covigera* to make contact with the woman and aid in his seduction. The matchmaker would act as a go-between to present gifts and secret notes, and would arrange a place for their tryst. The last thing these Christian communities wanted was to destabilize marriages through arranged adultery. Unstable marriage meant divorce. Divorce meant a knight's return to itinerancy and unpredictability. As such, *covigeras*, if caught and convicted, were sentenced to death.

Sexual relations with Jews were not banned. After all, such a ban would do nothing to further Reconquista. In fact many aspects this, the golden age of Jewish culture in Spain, were relatively beneficial to Jews in Iberia. For example, when Christian kings began to make substantial territorial advancements during the 11th century, they employed Jews as spies. Christians did not become spies because it was thought to be immoral. More than 2,000 Jews, or roughly 7% of the population, lived in Toledo under Alfonso VIII of Castile, and Jews were awarded *juderias*, or Jewish-controlled estates in the north of



Reconquista Soliders

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Herblore Gone Wrong

by Denise Lynn

From Aristotle, the bible or Dioscorides, to Gerard and Culpepper and even to modern books, medicinal and culinary uses of herbs have been documented throughout time. Even playwrights like Shakespeare have extolled their virtue. And let us not forget Ellis Peter's character Brother Cadfael. Magical uses for herbs have been handed down from one generation to the next through stories and lore. And that is the focus of this article—herb lore and more importantly—what could go wrong.



Rosemary is an evergreen shrub that can grow up to 6 ft tall over time. Its uses are numerous. The leaves can be used to flavor meat and stuffing. An infusion of the leaves in a tea is said to relieve nervous headaches and colds. It makes a hair rinse for dark hair and a muslin

bag full of rosemary dropped in water provides an invigorating bath. Most people know that rosemary is for remembrance. Greeks and Romans would twine it in their hair to quicken their mind and improve memory. The herb can also be used to ward off evil spirits and bad dreams if used correctly. But who's to say what could happen if used incorrectly? Could a sprig cause a person to forget the giver? Lose their memory? Could it call forth evil spirits or nightmares?



Yarrow, with its feather-like leaves and flat topped flowers could be found in any 12th century soldier's pouch. The leaves were used to heal wounds and staunch the flow of blood. It can add a sharp "bite" to salads or cream cheese. The flowers make a good lotion for cleansing the skin, or a face pack for oily skin.

More importantly, for this article, a yarrow sachet placed beneath one's pillow, while reciting the poem below, will enable them to dream of their true love.

Thou pretty herb of Venus' tree,
They true name is Yarrow:
Now who my bosom friend must be,
Pray tell thou me tomorrow.

Since looking for the things that could go wrong is much more fun, what if you flubbed the words of charm and instead of seeing your true love or bosom friend in a dream, you saw your enemy—someone attacking your home?



Lemon Balm was used as a strewing herb because of its fragrant, mint-leaf shaped leaves. It was also claimed to be good for insect bites and fevers. Infused in water with honey or sugar, it makes a mild tea useful for longevity. It is still an ingredient in liqueurs like Benedictine.

When steeped in wine, lemon balm will draw love your way—when presented to the right person of course! But, again, what if the goblet somehow ended up in the hands, or in this case mouth, of the wrong person? Would you be stuck with a lover you didn't want? Or, would you accidentally find true love?



Borage can be used to decorate wine cups, chopped into salads or egg dishes and eaten with cucumbers. Infused with water it's used as a diuretic, fever reducer or a laxative. The fresh leaves make a face pack for dry skin. The Celtic term for borage was barrach—a man of courage. While Dioscorides claimed that borage brought about absolute forgetfulness, Pliny said that it makes a man merry and joyful. So, naturally, I'm forced

to wonder what happens with a courageous warrior who cheerfully can't remember a thing...

Herblore can be found in almost any herbal reference book. Applying a good dose of Murphy's Law will go a long way with figuring out what could go wrong.

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And the Saints go Marching...

by Denise Domning

Candlemas ~ Mary Day
February 2nd is the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the day that Mary was ritually cleansed in the Temple after the birth of Christ). It's better known names are Mary Day or Candlemas.

Why the name Candlemas? That relates to Simeon's prophecy to Mary when she presented her new son to him: that Jesus would be the Light of revelation to the Gentiles. The tradition of prophecy remains tightly wound to the day, even into our modern age. Think Punxsutawney



Purification of the
Virgin Mary

Phil, the groundhog who predicts when winter will end. Because candles give off light, they easily became the symbol of Christ's light. St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of William the Conqueror, explained that candle wax, being a product of the "virginal" bee, symbolizes Christ's flesh, a candle's wick represents His soul and the candle's flame is His divinity. This connection to candles resulted in the development of one of the most magical processions of the liturgical year. Parishioners gathered at their local church, traditionally bearing a penny and a lighted candle. This was required as part of their duty to support him—it was part of his yearly pay.

Imagine the gentle glow steadily growing as each parishioner entered the darkened church until the sanctuary was ablaze. During the mass that followed parishioners could have other candles blessed for use, say at the bedside of a dying relative or for comfort in a thunderstorm.

The brightly lit church must have seemed almost miraculous after having spent so many long dark winter days trapped in a darkened

cottage; candles were expensive items and saved for very special occasions. No doubt it served as a welcome reminder that in just another month Spring would begin, which brings us to an earthier source for this holiday.

Early February is when the spring plowing begins, and when it's time to drive winter-starved cattle into the hay fields to eat. It also happens to be the time of year when the ewes begin to lactate prior to giving birth to their spring lambs. How well their milk comes in was a certain indicator of future prosperity... or failure. Notice that prophecy remains a theme here.

And the cycle of life begins one more time.

St. Blaise's Day...

On February 3rd we have St. Blaise's day, the patron saint of sore throat sufferers. He's new to me. I'd never heard of him prior to researching this article. Back in Fourth Century Armenia, he trained as a doctor, converted to Christianity, then eventually became the Bishop of Sebaste, until the emperor cracked down on the Christians. He was arrested, but while on his way to prison he was stopped by a mother whose child was choking on a fishbone. St. Blaise managed to cure the child on the spot (hmmm? Early Heimlich maneuver, maybe?) but he couldn't save himself. The local governor had him beaten with a stick, then had his flesh ripped away with carding combs before having him beheaded.

Anyone interested in becoming a Saint??



St. Blaise curing a child
from choking
on a fishbone

Denise Domning's first medieval romance, Winter's Heat, received the Romantic Times award for Best First Historical Novel in 1994. Spring's Fury, Autumn's Flame, A Love for All Seasons were respectively nominated by Romantic Times for Best Medieval Novel in 1995, 1996 and 1997. Her first Elizabethan novel, Lady in Waiting, was recommended by Publisher's Weekly as well written and researched, with an accurate portrayal of Elizabeth I. Denise is currently co-authoring an autobiography with Monica Sarli about her life entitled No Regrets.

Keeper of the Realm

Constantine VII of Byzantium

Co-Emperor 908 ~ 945 A.D.

Emperor 945 ~ 959 A.D.

by Linda Abel

The Purple Born

Constantine VII's mother, Zoe Karbonopsina, was the mistress to Emperor Leo VI (The Wise) of Byzantium. But I would think that it was Zoe who was the wiser for because of her foresight, Constantine VII's legitimacy started to take shape simply by the room in the palace where he was born. Being born in the Purple Room of the imperial palace meant that you were the son of a reigning Emperor of Byzantium. To secure the throne for her son and also his legitimacy, three days after the christening a marriage took place and Zoe was proclaimed Empress. Still feeling that the succession was in question, Leo had his son crowned as co-emperor on May 15, 908, when he was only two years old.

In 912 Leo VI died and he was succeeded by his younger brother Alexander who reigned until his death in 913. Constantine was now seven years old. Although he was now Emperor he was not to rule alone. It didn't take long before the throne was usurped and intrigues filled the court. His first regent was Nicholas Mystikos—a very unpopular man. And so the juggling of power went with his mother becoming regent (twice), then came an admiral, Romanos Lecapenus, who managed to make himself co-emperor in 920. Emperor Romanos I kept his power until 944 when he was deposed by his sons and Constantine. In 945, Constantine was at last successful in removing his co-emperors and claiming the throne as his alone.

In 919, at the age of thirteen, Constantine was forced into a loveless marriage of convenience with Helena, daughter of Romanus I. Fortunately the marriage eventually became a happy one, with Helena advising Constantine and two of their children rising to the throne after the death of their father.

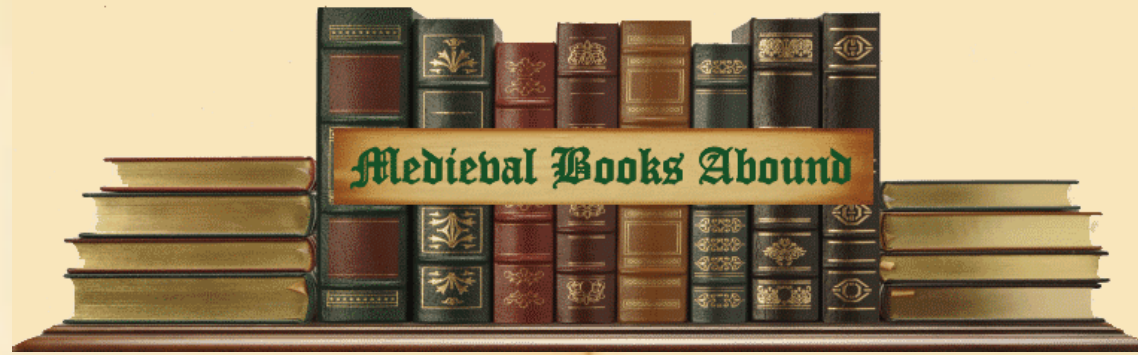
A good Emperor, Constantine VII battled his detractors—making survival his major duty—and discharged his duties as best he could. A patron of the arts, he was a passionate collector and an accomplished painter. He spent large amounts of time reviewing the Byzantine court ceremonial and his work entitled *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae* remains—to this day—an invaluable resource. He was known for his astute ability to discern the right man for the job and these successful appointments lead to a strong empire both economically and militarily.

On November 9, 959 Constantine at last found peace—in death. It has been said that the true mark of an Emperor is his ability as an aggressor. Yet oftentimes, as history has shown, it is the quiet, gentle rulers that take precedence.



Christ crowning Constantine VII

Linda Abel is the publisher, editor and your faithful Scribe of The Medieval Chronicle. She is also co-published in mystery and self published in non-fiction with books on the medieval period. She would love hearing from you. Please contact her at Scribe@TheMedievalChronicle.com.



January / February 2010 Releases

Historical Romances

Widow's Peak by Hanna Rhys Barnes
12th century England
(Wild Rose ♦ 8/09~I just found it)

Chalice of Roses by Jo Beverley, Mary Jo Putney, Karen Harbaugh & Barbara Samuel
Medieval to present day British Isles
(Signet Eclipse ♦ 1/10)

The Highlander's Forbidden Bride
by Donna Fletcher
1500's Scotland
(Avon ♦ 1/10)

Viking In Love by Sandra Hill
965 Northumbria
(Avon ♦ 2/10)

Highland Angel by Hannah Howell
15th century Scotland
(Zebra ♦ 1/10) re-issue

Wicked, Sinful Nights by Julia Latham
1487 England
(Avon ♦ 1/10)

Scoundrel's Kiss by Carrie Lofty
Medieval Spain
(Zebra ♦ 1/10)

Pregnant By The Warrior by Denise Lynn
1142 England
(Harlequin ♦ 1/10)

A Highlander's Destiny by Melissa Mayhue
Medieval Scotland & Present day
(Pocket ♦ 1/10) time travel

In a Warrior's Bed by Mary Wine
1063 Scotland
(Brava ♦ 2/10)

Moon Craving by Lucy Monroe
Medieval Scotland
(Berkley ♦ 2/10) Shape shifter

Taming The Highland Bride by Lynsay Sands
Medieval Scotland
(Avon ♦ 2/10)

Seduced By A Rogue by Amanda Scott
14th century Scotland
(Forever ♦ 1/10)

Historical Fiction

Between Two Queens by Kate Emerson
Tudor England
(Pocket ♦ 1/10)

Hugh and Bess by Susan Higginbotham
1341 England
(Sourcebooks ♦ 8/09~I just found it)

Historical Fiction cont.

Her Mother's Daughter by Julianne Lee
Tudor England
(Berkley ♦ 1/10)

O, Juliet by Robin Maxwell
Renaissance Florence
(NAL ♦ 2/10)

The Boleyn Wife by Brandy Purdy
Tudor England
(Kensington ♦ 2/10)

Medieval Mysteries

The Parisian Prodigal by Alan Gordon
1205 France
(St. Martin ♦ 2/10)

Sting Of Justice by Cora Harrison
16th Ireland
(Minotaur ♦ released 11/09~I just find it)

Her Highness' First Murder by Peg Herring
1546 England
(Gale Group♦ 2/10)

A Bolt From The Blue by Diane A. S. Stuckard
15th century Milan
(Penguin Group ♦ 1/10)

In 1191, in an old burial ground south of the Lady Chapel, the monks of Glastonbury Abbey unearthed a dug out oak coffin containing the remains of two skeletons. The one was of a tall man whose skull bore marks of a severe blow; the other was the lighter bones of a woman. A leaden cross was found on top of the grave. The Latin inscription HIC JACET SEPULTUS INCLITUS REX ARTHURIUS CUM WENNEVERIA UXORE SUA SECUNA IN INSULA AVALLONIA translates as, 'Here lies buried the renowned King Arthur with Guinevere, his second wife, in the Isle of Avalon.' (Journey to Avalon by Chris Barber and David Pykitt).

Was it really Arthur who was buried there? Or could it have been Lancelot—resting at last, and for eternity—with Gwenhwyfar?

Cynthia Breeding has written a series of 4 historical romances about the Arthurian legends. Prelude to Camelot is a 2009 release from Highland Press. In addition, a stand-alone book, My Noble Knight, offers a completely different slant on the Arthurian legends. Visit Cynthia at www.CynthiaBreeding.com.

Publisher's note: The author of this article, Cynthia Breeding, retains the copyright to this material. The article has been edited by The Medieval Chronicle's editor in the interest of space. Only additional theories have been removed; no remaining context has been changed or altered.

Continued from page 10, Herblore Gone Wrong

Check out these books to learn more...

The Rodale Herb Book—How to Use, Grow and Buy Nature's Miracle Plants, Edited by William H. Hylton, ©1974 by Rodale Press.

The Herb Book by Arabella Boxer and Philippa Back, ©1980 Reed Consumer Books

The Modern Herbal (Vol I) and *The Modern Herbal (Vol II)* by Mrs. M. Grieve, ©1982 Dover Publication, Inc. (These are two of TMC's favorite!)

Denise Lynn's latest medieval, Pregnant by the Warrior (A case of yarrow inspired dreams going really wrong...) is a January 2010 release from Harlequin Historical. Visit Denise at Denise-Lynn.blogspot.com

the Peninsula. Some were even awarded daughters as political alliances.

Also, because Jews had lived in Moorish-occupied territory throughout the centuries-long Christian expulsion, they knew a great deal about the Islamic tribes. Jews had performed the same function in the 8th century when they advised invading Moors about the habits and weaknesses of the conquered Visigoths. This pattern of adaptation—finding usefulness within an incoming regime—helped the Jews survive multiple invasions and re-conquests, but it added to the suspicions about their people and way of life.

Although Jews enjoyed these advantages in the heyday of Reconquista, the need for their expertise waned as Christians began to re-occupy more and more land and become acquainted first-hand with their Moorish enemies.

Eventually, in the early 13th century, Jews were expelled from their juderias, replaced in royal courts, and forced to wear identifying clothing. The taboo of marrying a Jew reappeared in good society, although their integration into Christian bloodlines in Spain was already greater than in any other medieval kingdom.

Thus iron-clad societal rules in medieval Iberia were not so iron-clad. The demands of Reconquista moved with the times, according to the kings in power, their aims, and the status of their campaigns against an Moorish enemy. The higher dictates of the Catholic Church only reappeared in full once the goal of Reconquista—a process that claimed more than eight centuries—culminated in 1492, when the last Muslim leader of Granada surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella.

Born in California and raised in the Midwest, Carrie Lofty found the love of her life in England. Since earning her master's in history from The Ohio State University, she's been devoted to raising her family and writing romance. Her January 2010 release, Scoundrel's Kiss, featuring a Spanish warrior monk and the troubled woman he's sworn to protect, is the sequel to her Robin Hood-themed debut, What a Scoundrel Wants. Visit Carrie at www.CarrieLofty.com.

sinister plots, mutilations, and more than a few royal eye gouging. Were these people so pious after all?

Truly the Byzantine world, as it evolved, was a complex one—labyrinthine, some would say—but certainly worth effort to unravel its mysteries, appreciate its grandeur and understand the importance of its place in history to mankind.

In 324 A.D., on becoming sole emperor of the Roman empire, Constantine the Great made two significant decisions that were to have far reaching consequences. He legalized Christianity and moved his capital from Rome. For the site of his new capital, he chose a modest city named Byzantium, founded a thousand years prior as a Greek colony by a man named Byzas. The site offered strategic advantages. Situated on a triangular promontory, it over-looked the Sea of Marmara to the south, a strand of the Bosphorus to the east where Europe met Asia and the Golden Horn to the northeast, a protected harbor five miles long which opened onto the Black Sea. Not only highly defensible and favorable as a commercial crossroad, the site also allowed the emperor ready access to his armies in the east and west.

At a frenzied pace, the city was laid out and Roman provinces were emptied of their treasures to fill Nova Roma (New Rome). While Roman style baths, forums, aqueducts and a hippodrome were raised, grand churches were erected and filled with relics. Constantine, who had undergone conversion (though he didn't receive Baptism till on his deathbed), intended his city to be a Christian one. Following forty days and forty nights of celebrations. Nova Roma, or Constantinople as it was soon called, was dedicated May 11, 330 A.D.

Artisans, merchants and adventurers flocked to the imperial city from all parts of the world. At the same time, Constantinople was not without her enemies, coveting her wealth and power. Over the next century, the entire city was fortified with thirteen miles of high, thick walls and watchtowers (triple walls on her landward side), making her an impregnable fortress.

The Byzantine political system, its government and laws, evolved over the centuries but continued without a break until the fifteenth century. Beginning with Constantine, the emperors were seen as having received their power directly from God (an Eastern concept). They lived amid opulent splendor and arrayed themselves

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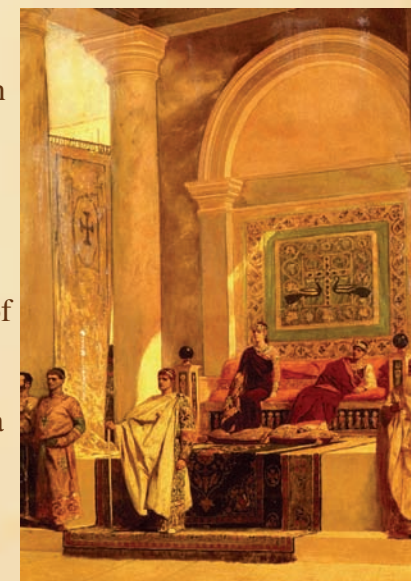
in extravagant attire. As head of both state and church—the two being inseparable—it was the emperor who appointed the Patriarch to his office in the Orthodox Church.

If one Byzantine emperor is remembered above the others, it is Justinian I (527-565 A.D.) for his codification of Roman law which, in time, became the model for legal and political thought for most Western nations; for his architectural achievements following the Nika Riots of 532 A.D. which left half the city burned and which he rebuilt from ashes (his masterpiece being the immense and magnificent Hagia Sophia, for which he proclaimed, "Solomon, I have outdone thee!"); and for his unforgettable wife, Theodora the bear keeper's daughter.

It was not until the seventh century, during the reign of Heraclius, that Greek became the official language of the empire replacing Latin which was still spoken at court, in government and the army. Greek had long been the language of the populace, which was predominantly of Greek extraction, and that of the Church, used in its liturgy and theology.

By the early tenth century, Constantinople boasted a population of roughly a million people. In *The Defiant Heart* my characters meet the emperor, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, as a child of ten—one possessing a bright and inquisitive mind. As a man, this scholar-emperor went on to compile treatises on a multitude of subjects including detailed information on government, history, geography and court ceremonials of the day. These he left to posterity in two important works, *De Administrando Imperio* and *The Book of Ceremonies* (from which this author gratefully gleaned vital information for her book!).

Tenth century Byzantium provided a cornucopia of detail to draw on. How could I resist including the 'Throne of Solomon', an elaborate mechanical throne that could be elevated from



Throne of Solomon

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floor to ceiling with golden lions roaring and jeweled birds singing in gilded trees? And how could I overlook those small, two-tined forks (in use in the fourth century but not introduced to Europe until much later when a Byzantine princess brought some with her on the occasion of her wedding to the doge of Venice)?

But what of stories of intrigues and mutilations? Plot and counterplot are not uncommon to any age, anywhere, though the Byzantines seemed masters of elaborate duplicities. Punishment by mutilation, though repulsive, was deemed a merciful act—a second chance for one to redeem their soul—for death was final.

Byzantium endured until the fifteenth century when it fell to the Ottoman Turks. As Seward and Mountgarret state in *Byzantium, a Journey and a Guide*, "It was the end of a realm which had renewed itself time and again, which had preserved Europe from Eastern (Persian and Arab) invasion for a millennium, at whose capital art, literature and the luxury of the Caesars had continued for a thousand years after the fall of old Rome."

On the morning of May 29, 1453, Constantine XI, the last emperor of the Byzantine Empire, fought and died heroically with his men atop the Romanus Gate.

On that day, the light of the (Byzantine) East went out forever.

Anita Gordon is the award-winning and best-selling author of the Heart trilogy. The first novel of the trilogy—The Valiant Heart (1991), a tenth century medieval—garnered numerous awards and recognitions including Romance Writers of America's prestigious Golden Heart Award. The sequel—The Defiant Heart (1993), a sweeping, epic style work—was on the bestsellers lists. The Captive Heart (1995) completed the trilogy. Writing under the pseudonym Kathleen Kirkwood, Anita has penned two Late-Victorian, paranormal romances: A Slip In Time (1998), set in the Scottish Highlands in 1893, and Shades Of The Past (1999), a haunted tale set in England's west Midlands in 1882. Anita's next book, a 12th century medieval entitled His Fair Lady (2001), captured the Golden Quill Award for Best Historical Romance. Anita is currently working on a ghostly tale set in Civil War Maryland but when it's completed she will, once again, return to her medieval roots with a tale set in 13th century Wales. Visit Anita at www.anitagordon.com.



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