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Discoveries

Clara Pinchbeck

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PEREGRINATIONS

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Discoveries

Clara Pinchbeck, *Kenyon College 2018*

New Christian frescoes revealed in Rome's Catacombs of Domitilla

A seven-year restoration of two underground burial rooms at the Catacombs of Domitilla has recently been completed. The restorers, using laser technology, uncovered hidden frescoes that were commissioned 1,600 years ago in order to commemorate the city's early Christians. The Catacombs are spread over 17 kilometers of underground caves, some of which are inaccessible. They are laid out on four levels, one on top of another, and the frescoes depict scenes of the Old and New Testament.

The first area restored dates back to the 3rd century, and researchers have found many references to pagan art, such as grape vines or cupids, two biblical scenes including Daniel and the lions and Noah with his ark, as well as a



number of frescoes depicting Christ and the apostles. The second area, known as the "room of bakers," houses frescoes commissioned by the city's bakers. The pictures represent Christ and the apostles and scenes from the life of a baker. This discovery sheds light onto everyday life in Rome and the transition from paganism to Christianity.

Rewritten from [Archaeology Wiki](#)

Ancient Tomb of Santa Claus Discovered Beneath Turkish Church



Archaeologists in Turkey discovered a tomb beneath the ruins of an ancient church, which is believed to contain the remains of Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus. Researchers from eight differing fields of study were involved in the process of unearthing the undamaged grave, which was discovered under St. Nicholas Church, in Turkey's southern Antalya province. The claims over the 1,674-year-old remains of Saint Nicholas conflict with differing

narratives that put the original saint's relics as far away as Ireland and Italy. Turkish experts claim that the wrong bones were removed from a different tomb (pictured) and taken abroad in the 11th century.

Rewritten from [Newsweek](#)



Coptic tombstone unearthed at Sphinxes Avenue in Luxor

Egyptian archaeologists in Luxor have come across a decorative Coptic tombstone buried on the eastern side of the Sphinxes Avenue, below Al-Mathan Bridge. The gravestone, carved from limestone, is adorned with a cross and Coptic texts. The exact date of the object and identity of the deceased have yet to be ascertained, however, experts are currently studying the tombstone to find out. The excavations in the Sphinxes Avenue are part of a Ministry of Antiquities initiative to restore the area and transform it into an open-air museum.

Rewritten from [Ahram Online](#)

St. Columba's cell revealed by archaeologists

Archaeologists from the University of Glasgow working with Historic Environment Scotland have discovered definitive evidence that a wooden hut generally associated with St. Columba at the monastery on Iona island dates to his lifetime in the late sixth century. Columba, known in Gaelic as Colum Cille or "dove of the Church," is a revered figure who brought Christianity to Scotland from Ireland, landing on Iona in 563.



Using the process of radiocarbon dating to analyze hazel charcoal uncovered from an excavation of a wattle and timber structure on the island 60 years ago, archaeologists found that its dates correspond to when Columba lived and worked at the Hebridean monastery. They believe that it may be the monk's cell where he prayed and studied in isolation.

Rewritten from Medievalists.net

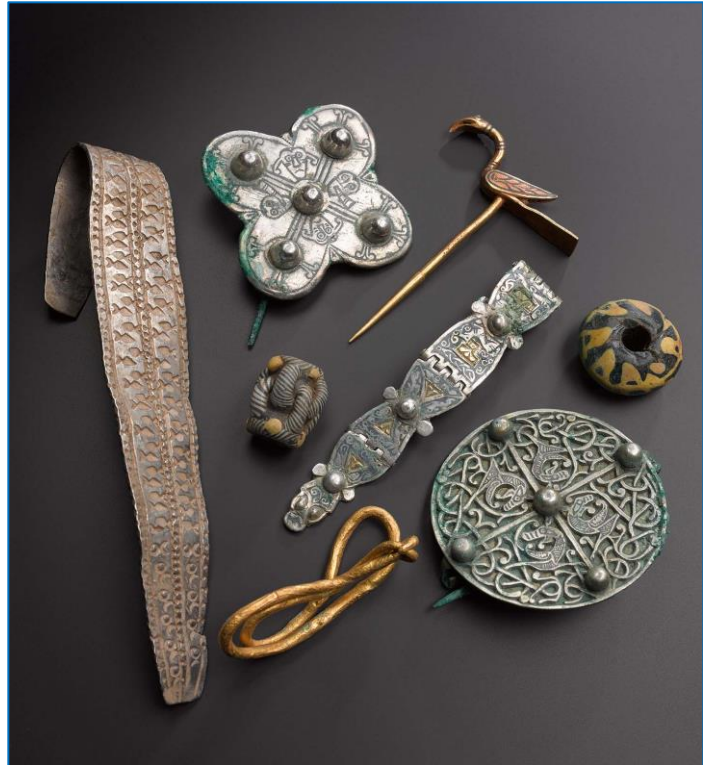
Uncovering the Galloway Viking Hoard, layer by layer

Considered to be one of the most extraordinary Viking hoards ever found in the British Isles, the Galloway Hoards, discovered in 2014, contain layer upon layer of archaeological artifacts. The top layer of the hoard, deposited around 900-920, contained 11 silver ingots and 11 silver arm-rings which had been flattened into bullion. Silver was not mined in Scotland during this time, so the people were reliant on external resources. Scandinavian trade routes brought silver from as far away as the Islamic world. Ingots were a portable form of moving wealth around, but the arm-rings, archaeologists theorize, were probably signifiers of social groups and hierarchies. The top layer additionally contained an Anglo-Saxon style pectoral cross elaborately decorated with gold leaf and niello decoration.

The layer below contained twice as many arm-rings and ingots as above, as well as a small wooden box containing a ring, an ingot, and a beautiful bird-shaped pin. Another parcel in the lower layer held a Carolingian or continental lidded cup that stands 10 cm high and 10 cm in diameter. This was filled with organic materials, glass beads, a gold ingot, a gold pendant, and two textile bundles containing gold filigree mounts thought

to be manuscript pointers. The vessel was wrapped in two layers of textiles, which is rare from an archaeological perspective because often textiles do not survive. There was also an Irish-style brooch or the bossed penannular type and underneath that were Anglo-Saxon disc brooches.

The hoard tells archaeologists about the beginning of the process in which later medieval kingdoms, Scotland, Ireland and England, came into being. It depicts the cultural mix that comes from the later medieval kingdoms, which are the foundations of these modern-day nations.



Rewritten from [Museum Crush](#)

Tiny box brooch from Viking fortress in Køge, Denmark may have belonged to Harold Bluetooth's shaman



A small silver fitting has been found in Køge, east Denmark, during excavations of the Viking fortress Borgring. It resembles one of the three missing parts of a unique Gotlandic box brooch which was discovered earlier at the Fyrkat fortress in

Hobro, north of Borgring. The ornate little box brooch was found in the road layer in Borgring's northern gate, thought to have been the central entrance to the fortress. It was deposited around the same time as a shaman grave at Frykat, around 980.

The Kyrkat grave, one of the richest female graves in Denmark from the Viking Age, was associated with a shaman or sorceress, whom the Vikings would have revered. If the silver piece from Borgring truly originated from the same box brooch, it would suggest that the woman had traveled between the castles, both of which were likely built by Harold Bluetooth who ruled Denmark from 958-987.

Rewritten from [Science Nordic](#)

Archaeologists Find Viking Age Toy Boat in Norway

Archaeologists from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology's University Museum have unearthed a toy dating back as far as 1153 in an abandoned well in Ørland, Norway. The town of Ørland is far from the sea and is not strategically located, thus the medieval



farm was most likely not the richest farm in the area. However, this discovery shows that life was good enough in Ørland so that someone had time to carve a toy boat for a child, and that the child had time to play with it.

Rewritten from [Sci-News](#)



Mysterious 1,000-year-old silver reliquary artifact found in Devon

A rare medieval artifact has been found by a metal detector on farmland in Devon. Measuring 30 mm l x 15 mm w x 8 mm h and weighing 11.29 g, the gilded silver object, dating between the 6th and 11th centuries, may have been the lid of a small reliquary box that

housed the bone of a saint's finger. Because it has no direct parallels, "the precise identity and function ... is unknown."

Rewritten from [Daily Mail](#)

Board Game and Luxuries Discovered in Galilee Crusader Castle



Archaeologists excavating the Teutonic fort recently found projectiles used by the Mamluk invaders, as well as the crusaders' arrows. Montfort Castle, in modern-day Israel, was built by German Teutonic crusaders in the late 12th century on top of a hill. It was destroyed by the Mamluk leader Sultan Baibars in 1271.

Recent excavations have uncovered the castle's Great Hall, which was located at the western end of the three-storied structure and probably stood over 30 meters in height. The lowest level contained cellars, the middle level housed the ceremonial hall, and the top level contained gilded luxurious domestic apartments, featuring vaulted rooms, gilded wood, stained glass, and sumptuously painted walls. The latest excavations also found the castle stables near the outer northern gate. The stables contained flag flooring, and a beam supported roof. Archaeologists also unearthed spades, axes, horseshoes, horseshoe nails, saddling buckles, and bells.

The castle was besieged three times by Mamluk emirs which explain the 42 mangonel stones around the outer ramparts that were once aimed at the castle. Burnt wooden beams, nails, hundreds of arrowheads and arrow shafts, spearheads, and crossbow nuts have also



been uncovered, bearing witness to the castle's bloody last days in 1271 before the Germans surrendered.

Rewritten from [Haaretz](#)

Medieval ring found during work on water supply in Bulgaria's Assenovgrad



Archaeologists, who were called to the Bulgarian town of Assenovgrad, found a medieval ring and ceramics after workers fixing the town's water supply discovered a fortress wall while digging below the street. The ring, comprised of copper with an inlaid stone, was most likely worn by a woman or child due to its small size. Unfortunately, most of the ceramics were found broken because the original water pipes, laid in the 1960s, destroyed the medieval archaeological objects. The fortress wall dates between the

12th and 14th centuries, when the village Stamimanos occupied the site.

Rewritten from [The Sofia Globe](#)

Sampling DNA from a 1,000-Year-Old Illuminated Manuscript

A group of archaeologists and geneticists in the United Kingdom have analyzed DNA from the York Gospels, which were assembled over a thousand years ago. The book, bound in leather, illustrated and illuminated, contains four Gospels as well as land records and oaths taken by clergymen. Scholars found human DNA from those who swore oaths on its pages and from bacteria probably originating from the hands and mouths of those humans. Additionally, they examined the 1,000-year-old DNA from the cows and sheep whose skin formed the pages of the book.



Most remarkable is that the authors extracted the DNA without destroying any parchment – all they needed were crumbs from rubbing the book with erasers which conservationists use to clean the manuscripts. Although they have yet to submit their report to a scientific journal, if the authors' techniques are accepted, it could revolutionize the use of parchment to study history. By using DNA, researchers may be able to track how a disease changed the makeup of a herd, or how the skin of sheep might have moved along medieval trade routes. It is all part of an increasing movement to bring together scholars in the sciences and humanities to study medieval manuscripts.

Rewritten from [The Atlantic](#)

X-rays identify medieval manuscript ink



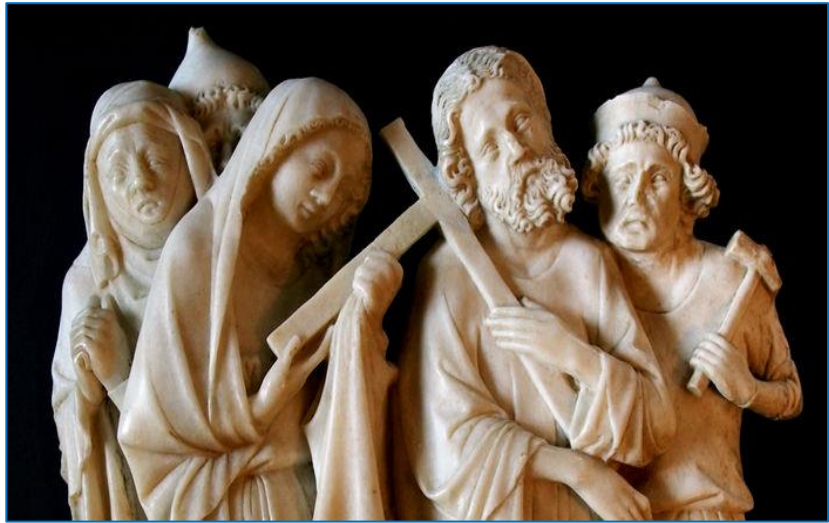
Recently, Luisa Smieska, Ruth Mullett and Laurent Ferri analyzed pigments in medieval illuminated manuscript pages, dating from the 13th to 16th centuries, at the Cornell High Energy Synchrotron Source (CHESS). The manuscript pages, from Cornell University Library's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections (RMC), were studied using X-ray fluorescence and spectral

imaging analysis. The team was surprised to discover the trace element barium in the azurite blues in many of the leaves. Identifying and measuring the amount of trace elements creates a pigment fingerprint, which can aid in provenance research to connect far-flung manuscript pages that have been separated from their original books. The impurities and trace elements are also likely indicators of where the pigments originated, and can help in other historic and scientific inquiries.

Rewritten from [Medievalists.net](#)

Tracing the origins of medieval sculptures using isotope fingerprints

Researchers at the French Geological Survey in Orleans, France analyzed the isotopic composition of sulfur, oxygen, and strontium in dozens of the alabaster pieces from the 12th-17th centuries, matching isotopic fingerprints with geographical locations. They found three main sources of alabaster: central England, northern Spain, and a previously obscure site in the French Alps. These results highlight the competition between these quarries during a time when this medium was favored by European sculptors.



Rewritten from [Nature](#)