

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE



The “hand of God”

Again it has been a very productive year for the Friends of the Mediaeval Society at the ROM. March Break was again very successful, and the FMSS-sponsored mediaeval fair was the high-point of the programme. We had falconry, dancers, men in armour, archery, calligraphy, food, a working full-size traction trebuchet, and lots of other fun things. We may or may not be involved in the next March Break, but our long-term plans are to have a mediaeval weekend, which will be the biggest mediaeval programme we have organized yet! We may even have jousting!! With horses! We are planning for October 2011, so watch this space!

This was followed by our Annual Symposium on March 27<sup>th</sup>, with ten speakers covering the mediaeval world. Despite the success of this event, we are making plans to make it more successful, such as reducing the number of speakers to eight, and having a shorter lunch break. We are even looking into *providing* lunch!

For my part, my field season this year comprised a break from my fieldwork at the monastery of St. Moses in the Syrian desert, as I went instead to Corinth in Greece. The site was the most important city in Greece during the mediaeval period, and was the final destination in a great deal of pottery from the Middle East. Excavations since the 1920's by the American School there unearthed considerable numbers of these imports, and so I went to identify it for them. The material was very interesting, including material from Iraq as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and a great deal of pottery from Egypt and Syria of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, including the piece pictured here, which is an 11<sup>th</sup> century luster-ware from Egypt and bears the Hand of God! This is an uncommon gesture, which resembles what is known as the “Coptic” blessing distinct from Greek, Latin and Syrian variants. Although Muslim, the potters of Egypt at this time were making a lot of pottery for the Christian market, perhaps due to the large Coptic Christian community in Egypt at the time. There were a number of unusual things in the group of pottery, and if you would like to find out more, I'm giving a talk on it for the Archaeological Institute of America on November 24<sup>th</sup> (page 3).

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## DEAD FISHES TELL LIVELY TALES

BY RICHARD HOFFMANN  
PROFESSOR EMERITUS AND SENIOR SCHOLAR  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, YORK UNIVERSITY

Now and in the distant past, fisheries are always socio-natural phenomena, zones where human cultures and natural ecosystems intersect. The interaction of nature and culture is the realm of environmental history. Throughout the mediaeval millennium, Europeans' relations with aquatic nature evolved in complex ways both distinctive and with telling parallels to some present-day issues. This paper tells some tales of those interactive



d. *Kunst boich. Köln: von Aich, [ca 1550]*

developments and their consequences for European nature and civilization. Elements of mediaeval symbolic culture greatly shaped how Latin Christians approached 'fish', as they classified all aquatic animals. Religious taboos of varying intensity determined when most respectable people who could afford meat ate fish instead. Medical opinion and the social prestige gained from conspicuous consumption influenced the varieties placed on the table. But so, too, then did the seasonal and technical capacities to capture, transport, and safely store each variety. Both natural conditions and material culture changed over time.

Mediaeval demand for fish to eat motivated capture fisheries at subsistence, artisanal, and later large commercial scales. Up to the eleventh century and commonly much later, local fishers exploited nearby natural hence freshwater and inshore marine ecosystems to supply their families, their lords household establishments, and/or local markets.

Family enterprises operated within craft or community constraints meant to serve social purposes and/or to safeguard quality on the market. In many places and under various legal regimes, these institutional arrangements sustained production throughout and beyond the Middle Ages. Human population growth and economic development changed parameters for mediaeval relations with aquatic systems. Massive agricultural clearances, the proliferation of water wheels, urbanization, and local emissions of waste impacted on aquatic habitats. Shippers, millers, and people seeking irrigation or flood control contested the waters with the fishers, while the demand for fish continued to rise. Written and archaeozoological evidence indicates local, regional, and species-specific overfishing. Such anthropogenic pressures worked in counterpoint with natural variability. Changing temperature and runoff regimes differently affected various fishes and regions

High and late mediaeval Europeans were not unaware of insecurity and shortfalls in the supply of fish. Over centuries and under different circumstances, their responses included privatization and public regulation of fishing rights and methods; purposeful manipulation of aquatic systems (aquaculture); and step-wise expansion of fisheries on Europe's marine frontiers. Indeed in a world of continual socio-cultural and natural changes, many issues now vexing fisheries on all four of Canada's coasts have counterparts or antecedents in mediaeval European experience.

The Heidelberg Booklet of 1493 55



b. *Ein wunder künstreiches Büchlein. Strasbourg: Frölich, 1531*



c. *Libret nouveau. [Lyon: Moderne, ca 1540]. Reproduced by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University, F1099.50*

Join the Friends of the Mediaeval Studies Society for a talk by Dr. Hoffmann on Mediaeval fisheries on Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 7pm. Room CC603.

## HOW A MAN SHALL BE ARMED

BY DAVID CVET

FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMY OF EUROPEAN  
MEDIÆVAL MARTIAL ARTS (AEMMA)

Armour, a word that typically conjures up an image of knights of the mediaeval ages, wearing combinations of mail, leather and plate to protect their bodies from injury during battle. Although a man in armour or “harness” was a formidable weapon of war, it was not infallible. There were ways in which warriors were able to breach the armour, to take down a fully armoured knight or to even kill an armoured man.

European mediaeval armour was first recorded as mail in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (often referred to incorrectly as “chain mail”). This was an extremely flexible form of defense, worn over the body as a shirt, sometimes reaching down to the knees or mid-thigh, sometimes long sleeved or mid-sleeved. The greatest advantage of mail was its incredible flexibility. It was able to withstand sword strikes, but it wasn’t the best defense against a thrusting weapon, such as a spear, arrow, dagger or sword.



Source:

Olivier de la Marche, et al.  
"Traicté de la  
Forme et Devis  
comme on Faict  
les Tournois".  
Paris. A. Barraud,  
Libraire-Éditeur.  
23, rue de Seine,  
23. 1878

Although, a knight wearing mail can withstand numerous thrusts, as rarely would the thrust penetrate deeply into the body, he would grow fatigued as the battle progressed due to loss of blood.

Later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, metal plate or hardened leather was applied to the mail to offer improved protection against strikes. Plate formation was developing very quickly, akin to an “arms race” in the period,

whereby, improvements in metallurgy techniques allowed for the construction of spectacular and efficient plate armour. The harness to be presented at the Friends event (See events on page 4) can be mapped to the latter portion of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, roughly in the 1375-1380 period. It most likely would have been constructed in Milan, Italy. The classic “hounskill” or “pig-faced” helm offered efficient protection against strikes or arrows by deflecting them to the side when striking the visor. By this period, much of the mail, which still remains an important defensive layer in the harness would weigh approximately 60 lbs for an average sized man and would have seen action in such historical battles as the Battle of Crecy



Join the Friends of the Mediaeval Studies Society for a talk by David Cvet on “How a Man Shall be Armed”, on Thursday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 7pm in Room CC603.

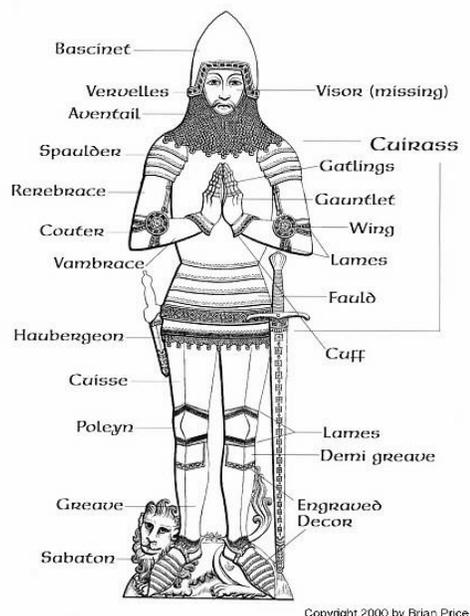
## FMSS EVENTS

### HOW A MAN SHALL BE ARMED IN THE 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY DELIVERED BY DAVID CVET

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2010

7PM, ROOM CC603 PLEASE USE STAFF ENTRANCE)

FREE TO FMSS MEMBERS AND THEIR GUESTS (TO REGISTER, [WWW.ROM.ON.CA/WHATSON](http://WWW.ROM.ON.CA/WHATSON)) OR  
416.586.5700



The FRIENDS OF THE MEDIAEVAL STUDIES SOCIETY (FMSS) is proud to present to its Members, a presentation on how a man shall be armed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, delivered by David M. Cvet. You will witness the arming up from the feet to the head with a reproduction of late 14<sup>th</sup> century armour, along with detailed explanations on each of the component's design attributes and their sources. Learn about the specifics of the components such as weight and manner of application to the body. Learn also the formidable military might of a knight fully armoured, and how the knight may have been taken down in battle. And finally, learn about the role heraldry played in the knights' realm, and the evolution of armour from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century into the 15<sup>th</sup> century, moving away from having mail as the primary base for defense to a completely plate constructed armour.

*David M. Cvet is the founding President of the FMSS; the Founder and President of the Academy of European Medieval Martial Arts; and an Honorary Fellow and President of the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada. David has spent the last 15 years in the research, reconstruction, training and instructing in the mediaeval fighting arts.*

**DEAD FISH TELL LIVELY TALES**  
**DELIVERED BY DR RICHARD HOFFMANN**  
**PROFESSOR EMERITUS AND SENIOR SCHOLAR**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, YORK UNIVERSITY**  
**JANUARY 11, 2011, 7PM, ROOM CC603 (PLEASE USE STAFF ENTRANCE)**  
**FREE TO FMSS MEMBERS AND THEIR GUESTS**  
**REGISTRATION: [WWW.ROM.ON.CA/WHATSON](http://WWW.ROM.ON.CA/WHATSON) OR 416.586.5700**

Throughout the mediaeval ages, Europeans' relations with aquatic nature evolved in complex ways both distinctive and with telling parallels to some present-day issues. Dr. Hoffmann will discuss those interactive developments and their consequences for European nature and civilization.