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Session ID	2
Session Title	The Materiality of Folklore and Traditional Practices
Start Time	Wed Dec 18 14:00:00
Room	728

Traditional ritual practices, happening outside or beyond more canonical or formal belief systems can take oral and material forms. Indeed, often such practices are characterised by a blending of the tangible and intangible, drawing on multisensory engagement with cultural and natural objects, place, songs, poems, dance and prayer. This session aims to explore how such traditions are expressed materially. Drawing on conceptual and theoretical developments within folklore, archaeology, ethnography and anthropology, such as the notion of structured deposition, bricolage, relational/assemblage approaches, feminist and queer perspectives, this session will explore the materiality and physicality of folklore, traditional and customary practices in Europe and beyond.

14:00	Session organisers	Introduction	
14:05	Zoe Crossland, Columbia University	Concerns about bodies and containment in 16th-17th century England	Witchbottles have been studied by archaeologists as a means to explore beliefs and practices around magic in 16th-17th century England. In this presentation I investigate another question: how might these apotropaic devices act as a source of evidence for changes in beliefs about the body in Renaissance and Early Modern England? The practical logic through which this material magic was composed offers another perspective on what is known historically about changing attitudes toward bodies, gender and illness at this period.
14:25	Ethan Coyle White, UCL	In Search of the Cofgodas: History, Archaeology, and Folklore in Early Medieval England	<p>Recent years have seen a growing utilisation of interdisciplinary approaches to popular religious belief and practice in early medieval Northwestern Europe. One largely overlooked issue has been the place of domestic spirits within the cognitive world-views of the period. This paper argues that the historical evidence, specifically two eleventh-century glosses, demonstrate the existence of such a belief in early medieval England, with such entities known in Old English as cofgodas. It argues that although there is very little direct evidence for what these beliefs entailed, we can proffer potential interpretations by looking at later folkloric beliefs about domestic spirits recorded in England (and elsewhere) from the twelfth century onward.</p> <p>From that point, it argues that we might fruitfully reinterpret forms of early medieval settlement evidence in the light of this folk belief. Prior research into 'special deposits' in early medieval English settlements, namely that of Helena Hamerow and Clifford Sofield, has greatly advanced our knowledge of this material but did not consider it from the perspective of recorded folklore. This paper argues that such 'special deposits' might be seen as gifts provided for the cofgodas, part of a series of exchange perhaps best understood through the theoretical framework of the 'new animism' advanced by scholars like Graham Harvey. It thus reiterates the argument that archaeologists – either of the Early Middle Ages or other periods – could open up new interpretative frameworks by paying attention not only to historical sources but also to later recorded</p>

14:45	Miles Russell, Bournemouth University	An Archaeology of Myth-Fulfilment	<p>The mythological foundations of Britain have, throughout the centuries, proved a fertile ground for those seeking political and dynastic stability, competing aristocracies attempting to anchor legends to particular natural places through the deployment of art, literature and monumental architecture. Archaeology has tended to approach mythology from the wrong direction, using excavated structures and other material remains from sites with legendary associations in a search for some 'deeper truth' concerning the origin of folklore. In reality, it would appear that it was mythology which provided inspiration for specific building projects, rather than the structural remains representing, in some way, the residue of genuine events which over time had become mythologised. It is only by studying the archaeology of myth-fulfilment, examining how the legends of Britain were appropriated and made real through the extreme modification of the landscape, can we truly hope to understand the grand designs, political foundations and aspirations of the Medieval state.</p> <p>Folklore is often dismissed as ephemeral, having little real impact upon the tangible structures of society such as buildings and material culture. The truth, however, is rather different for, with foundation mythology providing a blueprint for power in the post Roman and early Medieval period, the desire to 'legend-truth' British folklore, anchoring myths to specific places, resulted in a profound architectural fiction, the consequences of which affect us to this day.</p>
15:05	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
15:35	Alyssa Scott, University of California, Berkeley	Archaeology and Folkloristics at Tuberculosis Sanatoria in California	<p>Archaeologists should study contemporary folklore to understand how daily practices and beliefs relate to emerging negotiations of power and identity. Studying folklore alongside other lines of evidence can provide insight into how archaeological sites are situated in contemporary social memory. This paper uses examples from a 20th-century tuberculosis sanatoria in California, and focuses on how contemporary legends from internet forums intersect with archaeological material, oral histories, and historical documents. Themes include access to healthcare, colonialism, the institutionalization of children, processes of identification, and the relationship between people and the built environment. Lines of evidence are often in conflict with one another, however, the archaeological research process can also function as a valuable discussion about issues which are relevant to contemporary people. Concepts used in folkloristics such as intertextuality and ostension can be helpful for understanding of the relationship between lines of evidence and emerging and enduring narratives about health, disease, and institutionalization.</p>
15:55	Stephen Sherlock, Independent	TBC	<p>This paper will examine the deposition practices of a community living in north-east Yorkshire in the Later Iron Age (c. 100 BC–AD 100). It will be based on evidence collected from pits which contained a collection of objects placed in the pit in a deliberate structured manner. It is suggested the inhabitants at Street House are selecting specific items for deposit in pits. Further examples will be given from Street House and they will be compared with nearby settlements to assess the extent of this custom or practice.</p>
16:15	Cameron Moffett, English Heritage	Defense against the Evil Eye: evidence for magic at Roman Wroxeter	<p>Protective amulets were used in antiquity to defend the wearer or owner, usually against the Evil Eye. The Evil Eye is an ancient superstition that was imported into Britain from Rome. At Wroxeter, latterly the fourth-largest city in Roman Britain, the amulets of the 1st century AD – the military period – are almost all phallic in their iconography and most were for use on horse harness, ie by the Roman cavalry. The amulets of the civilian/urban period (2nd – 4th century AD), by contrast, were mostly for women and children and many are items of jet jewellery. Horse harness amulets still occur, but the depictions of male genitals used in the earlier period were replaced in the civilian phase by vulvate imagery.</p>
16:35	Ceri Houlbrook, University of Hertfordshire	Lessons from Love-Locks: The contemporary archaeology of a contemporary practice	<p>Archaeologists who research traditional practices frequently encounter difficulties in the interpretation of their often tantalizingly incomplete material records. Careful analysis of material remains may afford us glimpses into past beliefs and ritual activities, but our often vast chronological separation from the ritual practitioners prevent us from seeing the whole picture. The archaeologist engaging with ritual deposits, for instance, is often forced to study assemblages post-accumulation. Many nuances of its formation, therefore, may be lost in interpretation. This paper considers what insights an archaeologist could gain into the place, people, pace, and purpose of deposition by recording an accumulation of ritual deposits during its formation, focusing on a contemporary folk practice: the love-lock. This custom involves the inscribing of names/initials onto a padlock, its attachment to a bridge or other public structure, and the deposition of the corresponding key into the water below; a ritual often enacted by a couple as a statement of their romantic commitment. Drawing on empirical data from a five-year diachronic site-specific investigation into a love-lock bridge in Manchester, UK, this paper demonstrates the value of contemporary archaeology in engaging with the often enigmatic material culture of ritual practices.</p>

16:55 Session organisers

Discussion

17:30 END

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