



Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds

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Strange Histories presents a serious account of some of the most extraordinary occurrences of European and North American history and explains how they made sense to people living at the time.

From grisly anecdotes about ghosts, to stories of witches and werewolves, the book uses case studies from the Middle Ages and the early modern period and provides fascinating insights into the world-view of a vanished age. It shows how such occurrences fitted in quite naturally with the "common sense" of the time and offers explanations of these riveting and ultimately rational phenomena.

What made reasonable, educated men and women behave in ways that seem utterly nonsensical to us today? This question and many more are answered in the fascinating book.

Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds Details

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From Reader Review Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds for online ebook

Brittany says

I read the first thirty pages and had to put it down because of the arguably wrong things he says about the Middle Ages and modernity. He argues that we of the modern age don't believe in witchcraft which is outright not true, a woman was burned to death for suspected witchery in 2013 in Papua New Guinea. He argues that Sprenger and Kramer were completely sane and rational individuals-- wrong: at least one of them was completely off his rocker and had a deep-seated hatred of women, to the point where other people found him so off-putting they refused to prosecute witches. That's a zealot, not a "level headed educated person".

I skipped ahead trying to give him the benefit of the doubt. The book doesn't get better. His descriptions of magic and the trials are vague and unsatisfying.

If you know nothing about the Middle Ages or their sensibilities, you'll probably take this book as fact. If you've been educated as a Medieval scholar in any way, the weakness, and sometimes outright wrongness, of his arguments is glaring. He doesn't appear to delve into the trials with any sort of depth while he slaps vague facts and conclusions together. If you know anything about the Middle Ages, don't bother with this book. If you know nothing about the Middle Ages, still don't bother with this book. The information this author offers is basic, surface level, and questionable at best. Please find a better more accurate source of information. I'm looking to *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England: A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century* by Ian Mortimer for possible solutions to this plight, especially if you just want an overview of the Middle Ages. I haven't read Mortimer's book yet, so I can't speak to the veracity of it; however, I'm hoping it is a better work than this!

Christos Bouras says

Το βιβλίο είναι μάλλον αναφορικό με τις πεποιθήσεις και τις δεισιδαιμονίες στην Δυτική Ευρώπη και πώς αυτές συνδέονται με τα χριστιανικά δόγματα του καθολικισμού και του προτεσταντισμού. Ο Oldridge χρησιμοποιεί πολλές πηγές από το μεσαίωνα μέχρι και τον 17ο αιώνα για διάφορα θέματα προκαταλήψεων και δαιμονίων (μύθισσες, ορμάτα, αγούς, διαβόλους κλπ) που απασχολούσαν τους ανθρώπους της εποχής. Οι πηγές αυτές ερμηνεύονται με κάποιο τρόπο από τον συγγραφέα με βάση τα δεδομένα της εποχής αλλά και την σύγχρονη ανθρωπολογική ερμηνεία. Ωστόσο δεν μου προκάλυψε κάποια εντύπωση. Θα λέγατε τι βαρήθικα αρκετά. Το πλέον ενδιαφέρον θέμα του βιβλίου ήταν αυτό που αφορούσε τους αιρετικούς και την επιστημονική επανάσταση. Καταληκτικό είναι καλό για κάποιον ερευνητή αλλά όχι για έναν απλό αναγνώστη. Θα βαρεθείτε.

Το σχήμα Ρζι Καρόλνα says

Ωραία εκλαμμένη μέλη που παρουσιάζει μια ενδιαφέρουσα ποίηση. Τι θα συνέβαινε αν αυτές να θεωρούμε τον τρόπο που σκφτονταν οι άνθρωποι στα χρόνια του Μεσαίωνα και της

Αναγνώνησης – σε δι'φορες εκφ'νσεις της καθημεριν'τητ'ς τους - ως παρ'λογο, προσπαθο'σαμε να κατανο'σουμε την οπτικ' γων'α απ' την οπο'α αντιλαμβ'νονταν τον κ'σμο; Ο συγγραφέας αντ' να καταφ'γει στα κηρ'γματα περ' γ'νοιας, σκοταδισμό? και δεισιδαιμον'ας προσπαθε' να κατανο'σει διαφορετικ' τους ανθρ'πους εκε'νων των περασμ'νων εποχ'ν:

«?λα μας εμποδ'ζουν να δο'με τον κ'σμο ?πως, το πιθαν'τερο ?ταν στην πραγματικ'τητα: Μια κοινων'α ανδρ'ν και γυναικ'ν που δεν ?ταν λιγ'τερο λογικ' και καλοπροα'ρετοι απ' ?σο ε'μαστε εμε'ς. Δεν ε'ναι απλ'ς υπεραπλο'στευση να θεωρο'με αυτο'ς τους ανθρ'πους ως υστερικ'ς. Αυτ' επ'σης οδηγε' σε απ'ρριψη της ανθρωπ'ς τους. Το να τους θεωρο'με ως παρ'λογους ε'ναι το ?διο προσβλητικ' και λανθασμ'νο ?πως το να υποστηρ'ζουμε πως οι αφρικανο? ιθαγενε'ς ε'ναι "γ'ριοι"».

?λα αυτ' σε θεωρητικ' επ'πεδο ακο'γονται απολ'τως αποδεκτ'. Αλλ' οι περιπτ'σεις με τις οπο'ες καταπι'νεται ο ?λντριτζ πραγματικ' μπορε' να β'λουν σε δοκιμασ'α τη λογικ' μας. Για παρ'δειγμα η μαγε'α θεωρο'ταν κατ' το απτ' και πραγματικ' και δεν αφορο'σε μ'νο τους απλο'κο'ς χωρικο'ς αλλ' και τα μορφωμ'να μ'λη της αν'τερης κοινων'ας. Πριν την ?ναρξη του επιστημονικ'ο? ρασιοναλισμο' του 18ου αι'να, στις προβιομηχανικ'ς κοινων'ες, οι δι'φορες μορφ'ς μαγε'ας απ'κτησαν σταδιακ' θρησκευτικ' κ'ρος και συχν' συνυπ'ρχαν ? συγκρο'ονταν με την επ'σημη θρησκε'α.

Μ'λιστα πολλ'ς εφαρμογ'ς της μαγε'ας, ?πως η αλχημε'α αποτ'λεσαν τις απαρχ'ς για μια επιστημονικ'τερη προσ'γγιση του κ'σμου. Σε ?ναν κ'σμο ?πως κυριαρχο'σαν οι υπερφυσικ'ς δυν'μεις ως αναπ'δραστη πραγματικ'τητα, και που ?λα ?ταν δυνατ' μ'σα απ' την παρ'ουσα του Θεο', των δαιμ'νων και των αγγ'λων, οι ερμηνε'ες και η στ'ση εκε'νων των ανθρ'πων ε'ναι λογικ' να διαφ'ρουν απ' τους σημεριν'ς.

Υπ' το πρ'σμα αυτ'ς της λογικ'ς σε πολλ'ς περιπτ'σεις ε'ναι καταγεγραμμ'νες δ'κες ζ'ων, που ?γιναν η αιτ'α να προκληθε' θ'νατος σε κ'ποιον ?νθρωπο ? κ'ποια καταστροφ' σε ανθρ'πινες περιουσ'ες. Δι'τι σ'μφωνα με τις αντιλ'ψεις της εποχ'ς τα εξημερωμ'να - οικ'σιτα ζ'α, αποτελο'σαν, β'σει του θε'ου καν'να, ?ντα αφιερωμ'να στην υπηρεσ'α του ανθρ'που, οπ'τε με τις «πρ'ξεις» τους κά'τοι στερο'μενα λογικ'ς, παραβ'αζαν τη θε'κ' και φυσικ' τ'ξη πραγμ'των που ?θελε τον ?νθρωπο στο κ'ντρο της συμπαντικ'ς δημιουργ'ας.

« Απ' αυτ'ν την ?ποψη, η καταδ'κη των παραβατικ'ν ζ'ων ?ταν παρ'μοια με τις κατηγορ'ες περ' μαγε'ας: Και στις δ'ο περιπτ'σεις παρ'χονταν εξηγ'σεις για κ'ποιες απ'στευτες συμφορ'ς – επιρρ'πτοντας ευθ'νες στο ζ'ο ? στη μ'γισσα – και τα δ'ο προσ'φεραν στα θ'ματα ?ναν νομικ' μηχανισμό? που απ'λυνε τη δυστυχ'α τους».

Ενδιαφ'ρον παρ'ουσι'ζει επ'σης η ?ποψη του συγγραφέα για τη ρ'λο της γυνά'κας σε δι'φορα φαιν'μενα που σχετ'ζονται ε'τε με εκστατικ'ς – προφητικ'ς εμπειρ'ες ε'τε με περιπτ'σεις δαιμονισμού?. Κι αυτ' γιατ' οι γυνά'κες δεν ε'χαν την δυνατ'τητα πρ'σβάσης σε δημ'σια αξι'ματα και θ'σεις ισχ'ος και αυτ'ς ?ταν ο μοναδικ'ς τρ'πος – μ'σα απ' μια μορφ' «θρησκευτικ'ο? θε'τρου» να λ'βουν προσοχ' απ' ?να κοιν' και να εκφ'ρσουν τις απ'ψεις τους. Εκτ'ς αυτο? η προφητικ' –μυστικιστικ' εμπειρ'α προ?π'θετε μια παθητικ'τητα, η οπο'α λ'γω της κοινωνικ'ς κατωτερ'τητας της γυνά'κας, ?ταν κ'τι το οικε'ο σε αυτ'ν, πολ' ευκολ'τερα απ' ?ναν ?νδρα, μπορο'σε να γ'νει το «δοχε'ο» για εκφ'ρσει τη φων' του θεο? (? του διαβ'λου αν? περ'πτωση).

Οι θρησκευτικ'ς συγκρο'σεις που οδ'γησαν στο προτεσταντικ' σχ'σμα και την καθολικ'

αντιμεταρροθμιση ε?χαν ως αποτ?λεσμα την ?ξαρση του θρησκευτικο? φανατισμο? και των συγκρο?σεων αν?μεσα σε θρησκευτικ?ς κοιν?τητες, η καθεμ?α απ? τις οπο?ες αξ?ωνε την κατοχ? της υπ?ρτατης αλ?θειας, αλλ? οδ?γησε επ?σης στο φαιν?μενο του Πουριτανισμο?, ?που ο συνεχ?ς στοχασμ?ς περ? θαν?του και μια ζω? βυθισμ?νη στη θλ?ψη, στην αυστηρ?τητα και την αποστροφ? κ?θε εγκ?σμιας ευτυχ?ας ?ταν το ζητο?μενο και το λογικ?.

Πολ? συχν? διαδ?σεις και μυθε?ματα της εποχ?ς περνο?σαν μ?σα σε μελ?τες και καταγραφ?ς των μορφωμ?νων ως πραγματικ? γεγον?τα και ως τ?τοια διαμ?ρφωναν την κοσμοθεωρ?α των μεταγεν?στερων, που τα χρησιμοποιο?σαν ως αξι?πιστες πηγ?ς, διαδ?δοντας ?τσι εσφαλμ?νες αντιλ?ψεις. ?τσι, σ?μφωνα με τον συγγραφ?α, π?νω απ? 50.000 ?νθρωποι βρ?καν τον θ?νατο σε δ?κες μαγισσ?ν στην Ευρ?πη και στην Αμερικ?. Το συμπ?ρασμα λοιπ?ν του συγγραφ?α ε?ναι το εξ?ς:

«Αν λογικο? ?νθρωποι στο παρελθ?ν, μπορο?σαν να πιστε?ουν στην ?παρξη δαιμονισμ?νων μ?λων και να καταδικ?ζουν σε εκτ?λεση γουρο?νια, μ?γισσες και αιρετικο?ς, τ?τε οι ορθολογιστ?ς ?νθρωποι της σημεριν?ς εποχ?ς πρ?πει να εξετ?σουν το ενδεχ?μενο και οι δικ?ς τους ιδ?ες να εν?χουν ?να ποσοστ? «παραξενι?ς». Για να το θ?σουμε διαφορετικ?, οι ?νθρωποι του μ?λλοντος θα βρο?νε τις δικ?ς μας πεποιθ?σεις εξ?σου γελο?ες, ?πως εμε?ς θεωρο?με αυτ?ς των κυνηγ?ν μαγισσ?ν;»

Patty says

A nonfiction account of various "weird" facts about medieval Europe: that scholars wasted time arguing about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin; that lawyers and judges put animals on trial for murder or for destroying crops; a general belief in vampires, werewolves, and witches; the use of trial by ordeal; and, of course, burning heretics at the stake. Oldridge isn't just interested in listing bizarre incidents though – particularly since most of them are fairly well-known – but in examining the overall worldview that made such activities appear normal, even rational. He points out that it's easy to blame 'ignorant peasants' but in fact it was often highly educated, wealthy, cosmopolitan people who led the charge on such cultural beliefs. So why did they do it? That's what Oldridge sets out to explain.

The writing is humorous, well-researched, and easy to read. Definitely recommended for anyone who enjoys weird history with a thoughtful twist.

Matt says

It wasn't quite the book I expected from the title or the blurb. I was expecting a more narrative account of seemingly strange anecdotes from medieval and renaissance history. Instead, the book is a scholarly thesis trying to impress on his reader a simple point that I didn't really feel needed to be stressed outside of say Survey of European History 101. At least, the point was clearly stressed to me whenever I took college level world history; namely, that the historian errs when he tries to explain history by ascribing to the persons of the past limited intelligence or savageness or other traits associated with the stereotype of primitive as an explanation for their actions. Instead, the proper approach to history is accept that the persons involved were ordinary people no different than you or I, or other people we might encounter in the modern world, possessing of the same degree of intelligence, perceptiveness and the same emotions, but that their actions

were informed by at times wildly different sets of beliefs and values.

In particularly, the book seems to be aimed at fellow scholars that have great difficulty dealing with pre-modern world views which are informed by what they consider superstition, and so ascribe to the persons insanity or stupidity as an explanation for historical events. One would hope this explanation would be unneeded, but one could easily see in the current culture why it might be.

I'm deducting one star for the text being drier than it need be considering the subject matter. Oldridge also carries his otherwise worthy thesis a bit too far at times, ignoring or downplaying evidence that certain persons struck even their contemporaries with the same world view, culture and facts as being overly zealous, possessing poor judgment, or even perhaps insane.

I deduct a second star because I think Oldridge goes much too far in assuming that the views of his actors are remote and inexplicable to his readership, as there are strong parallels in many cases with modern world views - not only within the modern religious but within other subcultures as well. That is to say, when your thesis is that people of the past aren't actually so different than the people of today, it might do well to actually recognize that this is true across the board. Modern believers in conspiracy theories that cut across political and religious lines - for example vaccinations relationship to autism - strike me as a very apt comparison. Indeed, hysteria and fear in general is not unique to earlier times, nor is the problem of how we are to distinguish between information and misinformation coming from experts or self-proclaimed experts in any way a problem relegated to the past. I think any one that believes that they are not deceived on some small points or another, having taken for granted some plausible urban legend or failed to realize that they hold a belief which at one time was well regarded but has since been discredited, is deceiving themselves. Likewise, reasonableness requires us to imagine that at least some of the beliefs we hold very dear, and to be completely obvious, logical and reasonable, will fall into disrepute in future generations for reasons that will seem good to them.

Ted says

A book that attempts to portray the image of the world as it was in the middle ages and succeeds. Darren Oldridge takes stories that seem ludicrous by today's standards and embeds them into a comprehensive snapshot of the thoughts of the time, proving that objective thought led to this outcome.

In doing so this book leads to interesting and unsettling questions about the validity of our own world view.

Edward Sullivan says

A scholarly but fascinating and lively look at strange phenomena in the medieval and Renaissance eras and explains why people believed in them and reacted to them in the way they did. An interesting examination of cultural and religious beliefs in a historical context.

Ian says

"It is astonishing that there should still be found today people who do not believe that there are witches."
Henri Boguet, 1602.

This is a pretty good summation of this book. I found the introductory and concluding chapters to be fascinating, while the middle chapters seemed to be just a progression of examples. The writing was solid, but the author could have done more to weave these examples into a narrative, but maybe this is just because I am used to reading fictional works that deal with these same subjects, as opposed to actual scholarly History. I would really recommend it though, minor preferential gripes aside.

Redsteve says

An interesting read. The author presents a number of ideas that most modern folks would say "Wow! Look at those wacky primitives." to, and places them in their historical and cultural context, showing that, based on what pre-modern people "knew" and based their decisions on, that they were logical beliefs and actions. These included taking animals to both civil and criminal court, witch trials, the persecution of heretics, belief in demonic possession, werewolves and the walking dead. The author draws some interesting parallels between judicial persecution of witches and devil worshippers up to the 17th Century and current legal hobbyhorses like the "War on Drugs" and the "War on Terror". On the other hand, the author does tend to lecture a little and at times goes on a bit long (evidently not believing that the readership has ever heard of "historical context").

Maria Kellidou says

Εξαιρετικ?!! ?να ?ργο βαθι? επιστημονικ? που ωστ?σο απευθ?νεται στο ευρ? κοιν?. Μπορε? να διαβαστε? απ' τον οποιονδ?ποτε ακ?μα κι αν δεν ?χει καμ?α σχ?ση με τη μελ?τη της ιστορ?ας. Πρ?κειται κατ? τη γν?μη μου για ?να βιβλ?ο που παρ? το μ?γεθ?ς του αποτελε? σταθμ? για την καταν?ηση της μεσαιωνικ?ς και αναγεννησιακ?ς σκ?ψης. Απλ? στο δι?βασμα, με πολ? ωρα?ες παραπομπ?ς, σε βυθ?ζει στο κλ?μα της εποχ?ς, συχν? ζοφερ?, τρομαχτικ? και μυστηριακ?. Επ?σης ιδι?τερα πρωτοποριακ? και σ?γχρονο. Τ?λεια επιλογ?!

Eleni says

it was not the kind of book I had expected to read. I had expected an assortment of stories with a mix of interesting facts related to them, instead the book is more academic. After a while I also found it a bit repetitive but I suppose if you are using it as a textbook it's ok as it goes to great detail in explaining the different aspects affecting behaviour of society in the middle age's

Anne-Marie says

I know most of you people did not like this book... but I thought it was more interesting than Dorian Gray. The QUESTIONS are the killers which make it seem less enjoyable, but I thought the book itself wasn't that bad. Most of the time. *Umbridge hem hem* cough cough CHAPTER SEVEN.

I thought the arguments for the most part made sense and now I am kind of scared that I see the reason behind the possessed apple. Heehee I love how they say that "one brave young lad stepped forward" to face

the apple. I would love to watch how that all played out. It reminded me of Monty Python.

By the way Goodreads, the book is by DARREN OLDRIDGE not DARRE OLDRIDGE. Ugh, that's been bugging me all summer!

Margaret Sankey says

Animal trials, the walking dead, werewolves, flying witches, and demonic possession--this great little book is a thoughtful explanation of why these ideas were perfectly reasonable to Early Modern people.

David says

This was brilliant and disturbing analysis of contextualised reason. The essential reach of the book was to "reconstruct the thinking of men and women who accept as normal ideas that now seem to be absurd". The author does a marvelous job which, in the end, brings the whole idea of the Dark Ages into question -- as it well should be.

I'm not suggesting the scientific method existed in the early Middle Ages or even the Late Middle Ages but there was a lot going on technologically and there was no shortage of 'reason' in the period as well. A healthy, if disturbing, corrective to the Enlightenments villification of this period of Western history.

Mr. Oldridge asks an interesting question: "If people once accepted things that now seem strange or cruel, what should we make of our own commonplace assumptions?"

Of course, we cannot answer such a question, but it is one worth contemplating.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Warning: Some of the examples in this book may be deeply disturbing to contemporary sensibilities.

Eric says

This entertaining and well-written book makes an interesting claim: it made sense for folks to believe in haunted apples and flying witches and devilish sabbats. After all, that's what their political officials and religious officials told them. There was even documented evidence.

In fact, if we sophisticated, modern, and technologically savvy folks happened to live in that time, we'd probably believe all that too.

The author makes a good case for his thesis, but for me, the strength of the book is the detailed legends and myths he describes. It makes for fascinating reading, and is a treasure trove of story ideas. A fun,

informative, and educational book. Hard to beat that!
