

Medieval Worlds: Manuscripts, Texts, Film – Set Question

Choosing one of the texts or images below (*Deor's Lament*, The Northumbrian Gospels, The Lewis Chessmen), please write a short response on what it can tell you about the Medieval World. You are not expected to have studied any of them before and you do not need to use other sources of knowledge in your answer. We are interested in your ideas, not how much you already know about the medieval period. Your answer should be solely focused on the text/image itself, what you find interesting about it, and the inferences you can make using it.

Please write no more than 300 words.

If you have any questions about the set question task please email James (aoc@corpus.cam.ac.uk)

Deor's Lament – Anonymous, mid-10th century (trans. by M. Burch)

This Anglo-Saxon poem was originally written in Old English but its precise origins are unclear. The first five stanzas all reference a different legendary or historical Germanic character (who themselves would have been central to their own tales/poems).

Weland knew the agony of exile.
That indomitable smith was wracked by grief.
He endured countless troubles:
sorrows were his only companions
in his frozen island dungeon
after Nithad had fettered him,
many strong-but-supple sinew-bonds
binding the better man.
That passed away; this also may.

Beadohild mourned her brothers' deaths
but even more, her own sad state
once she discovered herself with child.
She predicted nothing good could come of it.
That passed away; this also may.

We have heard that the Geat's moans for Matilda,
his lady, were limitless,
that his sorrowful love for her
robbed him of regretless sleep.
That passed away; this also may.

For thirty winters Theodric ruled
the Mæring stronghold with an iron hand;
many knew this and moaned.
That passed away; this also may.

We have also heard of Ermanaric's wolfish ways,
of how he held wide sway in the realm of the Goths.
He was a grim king! Many a warrior sat,
full of cares and maladies of the mind,
wishing constantly that his kingdom might be overthrown.
That passed away; this also may.

If a man sits long enough, sorrowful and anxious,
bereft of joy, his mind constantly darkening,
soon it seems to him that his troubles are endless.
Then he must consider that the wise Lord
often moves through the earth
granting some men honor, glory and fame,
but others only shame and hardship.
This I will say for myself:
that for awhile I was the Heodeninga's scop,
dear to my lord. My name was Deor.
For many winters I held a fine office,
faithfully serving a just lord. But now Heorrenda
a man skilful in songs, has received the estate
the protector of warriors gave me.
That passed away; this also may.

The Northumbrian Gospels – Late 7th Century

Most likely made at Lindisfarne, this is the first page of a manuscript containing the Gospel of John. The manuscript itself is made from calf skin and the script is written in Latin.



Lewis Chess Pieces – late 12th Century

93 pieces were found in a hoard on the Isle of Lewis in the outer Hebrides. They are carved from walrus ivory and most likely originate from Norway.

