

# Commentary: John Marshall Carter's, "The Study of Medieval Sports and Pastimes: The NASSH Generation"

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The opportunity to comment on John Marshall Carter's interesting and insightful bibliographical commentary about medieval sports and pastimes is greatly appreciated. I too feel this is an important period for historical investigation, but I don't share as strong a sense of optimism as that of Professor Carter for the contribution that the "NASSH Generation" may have made, or even may be thinking of making. It is good to be melioristic, however, and I trust the situation will improve steadily. What will help to develop this area of study with reasonable haste in my opinion would be the location of three to five people like Professor Carter in universities where doctoral programs in sport and physical activity would be available to graduate students possibly interested in this time period.

Even under such a condition, promoting the study of sport and physical activity in the Middle

Ages is going to be no mean undertaking. As Michael Wood (Wood, M. (1987). *In search of the Dark Ages*. NY: Facts on File Publications.) explains,

As might be expected the sources for such a long period are not only diverse but variable in quantity and quality. We can divide them into three main categories: narrative history (chronicles, annals, histories), documentary records (laws, charters, wills, writs, *Domesday Book*), and material sources (coinage, metalwork, sculpture, manuscripts, embroideries, etc.). In the last category we might include the whole range of archeological evidence. Other kinds of sources appear in these pages, particularly literary compositions—poems, letters, saints' lives, royal biographies—but it is perhaps the chronicles and charters which require a brief explanation. . . . (p. 8).

In passing, I would like to recommend several additional sources, some from the direction of physical education literature, that relate to the Middle Ages to a greater or lesser extent (several of which I found useful). The first is a doctoral investigation titled "The Contribution of the Italian Renaissance to Physical Education" by Carmelo Bazzano (Bazzano, C. (1973). *The contribution of the Italian Renaissance to physical education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University.) that deals extensively with sport, games, and other types of recreation, not to mention health and physical education in the school curriculum of the times.

The second is another doctoral study titled "Origins of Some Modern Sports" by Marvin Eyler (Eyler, M.H. (1956). *Origins of some modern sports*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.) in which he set out to determine the "date of origin of the earliest reference in the literature when a date cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy," as well as the geographic location, the person or persons involved, and "any significant circumstances embracing the origin which might add materially to a fuller understanding" (p. 1).

The third is a chapter by Peter McIntosh titled "Physical Education in Renaissance Italy and Tudor England" in Dixon et al. (McIntosh, P.C. (1957). "Physical education in Renaissance Italy and Tudor England." (In J.G. Dixon, P.C. McIntosh, A.D. Munrow, & R.F. Willetts, *Landmarks in the history of physical education*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.). As described in this excellent chapter, it is literally impossible to separate physical culture from that which professor Carter call "medieval sports and pastimes."

The fourth source, moving alphabetically, is a delightful effort titled *Pastimes in Times Past* by O. Paul Monckton (Monckton, O.P. (1913). *Pastimes in times past*. Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott.). Although written in a more popular vein with little referencing, this book discusses the historical background of bridge; chess; little-known sports as bull-running, cock-throwing, duck-hunting, horse-baiting, and "cock-fighting" by two men; curling ("kuting"); the early development of football; the history of bowls and skittles; and other early sports such as cricket, golf, and lawn tennis.

Fifth, I encountered a book titled *Festivals, Games, and Amusements* by Horatio Smith (Smith, H. (1831). *Festivals, games, and amusements*. London: Colburn & Bentley.) that included historical data about a number of sports, games, and pastimes played in the Middle Ages. Smith's effort has much better documentation than that of Monckton mentioned above.

Six, and finally, I would be remiss not to mention *Vittorino Da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* by William Harrison Woodward (Woodward, W.H. (1905). *Vittorino da Feltre and other humanist educators*. Cambridge University Press. (Reprinted from 1897 ed.)). This is an outstanding assessment of sport, games, recreational pastimes, and physical culture during the first period of the Renaissance after the death of Petrarch.

That this area of study has been largely neglected by practicing sport and physical activity historians is obvious, but it was gratifying to learn today about (what must be called "sporadic") earlier investigation on disparate aspects of this area of study by those who might be identified as social historians largely. Even in 1975, I soon discovered the lack of attention to this area by sport and physical activity historians in the English-speaking world—between 1950 and 1975, for example—when I began to write and edit a concise world history of physical education and sport. I very soon discovered at that point that I would have to write my own chapter on the Middle Ages (Zeigler, E.F. (1988). "physical education and sport in the Middle Ages." In E.F. Zeigler, (Ed. & author), *History of physical education and sport*. Champaign, IL: Stipes.). (At that point I was not fully

aware of the work by Professor Bazzano, nor do I think was there a Professor Carter yet available.)

In conclusion, may I again congratulate Professor Carter for his contribution to our knowledge about the literature on medieval sports and pastimes. Now we must continue our efforts to promote the historical study of sports and pastimes in this highly interesting and important historical period of history. This can be done to a degree by spending somewhat more time than at present on this period in our sport history courses, and also by having a regular session of this type at our annual meeting of NASSH.