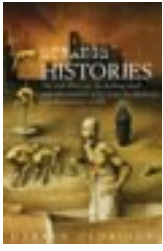


Strange Histories



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著者:Darren Oldridge

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Despite the spooky title and cover art, this is not a collection of Gothic ghost stories or fireside tales. These accounts of pre-modern beliefs (spanning the late Middle Ages to the late 17th century) employ serious scholarship. Oldridge contends that examining the so-called "strange" beliefs of the past can help us achieve a richer understanding of history. "If we can begin to understand why a French judge warned people about demonically possessed apples in 1602," he writes, "we might start to unravel the intellectual context in which he lived." But more importantly, Oldridge hopes that grasping the context of these beliefs will encourage readers to take a critical look at their own preconceived ideas. If the book suffers from anything, it is an intellectual earnestness and over-seriousness most evident in Oldridge's constant insistence that the majority of the people he writes about were acting with "good intentions." For example, in a chapter on the rationale behind the execution of heretics in Medieval times, Oldridge notes that "the pious desire to retrieve souls from damnation could, of course, conceal more worldly motives for suppressing dissent, but it would be unduly cynical to assume this was normally the case." In moments like this, it seems that Oldridge's single-minded adherence to his thesis—that "bizarre" past behavior and beliefs are entirely rational when taken in context—blinds him to the instances when people may very well have had impure motivations. That said, this is still a fascinating historical study that encourages self-reflection.

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目录:

[Strange Histories_ 下载链接1](#)

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