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Curious Cat Walks Over Medieval Manuscript

Inky paw prints have been discovered in a 15th century manuscript.



Inky paw prints presumably left by a curious kitty on a 15th century manuscript.

Photograph courtesy Emir O. Filipovic

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Kate Andries
National Geographic News
Published March 26, 2013

From ancient Egyptian religions to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" to the latest I Can Haz Cheeseburger meme, felines, literature, and culture have enjoyed a long love affair. But perhaps no other feline has walked through history in quite the fashion that a Mediterranean cat did when it left paw prints across the pages of a 15th century manuscript from [Dubrovnik, Croatia \(map\)](#).

While thumbing through the medieval manuscript in July 2011, Emir O. Filipović, a teaching and research assistant at the University of Sarajevo, discovered pages of the book stained with the inky paw prints of a cat and snapped a picture—something he planned on sharing with colleagues and students for a laugh.



Paw print up close. Photograph courtesy Emir O. Filipovic

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"I never could have imagined the attention that those prints would subsequently receive," Filipović wrote in an email.

Filipović sent the photo to fellow historian [Erik Kwakkel](#) via Twitter in September 2012, but it wasn't until earlier this year that the paw prints saw a flurry of reblogging, retweeting, and sharing.

"It's not very often that a researcher can come across curious things while sifting through monotonous and dull archival registers," Filipović said. But the more time spent scouring manuscripts, the better the chances of stumbling across oddities.

In the course of his research—which Filipović started in 2008—he's come across small doodles, strange fungi, elaborate decorated initials, holes presumably drilled through the manuscripts by worms or other pests, and even carefully crafted watermarks.

While it makes for an interesting cat meme, Filipović hopes the photo will move beyond a fun find and inspire more interest in the medieval Mediterranean.

"[The photo] could perhaps encourage at least one researcher to dedicate more time to the history of Dubrovnik, its immediate Hinterland (Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia), and the wider Mediterranean region."

The photo will be featured in the [Interactive Album of Medieval Paleography](#), a collection of transcription exercises intended to help train students and amateurs in the practical aspects of reading manuscript texts—especially how to decipher medieval handwriting.

Maintained by historian [Marjorie Burghart](#), of the European Association for Digital Humanities, the album's featured manuscripts range from the 9th to the 15th century.

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Timothy Onion Moore

Mar 31, 2013

typical.

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Lina Hassen

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The man writing it must have been annoyed when his cat stepped in his ink then walked all over his writing that must have taken like half an hour!

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Jim Read

Mar 30, 2013

Is no one curious as to what the manuscript was about?

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