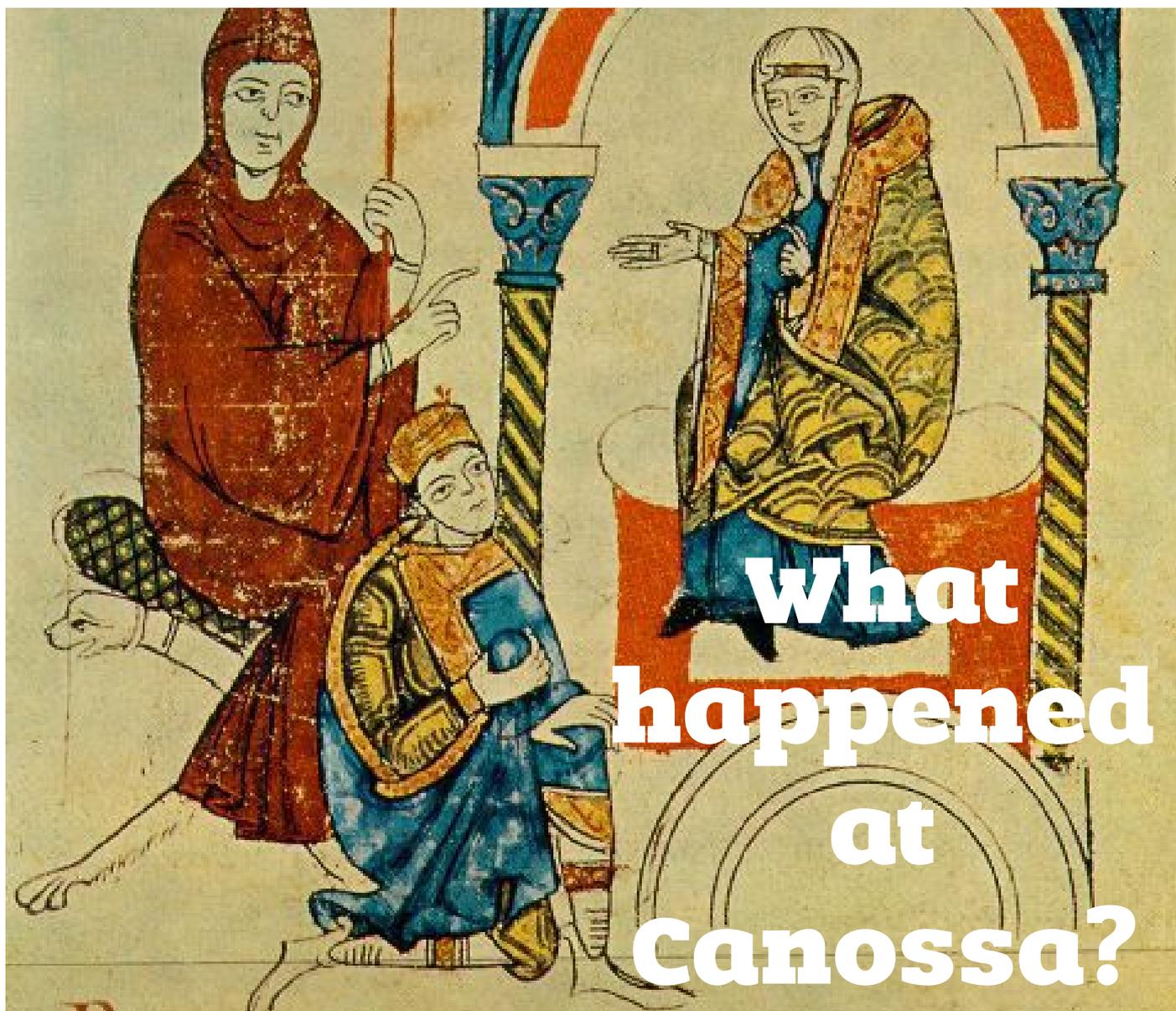


# The Medieval Magazine

Number 45

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A brother to The Book of Kells?



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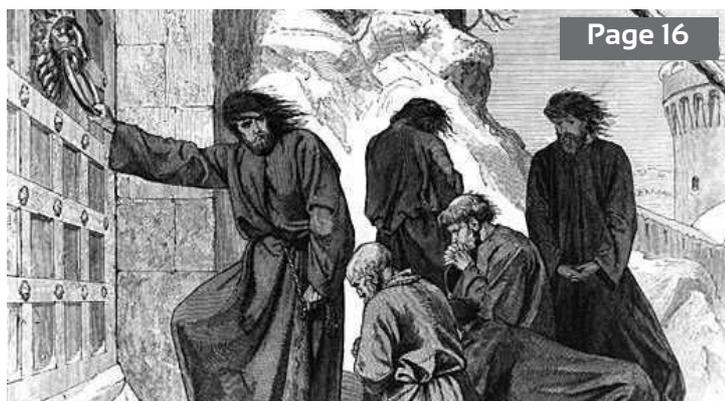
## Which Bridge should they build at Tintagel Castle?

English Heritage is looking for the public's feedback for a new bridge to be built at the famous castle.



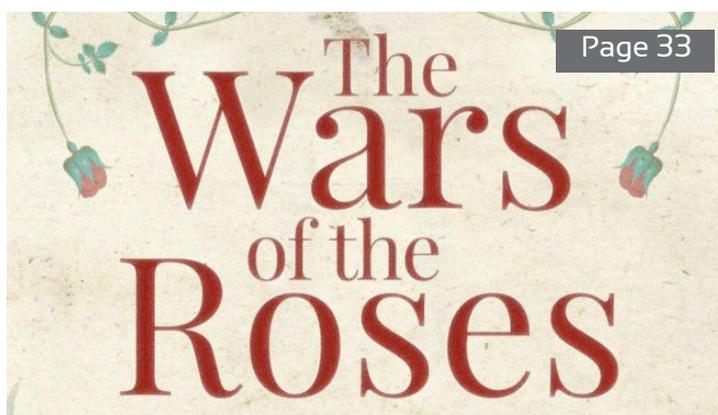
## And the winner of the (medieval) Bad Sex in Fiction award is...

On onions and when you can't have sex



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Henry IV, Gregory VII and the famous scene from 1077



## What were 'The Wars of the Roses'?

Read an excerpt from John Ashdown-Hill's new book *The Wars of the Roses*

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Cover Photo: 12th century image of  
Matilda of Tuscany and Emperor Henry  
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## Medieval News

# Manuscript fragments bear 'striking resemblance to The Book of Kells'

Fragments of a medieval manuscript hidden in the spine of a book for hundreds of years could shed new light on Ireland's greatest cultural treasure, *The Book of Kells*.



Image courtesy University of Aberdeen

*The Book of Kells* is thought by scholars to have been produced on the island of Iona, in Gaelic Scotland, around AD 800, although conflicting views have suggested that its origins could lie in English Northumbria or in Pictland in eastern Scotland.

The 'new' manuscript fragments were found in a German library by a retired professor who realised their significance and passed them to an eminent American palaeographer to try to establish their origin. He in turn sought the expert help of Professor David Dumville, a professor in history, palaeography, and Celtic at the University of Aberdeen, who assembled an international team of scholars in the Granite City to analyse scans of the fragments. Professor Dumville commented, "Manuscripts were often chopped up and reused once they were no longer useful or did not fit with the predominant religious taste of the time. Fragments do turn up quite

regularly, but this find is something special.

"Not only is it remarkable that they survived, but by a great stroke of luck the three fragments are adjoining vertical portions and so provide a crucial insight into the scale of the manuscript they came from. It was immediately obvious that they bear a striking resemblance to *The Book of Kells* because they were written in a very similar type of Insular script."

*The Book of Kells* contains the four Gospels in Latin and is written in a high grade of Insular script, originally developed in Britain and Ireland and which spread to continental Europe during the early Middle Ages. Insular script comprises a hierarchical family of varying scripts used for different functions and 'The Book of Kells' stands at the very top of this spectrum, with illustrations and ornamentation which surpass that of other

ornamentation which surpass that of other Insular Gospel-books of the period.

Scholars from the US, Netherlands, Ireland, and the UK gathered in Aberdeen to 'begin the journey' into understanding the history and significance of the fragments discovered and their relationship to *The Book of Kells*.

Professor Dumville added, "When we put the fragments together it became clear that we were looking at the parts of a quite remarkable book. It is bigger in physical size than *The Book of Kells*, and it required significant investment for books of this scale to be produced in the period.

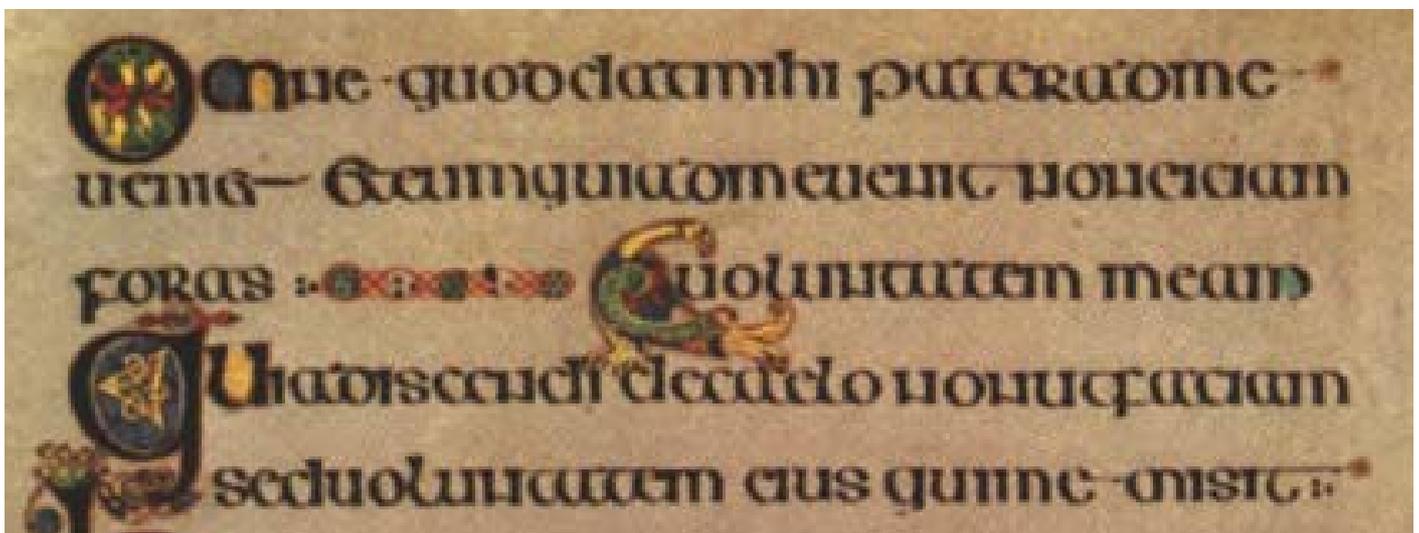
"In terms of both decoration and script, the new discovery is not as elaborate but is still of a high level. It is close in date to *The Book of Kells*: it may pre-date it and could have been a step along the way to creating a more polished version as the style of writing is remarkably similar.

"We can date it to a period between AD 750 and AD 850 as there was a step-change in the quality of Insular script at this time but we cannot yet narrow that date-range. Some scholars within the group thought it likely that it was produced before *The Book of Kells*, but equally it is possible that it belongs later in the period as resources began to decline.

"What it certainly offers us is another window into early mediaeval Insular book-production. The finding of these fragments demonstrates that there were other manuscripts of the same scale as *The Book of Kells* being made at around the same time.

"This raises questions about how much of this was done. It looks as though there was in Britain and Ireland a period around AD 800, just before the Viking Age began to bite, when the human and material resources became available to permit great religious and intellectual projects to be conceived and carried to fruition. That was almost certainly the case at Iona Abbey in the Hebrides, and we must remember the archaeological evidence excavated at Portmahomack in Easter Ross which coheres with this analysis.

"It was an era of great cultural flowering in the various different countries of Christian Western Europe. In Britain and Ireland it was brought to a juddering halt by a heathen Scandinavian invasion, one reaction to which was the creation of the kingdoms of Scotland and England."



Writing from *The Book of Kells*

# Vikings may not have colonized Greenland in nice weather

A new study questions the popular notion that 10th-century Norse people were able to colonize Greenland because of a period of unusually warm weather.

Based upon signs left by old glaciers, researchers say the climate was already cold when the Norse arrived--and that climate thus probably played little role in their mysterious demise some 400 years later. On a larger scale, the study adds to building evidence that the so-called Medieval Warm Period, when Europe enjoyed exceptionally clement weather, did not necessarily extend to other parts of the world.

"It's becoming clearer that the Medieval Warm Period was patchy, not global," said lead author Nicolás Young, a glacial geologist at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory. "The concept is Eurocentric--that's where the best-known observations were made. Elsewhere, the climate might not have been the same." Climate scientists have cited the Medieval Warm Period to explain anomalies in rainfall and temperature in far-flung regions, from the U.S. Southwest to China. The study appeared last week in the journal *Science Advances*.

Norse, or Vikings, led by Erik the Red, first sailed from recently settled Iceland to

southwestern Greenland around 985, according to Icelandic records. Some 3,000 to 5,000 settlers eventually lived in Greenland, harvesting walrus ivory and raising livestock. But the colonies disappeared between about 1360 and 1460, leaving only ruins, and a longstanding mystery as to what happened. The native Inuit remained, but Europeans did not re-inhabit Greenland until the 1700s.

The Greenlandic Vikings' apogee coincided with the Medieval Warm Period (also known as the Medieval Climate Anomaly), generally dated from about 950-1250; their disappearance followed the onset of the Little Ice Age, which ran from about 1300-1850. Both periods are firmly documented in European and Icelandic historical records. Thus, popular authors and some scientists have fixated on the idea that nice weather drew the settlers to Greenland, and bad weather froze and starved them. But there are no early historical climate records from Greenland. Recently, historians have proposed more complex factors in addition to, or instead of, climate: hostilities with the Inuit, a decline in ivory trade, soil erosion caused by the Vikings'

caused by the Vikings' imported cattle, or a migration back to Europe to farms depopulated by the Black Plague.

In the new study, the scientists sampled boulders left by advancing glaciers over the last 1,000-some years in southwest Greenland, and on neighboring Baffin Island, which the Norse may also have occupied, according to newly uncovered evidence. Glacial advances during the Little Ice Age have wiped out most evidence of where the glaciers were during the Norse settlement. But Young and his colleagues were able to find traces of a few moraines--heaps of debris left at glaciers' ends--that, by their layout, they could tell predated the Little Ice Age advances. Using newly precise methods of analyzing chemical isotopes in the rocks, they showed that these moraines had been deposited during the Viking occupation, and that the glaciers had neared or reached their later maximum Little Ice Age positions between 975 and 1275. The strong implication: it was at least as cold when the Vikings arrived as when they left. "If the Vikings traveled to Greenland when it was cool, it's a stretch to say deteriorating climate drove them out," said Young.

The findings fit with other recently developed evidence that the effects of the Medieval Warm Period were not uniform; some places, including parts of central Eurasia and northwestern North America, may actually have cooled off.

In the Atlantic region, the research includes a 2013 study of ocean-bottom sediments suggesting that temperatures in the western North Atlantic actually went down as the eastern North Atlantic warmed. Other studies of the region suggest a more complex picture. A 2011 study of a core from the Greenland ice sheet shows a strong cooling at the start of Norse occupation, and another in the middle, with interspersed warming. On the other hand, lake-bottom sediments from southwestern Greenland studied in 2011 by

Lamont-Doherty paleoclimatologist William D'Andrea, suggest it might indeed have been warm when the Norse arrived, but that climate cooled starting in 1160, well before the Little Ice Age.

The new study may feed recent suggestions by other researchers that the Medieval Warm Period was in part just an extended phase of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO). Modern observations show that the NAO is a generally decadal-scale climate cycle, in which warm winds from the west strengthen and boost temperatures in Europe and Iceland, but simultaneously make southwest Greenland and Baffin Island colder, by sucking in more Arctic air. That makes the two regions seesaw in opposite directions.

Gifford Miller, a paleoclimatologist at the University of Colorado, called the paper "a coup de grace on the Medieval Warm Period." Miller said it shows "with great clarity of evidence" that "the idea of a consistently warm Medieval period is certainly an oversimplification and of little utility."

Astrid Ogilvie, a climate historian currently based at Iceland's Akureyri University, said the study "shows that the climate is clearly more complicated and variable than people earlier assumed." As for the Vikings, the climate story has been dimming for some time, she said. "I do not like the simplistic argument that the Greenland people went there when it was warm, and then 'it got cold and they died'," she said. "I think the Medieval Warm Period has been built on many false premises, but it still clings to the popular imagination."

**[Click here to read the paper "Glacier maxima in Baffin Bay during the Medieval Warm Period coeval with Norse settlement"](#)**

# Which Bridge should they build at Tintagel Castle?

English Heritage has unveiled concept designs from the six shortlisted teams who are competing to design a new footbridge at Tintagel Castle in Cornwall.

The new bridge will follow the path of the original crossing between the mainland and headland, helping visitors to better understand Tintagel's history.

Earlier in the year, English Heritage launched a competition to find the best team to design this new bridge, these concept designs give an indication of the different approaches the six finalists would take.

Kate Mavor, English Heritage's Chief Executive, said: "We are looking for the most talented team of architects and engineers to design something special for Tintagel Castle.

"These concept designs help us to visualise each team's approach and how the bridge would complement Tintagel's exceptional landscape and rich heritage.

"We want to keep the public updated at every stage of this very exciting project which is why we've organised this display. Seeing the concept designs is a particularly fascinating stage and we're looking forward to hearing people's comments."

Tintagel Castle on the north Cornwall coast is one of the most spectacular historic sites in Britain and inextricably linked to the

legend of King Arthur. Today the remains of the 13th century settlement can be seen on both the mainland and jagged headland projecting into the sea, but Tintagel's divided landscapes were once united by a narrow strip of land. The new footbridge will follow the path of this original crossing.

The final bridge will be subject to a number of consents and regulatory approvals, including planning permission and Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent. It is planned for completion in 2019.

The Tintagel Castle: Bridge Design Competition is organised by Malcolm Reading Consultants. **Click here to find out more information and view the concept designs.**

You can comment by email to [tintagel.bridge@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:tintagel.bridge@english-heritage.org.uk).



**Entries from left to right | Top row: Dietmar Feichtinger Architectes with Terrell (France); Marks Barfield Architects with Flint and Neill (UK); | Middle row: Ney & Partners with William Matthews Associates (Belgium); Niall McLaughlin Architects with Price and Myers (UK) | Bottom row: RFR and Jean-François Blassel Architecte, with Engineers HRW, and WSP (France); WilkinsonEyre with Atelier One (UK) 0 images courtesy English Heritage**

# And the winner of the (medieval) Bad Sex in Fiction award is

By David Clark

The winner of the Literary Review's 2015 award for **Bad Sex in Fiction** was announced on December 1, and the nominated extracts include the usual mix of overly specific descriptions, contrived imagery and unintentional comedy.



The defloration rite, 1484.

One of them, an extract from Norwegian author Tomas Espedal's *Against Nature*, involves the infamous medieval lovers Abélard and Héloïse:

*Héloïse has lost all sense of how she ought to behave, she practically throws herself at Abélard, pulls him to the floor and straddles him as if they're two boys fighting. She presses him to the ground, pins his hands to the floor. She kisses his face and licks it. She bites his lip. She bites his cheek. She pants in his ear, shouts his name in his ear, she whips his face with her hair. She stops his mouth hard with her hand and takes his breath away. She rides above him the way she'd imagined that one day she'd ride a boy, a man, a beast ...*

But I think the real medievals can do better than that. And the appearance of Abélard and Héloïse in this year's innings got me thinking: what depiction of sex might have won a medieval version of the award?

After some thought, I plumped for the following Anglo-Saxon riddle, from a tenth-century manuscript:

*I am wonderful help to women,  
The hope of something to come. I harm  
No citizen except my slayer.  
Rooted I stand on a high bed.  
I am shaggy below. Sometimes the beautiful  
Peasant's daughter, an eager-armed,  
Proud woman grabs my body,  
Rushes my red skin, holds me hard,  
Claims my head. The curly-haired  
Woman who catches me fast will feel  
Our meeting. Her eye will be wet.*

(Translated by Craig Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures*, 1982)

Ouch, right? The answer to the riddle is of course ... an onion. But if you leapt to a sexual solution, don't worry, you're not the only one. Generations of medieval monks knew the joys of the smutty double-entendre and the pose of moral outrage ("you thought it was

a penis, Brother Alfred? I'll pray for you ... ")

Such riddles are spoken by objects such as keys, pokers, helmets, dough and churns. The trick is that they make the reader think that they are "really" describing sexual organs. Other sexual riddles feature a Welsh slave-woman using a leather dildo by the fire, a cockerel and hen having sex in a courtyard, and the biblical character Lot getting incestuous with his daughters.

## What the Church had to say

This might make you wonder whether we've actually become more prudish over the last few centuries. But do these texts actually tell us anything about how the Anglo-Saxons viewed sex? Or the kinds of sex they had, and how often? These are more tricky questions to answer.

One reason for this is that medieval sex is far more often discussed in penitentials – lists of sins (according to the Church) and the various penances that confessors should give the perpetrators for committing them:

- Had sex with another man's wife? Fast for one winter
- Had a wet dream? Sing 23 psalms
- Had sex with a pig? Fast for seven years

But we have no way of knowing how this related to real life practice. Just because a sex act is mentioned doesn't mean that anyone actually performed it (shades of the Cameron biography here). We don't know how often Anglo-Saxons had sex with pigs (if at all), whether they bothered to confess it to a priest, or whether the priest actually gave them the penance he was supposed to assign.

And, in theory, if you obeyed the Church, even marital sex was off the table for most of the year:

- Not during Lent, Easter, Pentecost and various other feast and fast days

- various other feast and fast days
- Not while the wife is menstruating
  - Not while the wife is heavily pregnant or for 40 days after she gives birth
  - Not on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday nights
  - Not during daylight

And the type of sex you could have was also limited:

- No oral or anal sex
- No masturbation
- No positions other than the "missionary" position
- No sex unless your express intent is to produce children and you're not enjoying it too much

It seems unlikely that ordinary people obeyed these prohibitions to the letter, particularly since historians such as Bede describe monks and nuns giving the Church a bad name through their drinking, gluttony, and fornication. No, religious documents don't tell the whole story.

So perhaps we get a clearer picture from the literary descriptions. Does the "onion" riddle prove that Anglo-Saxon peasant women were enthusiastic and active sexual partners (note those verbs: grabs, rushes, holds, claims)? Or does it represent some monk's sexual fantasy? The answers are not obvious here either.

The final tricky area is to do with sexual identity. In the 21st century, Westerners often like to divide people into straight and gay (even now we struggle to come to grips with categories such as bisexuality, asexuality, sexual fluidity). But the gay-straight opposition is only about 130 years

old. Before that, people tend to talk more about what they do rather than what they are. In fact, if medieval people did think much about sexual identity, they may have been more inclined to do so in terms of categories such as virginity and chastity.

And that's what's really exciting about the Anglo-Saxon period. It's not just the joys of good (or bad) sex in literature. Reading texts produced over 1000 years ago can make us think wider and deeper than the binaries and labels we fight over today. Asking questions about the past, it turns out, might help us re-envision the present.

*David Clark is a Senior Lecturer in Medieval Literature, University of Leicester*

*This article was first published in **The Conversation***

Isidore of Seville on...

# Ball Games

Isidore of Seville's, 7th-century work *Etymologiae*, even covers some games and sports. Here is what he writes about ball games:

## Ball games (De pila)

1. A ball (*pila*) is properly so called because it is stuffed with hair (*pilus*). It is also a 'sphere' (*sfera*, i.e. *sphera*), so called from 'carrying' (*ferre*) or 'striking' (*ferire*). Concerning the type and weight of these, Dorcatius thus reports:

*Nor spare to stuff in the hair of the lively deer until an ounce has been added over two pounds.*

2. Among the types of ball games are 'trigon-ball' (*trigonaria*) and 'arena-ball' (*arenata*). *Trigonaria* is so named because it is played by three (*tres*; cf. E, "contest") players. *Arena-ball*, which is played in a group, when, as the ball is thrown in from the circle of bystanders and spectators, they would catch it beyond a set distance and begin the game. They call it the 'elbow-game' (*cubitalis*) when two people at close quarters and with their elbows (*cubitum*) almost joined strike the ball. Those who pass the ball to their fellow players by striking it with the outstretched lower leg are said to 'give it the calf' (*suram dare*).

***The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*** has been edited and translated by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof, and was published by Cambridge University Press in 2006

**Click here to visit the Publisher's website for more details**

# The Walk to Canossa

By Peter Konieczny

Ever since it happened people have been debating what took place at Canossa. Some have called it a brilliant masterstroke by Emperor Henry IV, while others have termed it his humiliation. The events leading up to January 28, 1077 are considered one of the most dramatic moments of the Middle Ages, and perhaps the most murky when it comes to understanding what really took place in this Italian castle.

About a year earlier, on February 22, 1076, Pope Gregory VII made the following pronouncement at Rome:

*...on behalf of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and by your power and authority, I deny to King Henry, son of the Emperor Henry, who with unheard-of pride has risen up against your church, the government of the whole kingdom of the Germans and of Italy; I absolve all Christians from the bond of any oath that they have made or shall make to him; and I forbid anyone to serve him as king. For it is fitting that, because he has striven to diminish the honour of your church, he himself should forfeit the honour that he seems to possess. Finally, because he has disdained to show the obedience of a true Christian and has not returned to the God whom he forsook by communing with excommunicated men, by - as you are my witness - disdaining my advice which I sent him for his salvation, and by attempting to rend your church and separating himself from it, by your authority*

*I bind him with excommunication.*

News soon spread throughout Europe that the Pope had sentenced the Holy Roman Emperor to be excommunicated and stripped of his right to rule. It was the culmination to an increasingly bitter dispute that Gregory had with Henry, one that threatened to plunge both Germany and Italy into civil war.

Gregory was in his mid-50s around this time, and had already developed a reputation that made many friends and many enemies. Born Hildebrand of Sovana, he was the son of a blacksmith, and as a young man began working for important officials within the Catholic Church. It was during this time that he would see the Papacy riven with infighting and corruption, with multiple men claiming to be Pope. In 1046 Emperor Henry III would travel down to Italy and oversee the deposition of Pope Gregory VI, who was Hildebrand's boss at the time.



**Pope Gregory VII depicted in the 11th century**

Hildebrand's career within the Papal government continued to rise, and by the late 1050s he was perhaps the most important official in Rome with the exception of the Pope. Hildebrand was also zealous reformer, who wanted to eliminate long standing church practices, such as allowing priests to be married and simony, which was the buying and selling of church positions. He found his share of supporters who believed that Catholic church had lost its way, and had become subservient to the rulers of Europe, most notably the Holy Roman Emperor. In

1073 Hildebrand became Pope - he was not elected in the traditional sense but was acclaimed by the people of Rome. He took the name of Gregory VII.

Meanwhile, the emperor at the time was the young Henry IV. He was only five-years old when his father, Henry III, died in 1056. Nearly all of his reign to this point was spent trying to consolidate his power against the nobility of the empire. He was also eager to continue the practice where emperors actually chose who would be the bishops in various German cities, which at the time was not only an important religious position, but also included a lot of secular authority. Pope Gregory had demanded this practice stop, and their dispute, known as the Investiture Controversy, heated up.

The political dispute between Pope and Emperor soon got personal, as both men and their followers disparaged each other. Gregory would be accused of practicing necromancy, hiring assassins, and even destroying the eucharist; meanwhile the Pope would excommunicate Henry's supporters and threaten to do so with the Emperor. The pro-Imperial side would eventually renounce the Pope, claiming he had never been elected properly, and called him to step down from position in Rome. Once Henry had voiced his support for that position, Gregory replied by excommunicating the emperor in early 1076.

It was a bold move for a Pope to say that he could deprive an emperor of his right to rule, when it was just a generation ago that the emperors were determining who could sit on the Papal throne. As one historian noted, "the papal ban was seen to speedily efficacious. It frightened the more timid of Henry's adherents, it impressed moderate men who had been horrified by the king's attack on the Pope. Moreover, it gave the excuse for revolt to raise its head in Saxony once more, and to win adherents from the among the higher nobility in the rest of Germany, alienated by

Emperor Henry IV depicted in the 12th century - Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 373, fol. 60r



the high-handed measures of the king in his moment of triumph and resenting their own lack of influence in the affairs of the kingdom."

Throughout the summer and fall of 1076 the supporters of Henry abandoned him, while his foes became more brazen. At a council held in Tribur the German princes made a demand of the emperor - if Henry had not received absolution from the Pope by February 22, 1077, he would automatically be deposed and replaced by a new candidate. They even invited Gregory to come to Augsburg to preside over a meeting that

month where they would make the choice on who the new emperor would be.

The Pope was delighted by this news, and as winter approached he left Rome in the company of Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, who had been fighting the Emperor over her lands in Italy (the pro-Imperial side also sent out rumours that Gregory and Matilda were more than just allies). They headed to northern Italy, waiting for the German princes to send them an escort to take them through the Swiss Alps.

Meanwhile Henry IV faced with the real

possibility that he would be deposed in just a few months, and with little support in Germany, he decided on a bold move - he would go to Italy. While most of passes over the Alps were guarded by his opponents, he found one who could be bribed enough for him to be allowed through. In December, with an entourage of only about 50 people, including his wife and infant son, Henry began his trek southwards.

Chroniclers report that the winter of 1076-7 was one of the harshest they had ever seen, and Henry had to cross the formidable Swiss Alps. Lampert of Hersfeld, whose Annals is one of the best sources for the events of this episode, reports:

*He therefore hired certain natives of the region, who were skilled and well accustomed to the rugged summits of the Alps. They were to lead his entourage over the steep mountains and the huge mass of snow and to smooth the unevenness of the path by whatever means they could for those who were following. When, with these men as their guides, they had with great difficulty reached the summit of the mountain, there was no possibility of advancing further. For the mountain side was precipitous and, so they said, slippery because of the icy cold and seemed to rule out entirely any hope of descent. In that situation the men tried to overcome every danger using their own strength, now crawling on their hands and feet, now clinging to the shoulders of their guides and also occasionally, when a foot slipped on an icy surface, falling and rolling down for a considerable distance. At last with difficulty and for a time at serious risk of their lives they reached the plains. The queen and the other women who were in her service were placed in the hides of oxen and the guides who had been hired to lead the expedition dragged them down behind them. Some of the horses they lowered down the mountain side by means of certain contrivances; others they spancelled and dragged down but many of these died while they were being dragged and very many were crippled: very few were able to escape*

*the peril safe and sound.*

News soon spread of his arrival in Italy, and the Pope feared that he might be coming to capture him (or do even worse). The Emperor had many supporters among the Italian nobility, enough to raise an army. Countess Matilda took Gregory to her castle at Canossa, where they waited to see what Henry was planning.

On January 25, 1077, with a blizzard raging, Henry arrived at the gates of Canossa. Here is Gregory's own account, written just weeks after, of what happened:

*Finally he came in person to Canossa, where we were staying, bringing with him only a small retinue and manifesting no hostile intentions. Once arrived, he presented himself at the gate of the castle, barefoot and clad only in wretched woollen garments, beseeching us with tears to grant him absolution and forgiveness. This he continued to do for three days, until all those about us were moved to compassion at his plight and interceded for him with tears and prayers. Indeed, they marvelled at our hardness of heart, some even complaining that our action savored rather of heartless tyranny than of chastening severity. At length his persistent declarations of repentance and the supplications of all who were there with us overcame our reluctance, and we removed the excommunication from him and received him again into the bosom of the holy mother church.*

Lampert of Hersfeld's version is very similar:

*His whole entourage was left outside and he himself, laying aside his royal garb, with nothing in his appearance, with no display on splendour, with bare feet, he remained fasting from morning to evening, waiting for the judgment of the Roman pontiff. He did this on the second day and on the third day. At last on the fourth day he was allowed to come into the pope's presence and after many arguments and counter-arguments he was finally*



R EX RO GAT ABBATEM. MATILDIDM SUPPLICAT ATQ ;

Early 12th century depiction of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, at the foot of Matilda of Tuscany, while Hugh of Cluny, watches on.  
From Cod. Vat. lat. 4922



**Henry at the gate of Canossa, by August von Heyden (19th century)**

*and counter-arguments he was finally absolved from excommunication...*

The account written by a supporter of Countess Matilda has her playing more of a central role in the affair, acting as the key intermediary. At one point the emperor begs her "If you do not help me in this moment I cannot fight anymore because the Pope has condemned me. O valiant cousin, make him bless me. Go!" Finally, if you were reading a pro-Henry chronicler, than most of these details would be conveniently left out, replaced with a simple notice that the emperor was able to get his sentence of excommunication lifted.

Before being absolved, Henry had to promise Gregory that he would behave better and gave the following oath:

*I, Henry, king, promise to satisfy the grievances which my archbishops, bishops, dukes, counts, and other princes of Germany or their followers may have against me, within the*

*time set by pope Gregory and in accordance with his conditions. If I am prevented by any sufficient cause from doing this within that time, I will do it as soon after that as I may. Further, if Pope Gregory shall desire to visit Germany or any other land, on his journey thither, his sojourn there, and his return thence, he shall not be molested or placed in danger of captivity by me or by anyone whom I can control. This shall apply to his escort and retinue and to all who come and go in his service. Moreover, I will never enter into any plan for hindering or molesting him, but will aid him in good faith and to the best of my ability if anyone else opposes him.*

Once that was done the Pope held a mass and gave communion to Henry. Afterwards they had dinner, and according to another chronicler the Emperor was in such a bad mood that he did not touch his food, but instead spent his time grinding his fingernails into the wooden table. With a final blessing from Gregory, Henry departed Canossa and headed back to his supporters.

Almost as soon as the event happened, people were debating what was the real significance of the Walk to Canossa. Had Henry humiliated himself and become subservient to the Papacy? Or was he deft enough that he framed the issue around his personal repentance and this situation had no bearing on his right to kingship? Medieval chroniclers (and modern historians) have argued about this, but the immediate effect was the threat from the rebellious German nobility collapsed - only a few diehards continued to oppose him. Meanwhile, the Pope tried to explain that just because he absolved Henry that did not mean he was still allowing him to be emperor.

Within three years the Emperor and the Pope were fighting again, with Gregory

excommunicating Henry for a second time. However, by this time the bitterness between the two men had only grown, and Henry would not return to seek forgiveness. Instead both sides fought to depose each other, and war would be waged in both Germany and Italy. The fighting over the Investiture Controversy would continue long after both Gregory and Henry were dead.

The Walk to Canossa has been remembered by historians and artists, and continues to be seen as one of those fascinating episodes that make the Middle Ages so interesting. The broader implications, however, are less clear, but reflect on how the conflict between church and state would remain one of the main themes in the history of medieval Europe.

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# 5 Things to Pack in Your Medieval First Aid Kit

By Danièle Cybulskie

Like modern people, medieval people dealt with minor ailments and injuries without immediately calling for the doctor. For these minor medical issues, there were some natural remedies that were useful to have on hand pretty much all the time. Here are five things that would have been a handy part of a medieval “first aid kit”, and that (incidentally) science is slowly proving can still be counted on to work in a pinch.

## 1. Willow Bark

Willow bark has been used since ancient times all over the world to deal with pain and fever, especially headaches. According to **The University of Maryland Medical Center**, ancient Greeks were advised to “chew on the bark to reduce fever and inflammation”. Willow bark actually does work to dull pain because it contains salicylic acid/salicin, which is very close to acetylsalicylic acid: aspirin. The UMMC credits the bark’s natural flavonoids for its anti-inflammatory properties, as well as other natural chemicals that need to be studied further. Because it’s pretty easily available, it’s likely that this was the most popular go-to painkiller for medieval people.

## 2. Honey

Another medicine known to the ancients, honey was used on medieval wounds like **the arrow wound the future Henry V received in**

**the face**. Honey was a good choice to use for such wounds, as it turns out, because of its antibiotic properties. In ***Dragon’s Blood and Willow Bark: The Mysteries of Medieval Medicine***, Toni Mount notes,

*The antimicrobial activity in most honeys is due to the presence of hydrogen peroxide, which inhibits the growth of bacteria and its high sugar content (high osmolarity), which draws the fluids out of any bacteria present, so they shrivel and die. (p.115)*

Mount also points out honey’s unique ability to bind a wound closed (because it is so sticky) while keeping it from drying out (p.115). Besides honey’s ability to disinfect wounds, it was also handy to have on hand because it tastes good, making it a frequently-mentioned ingredient in all sorts of medieval remedies. Because it was so often used in cooking (as well as making mead), honey would have been readily available for medical use.

### 3. Cobwebs

A trick that medieval people used to stop bleeding in minor cuts was to pack them with cobwebs (like those above, this is also an **aboriginal remedy**). Like honey, cobwebs are sticky, which helps hold the cut together, and may also help spread the chemical goodness of the web over a greater surface, as **scientists at the University of Akron have theorized**. According to Mount, "spider's webs have natural antiseptic and antifungal properties to combat infection" (p.114), and they also contain vitamin K, which assists blood in clotting. The spider's web must be clean, however, and hopefully spider-free.

### 4. Moss

Moss is another ancient global remedy that has been used for thousands of years to soak up blood, from **menstrual blood** to wounds. A particularly great moss used in medieval first aid (as well as single malt whiskey) is sphagnum moss (dried, decayed sphagnum moss creates peat). Mount says,

*This bog moss, found in Scotland, Ireland and western England is capable of soaking up fluids or discharge from a wound far better than cotton wool and deodorises it as well. These benefits would have been obvious, but what couldn't be known to the surgeons of history was that certain penicillin moulds live in the sphagnum moss, giving it antibiotic properties. (p.114)*

Sphagnum moss, then, not only cleans up the blood, but kills bacteria, which would have been critical, especially in the case of battle wounds. Sphagnum moss, or "**blood moss**", was so well known and frequently used, that it was still being used **as recently as World War I** for sanitary napkins.

### 5. Live Snails

For a minor cut or burn, a medieval person could turn to the humble snail for relief. As

Mount says, given snails' constant travel over rough ground, it makes sense for them to have chemical aids to help them treat minor scratches, and (as it turns out) they have these chemicals in abundance. According to Mount,

*Recent research has shown that snail slime contains antioxidants, antiseptic, anaesthetic, anti-irritant, anti-inflammatory, antibiotic and antiviral properties, as well as collagen and elastin, vital for skin repair. (p.121)*

Snails, it seems, are the answer to many a skin complaint – a veritable fountain of youth for skin. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that "**Snail Gel**" is available today, touted as the answer to all manner of problems. If, that is, you can get past the fact that it's literally slime.

For more handy, readable information on medieval medicine, check out Toni Mount's book ***Dragon's Blood and Willow Bark: The Mysteries of Medieval Medicine***.

You can follow Danièle  
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# Christine de Pizan

## on Business

### Ethics

How should one run a business? For Christine de Pizan, the famous medieval French writer, those that lived by trade had to follow a simple set of rules.

Christine de Pizan (1364 – c. 1430) is one of those unique figures from the Middle Ages who showed how the period was changing in new and interesting ways. Born in Italy, but having grown up in Paris, she received a very good education. At the age of 25, when she had been widowed and had three young children to support, Christine turned to writing to earn an income. At the beginning she might have been viewed as novelty, but soon Christine proved that she was formidable intellectual. Her most famous works include *The City of Ladies* and her poem eulogizing Joan of Arc.

Around the years 1404-407 she wrote *The Book of the Body Politic* for Prince Louis, the heir to the French throne – the work falls into the genre of “mirror for princes” that was popular in the Middle Ages – a guide to politics and how rulers should behave and govern. In this work Christine offers advice on a range of topics, like justice and education, adding in various examples from ancient times to prove her points. One of the more unique parts of her book is that Christine also details how common people should behave, including merchants.

One usually does not find much attention paid to merchants and business in the works

aimed at the upper class of medieval society, and what could be found was often very negative. As one historian put it, the merchant was “considered a parasite and a sinner, barely tolerated for his questionable contribution to society’s output.”

However, for Christine de Pizan the merchant was a vital part of society, and one whose work should be respected. She notes that “there is no important citizen in any city who is not involved with trade, however, they are not considered thereby less noble. So Venice, Genoa, and other places have the most rich and powerful merchants who seek out goods of all kinds, which they distribute all over the world.”

She adds that business and trade are good not only for those who take part in it, but for the rest of society too:

*For it is very good for a country and of great value to a prince and to the common polity when a city has trade and an abundance of merchants. This is why cities on the sea or major rivers are commonly rich and large, because of the goods that are brought by merchants from far away to be delivered there.*



Christine goes on to list some of the qualities a merchant should have:

*These people ought to be well advised in their deeds, honest in their labor, truthful in their words, clever in what they do, because they have to know how to buy and resell things at such a price as not to lose money, and ought to be well informed about whether there are enough goods and where they are going short and when to buy and when to sell – otherwise their business will be gone.*

Those who practice such business also should follow some simple rules, according to Christine, which centres around honesty:

*They ought to be honest in their work, that is that they ought not, under the threat of damnation and awful punishment of the body, treat their goods with any tricks to make them seem better than they are in order to deceive people so that they might be more expensive or more quickly sold, because every trade is punished when there is fraud in one. And those that practice deception ought not to be called merchants but rather deceivers and evil doers. Above all, merchants should be truthful in words and promises, accustomed to speaking and keeping the truth in words and promises so that a simple promise by a merchant will be believed as certain as by a contract. And those that keep their promises and are always*

*found honest should prefer to suffer damage rather than fail to keep an agreement, which is a very good and honest custom, and it would please God, if others in France and elsewhere would do the same. Although there may be some that do wrong, I hold that by the mercy of God, there are those who are good, honest, and true. May God keep them rich, honourable and worthy of trust!*

Finally, the medieval writer adds a few lines about appropriate behaviour as well as how much money a merchant should donate to charity:

*these people ought to be of fair and honest life without pomp or arrogance and ought to serve God in courage and reverence and give alms generously from what God has given them, as one finds among those who give a tenth of their goods to the poor and who found many chapels, places of prayer, and hospital for the poor.*

Christine de Pizan's book also offers her thoughts about knights, craftsmen and even "simple labourers" – you can read the rest of ***The Book of the Body Politic*** through Kate Langdon Forhan's translation, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 1994.

# Elizabeth of York, Queen of England

By Susan Abernethy

Elizabeth of York symbolized the epitome of the perfect medieval queen. She was beautiful, charitable, and beloved by the people. By marrying Henry Tudor, who had taken the throne of England by conquest, the Houses of Lancaster and York were united and the War of the Roses came to an end. And Elizabeth was the mother of an heir who would become King Henry VIII of England and two of her daughters would become queens.

Elizabeth of York was born at the royal palace of Westminster on February 11, 1466. She was the eldest child of Queen Elizabeth Wydeville and King Edward IV of England. While she was still young she received religious instruction, learned manners, embroidery, music, singing, dancing and other necessary things in preparation for her role as a royal wife and mother. When Elizabeth was four years old, her father named her as his heiress and brokered a betrothal with George, the son of John Neville, Marquess Montagu. This was clearly a politically expedient arrangement as Edward was attempting to create a bond with the Nevilles after they had participated in an uprising against him. Neville was to die in the Battle of Barnet in 1471 so the betrothal was broken.

In September 1470, King Edward was forced to flee England when Margaret of Anjou and the Earl of Warwick were threatening to invade and take back the throne for the Lancastrian King Henry VI. Elizabeth's mother was forced to flee to sanctuary within the confines of Westminster Abbey with her children where they would remain for five tense months. In medieval times, criminals and others could take refuge in church or its precincts providing for immunity from the law. On November 1, 1470, Elizabeth Wydeville gave birth to a son named Edward, making Elizabeth second in line for the throne.

King Edward was encouraged by the birth of a son and provided with money by his brother-in-law, Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. He gathered a fleet and raised an army to



Portrait of Elizabeth of York, circa 1500, now at the National Portrait Gallery

army to return to England to fight against his own rebellious brother George, Duke of Clarence and the Earl of Warwick. Upon arriving, his brother made peace with him. Edward gradually made his way to London where he entered with no resistance. Elizabeth Wydeville and her children were released from sanctuary and there was a joyous family reunion. King Edward would eventually defeat the Earl of Warwick and Queen Margaret of Anjou in battle and King Henry VI would die in the Tower. This resulted in a period of relative peace in the realm.

By the time Elizabeth was five or six, her formal education began. She was taught to read and write. She learned managerial skills such as running a household, managing servants, how to do accounting for the household budget, and delegating responsibilities. She may have read and spoke French and she grew to love books. She is described as being devoted to God, obedient to her parents, loving toward her brothers and sisters and dedicated to helping the poor.

In 1475, King Edward invaded France. He would come to terms with King Louis XI on August 29, 1475 with the Treaty of Picquigny. It settled the conflict between England and France and provided for Elizabeth to marry Louis' son and heir, the Dauphin Charles when they became of marriageable age. Elizabeth was to go to France for the wedding at the age of twelve.

When Elizabeth turned twelve, preparations for the marriage which had dragged on finally stalled. She had grown into a real beauty with blond hair and a fair complexion. If the effigy in Westminster Abbey is accurate, she would have been about 5 feet 6 inches tall. In March of 1482, Mary of Burgundy died after falling from her horse and King Louis annexed the duchy of Burgundy for France and arranged for his son Charles to marry Margaret of Austria, Mary of Burgundy's daughter. So Charles' betrothal to Elizabeth was called off.

A year later, on April 9, King Edward IV died unexpectedly and Elizabeth's life was thrown into turmoil. Her mother fled to sanctuary once again with her children and her brothers were imprisoned in the Tower. Elizabeth's uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester had Elizabeth Wydeville and Edward IV's marriage declared bigamous due to an alleged prior contract of marriage by Edward and had all his children pronounced illegitimate. Gloucester was declared King as Richard III and eventually, Elizabeth's brothers Edward and Richard disappeared from the Tower.

Plots and rumors arose that someone would rescue Elizabeth and her sisters from sanctuary and take them overseas. Because Elizabeth was considered by some as her father's heir, this was worrisome for King Richard. On Christmas Day 1483, Henry Tudor, who had emerged as a figurehead of the opposition to Richard, swore an oath at Rennes Cathedral in France to marry Elizabeth if he became king. On March 1, 1484, Richard and Elizabeth Wydeville reached an agreement allowing Elizabeth and her sisters to come out of sanctuary. Richard guaranteed their safety and promised to keep them in a manner according to their rank, give them an income and find them suitable husbands.

After the death of King Richard's wife Anne Neville in March 1485, there was sufficient speculation that Elizabeth would marry her uncle that Richard had to publicly deny the rumors. Elizabeth Wydeville was most likely plotting with Margaret Beaufort to marry Elizabeth to Beaufort's son Henry Tudor.

In August 1485, Richard was defeated by Henry Tudor and his forces at the Battle of Bosworth. Henry gained the throne of England by conquest and became King Henry VII. One of his first acts as king was to reverse the declaration of Elizabeth and her siblings' illegitimacy. She was brought from her location somewhere in the north openly to London to stay with his mother at Coldharbour

location somewhere in the north openly to London to stay with his mother at Coldharbour where she awaited word she would become Queen. Henry took his time in marrying her but after being urged by parliament, the wedding took place on Jan 18, 1486 although she was not crowned yet.

Henry came to value if not love Elizabeth. She was beautiful, charming, generous, virtuous, gentle and kind. His union with her legitimized his conquest and ended the years of strife the civil war had caused. Both Elizabeth and Henry had Yorkist as well as Lancaster components to their households.

The couple had similar interests like court ceremonial, dancing, gaming, music, gambling, plays, Morris dancers and other entertainers. She made no attempt to enter the political realm after her marriage. She concerned herself with the traditional roles of a Queen consort such as her household, her estates, her court and her children. If she did have any role in politics, it was behind the scenes and in private with her husband. She traveled extensively, sometimes with Henry and sometimes on her own.

Elizabeth was either pregnant when she married or became pregnant immediately afterwards. On September 20, 1486, she gave birth to a fair prince, named Arthur after the legendary king. Elizabeth suffered greatly and was weak after the birth, possibly of puerperal fever. This may be why she didn't become pregnant for another two and a half years. After the birth of her son, Henry paid for a coronation ceremony which took place on November 25, 1487.

On November 28/29, 1489, Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter named Margaret. Prince Henry, the future Henry VIII, was born on June 28 1491. Prince Arthur was brought up in his own household away from court but the other children would grow up at Eltham Palace, far from the noisome London air. Elizabeth and her mother-in-law Margaret Beaufort

oversaw the rules of how the royal nursery was governed.

Elizabeth was very family oriented. She loved and supported her children, her sisters and other relations. She kept her sisters at court and arranged marriages for them. On July 2, 1492, she gave birth to a daughter Elizabeth. This daughter would die on October 7, 1495. Around this time negotiations were ongoing to marry Prince Arthur to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Elizabeth's daughter Mary was born on March 18, 1496 at Sheen Palace. The nursery at Eltham was dominated by women and Henry, Margaret and Mary became very close to their mother.

Another prince named Edmund was born on February 21, 1499. He would die in June of 1500. In early November 1501, Catherine of Aragon arrived from Spain to marry Arthur and Elizabeth greeted her. The couple was married on November 14. This alliance was politically important for the stability of the Tudor dynasty. Catherine and Arthur left for Ludlow where Arthur would continue his training and education for the throne. But in March of 1502, both Catherine and Arthur became ill with what the chronicles say was the sweating sickness. Catherine was to survive but Arthur died.

On April 4th a messenger arrived at Greenwich Palace near London to inform the privy councilors of the sad news. The council called upon King Henry's confessor to break the news to him. The King was shocked by the news and called for the Queen. Elizabeth did her best to comfort the king by reminding him that he was the only child of his mother and they had another son and their two daughters. She also reminded him they were still young and could have more children. Henry thanked her for her kind words and Elizabeth returned to her apartments. Once there, she broke down in deepest grief. Her ladies called for the king to comfort her. He appeared and did his best to quiet her, reminding her of her own

**Funeral Effigy of Queen  
Elizabeth of York - photo by  
Lisby / Flickr**



reminding her of her own brave words in comforting him.

Elizabeth was to stay in mourning for most of the rest of the year and her health began to suffer, possibly from the shock of Arthur's death. She sought medical help during this time and this may indicate she was suffering from some underlying health issue. Due to Arthur and little Edmund's death, she may have felt the need to try for another child, even though she had difficulties after her pregnancies in the past and she was increasingly ill.

By July of 1502 she was in the early stages of another pregnancy. Sean Cunningham, in his biography of King Henry VII suggested she was suffering from an iron deficiency and her pregnancy could have exacerbated the symptoms. Elizabeth's baby was due in the middle of February. On January 26th, Elizabeth and the King decided to stay in the

Tower and on that day, Elizabeth and her sister Katherine arrived there. Elizabeth went into labor in the morning on February 2nd. The early labor was a surprise as she was expected to deliver at Richmond.

The birth was difficult. The child was named Katherine. Both the baby and Elizabeth were weak and by February 9th, Elizabeth became very sick. She possibly developed puerperal fever and her iron deficiency may have made her condition worse. On the 10th, the king was calling for physicians to come to the aid of the queen. But it was all in vain. Elizabeth died in the early morning of February 11th, her 37th birthday. The King was devastated. He assigned some officers and his mother to arrange the funeral, took a boat to Richmond and shut himself up in a private place to mourn. Elizabeth was loved by her husband, her children and the people of England. Her baby daughter died on February 18th.

Henry paid for a lavish and magnificent funeral. Construction had just begun on the Lady Chapel in Westminster Abbey where there was to be a tomb for Elizabeth and Henry. Until this was built, Elizabeth was buried in a vault specially made for her in the crossing of the abbey, between the high altar and the choir. The magnificent Lady Chapel was consecrated the day after the death of King Henry VII in 1509. He was buried in the large vault that was constructed there and Elizabeth's body was exhumed and buried next to him. Their son, King Henry VIII commissioned the magnificent effigies that adorn the top of the tomb now.

### **Further reading**

*Elizabeth of York: A Tudor Queen and Her World*, by Alison Weir,

*Elizabeth of York: The Forgotten Tudor Queen*, by Amy License,

*The Last Medieval Queens*, by J.L. Laynesmith

*Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens from Eleanor of Aquitaine to Elizabeth of York*, by Lisa Hilton

*Blood Sisters: The Women Behind the War of the Roses*, by Sarah Gristwood

Susan Abernethy is the writer of **The Freelance History Writer** and a contributor to **Saints, Sisters, and Sluts**. You can follow both sites on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/thefreelancehistorywriter>) and (<http://www.facebook.com/saintssistersandsluts>), as well on **Medieval History Lovers**. You can also follow Susan on Twitter **@SusanAbernethy2**

**Books**

# **The Wars of the Roses**

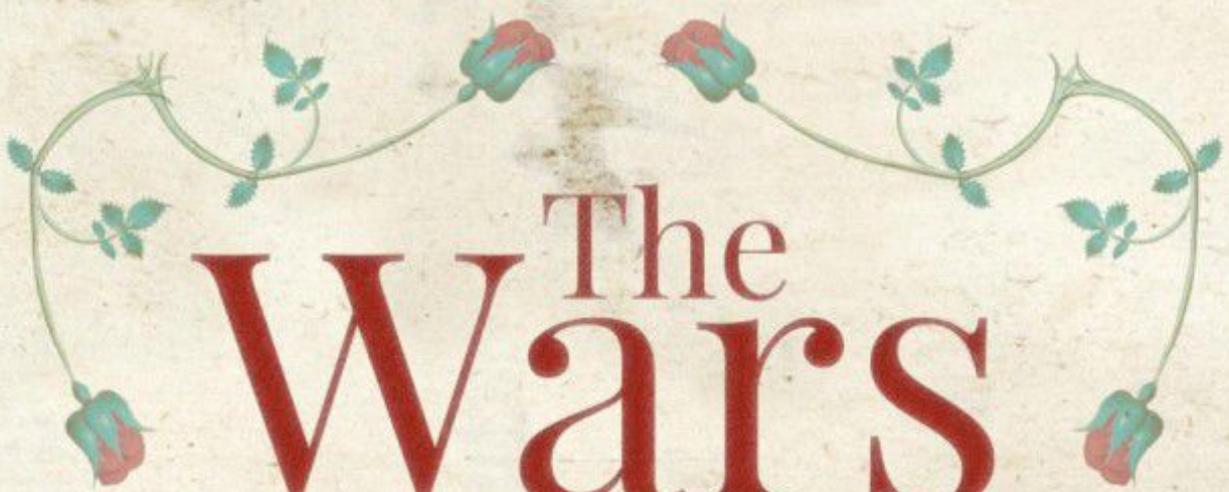
**By John Ashdown Hill**

**Amberley Publishing, 2015**

**ISBN:: 9781445645247**

The Wars of the Roses call to mind bloody battles, treachery and deceit, and a cast of characters known to us through fact and fiction: Edward IV, Elizabeth Woodville, Richard III, Warwick the Kingmaker, the Princes in the Tower, Henry Tudor. But the whole era also creates a level of bewilderment among even keen readers. John Ashdown-Hill gets right to the heart of this 'thorny' subject, dispelling the myths and bringing clarity to a topic often shrouded in confusion.

Between 1455 and 1487, a series of dynastic wars for the throne of England were fought. These have become known as the Wars of the Roses. But there never was a red rose of Lancaster ... This book sets the record straight on this and many other points, getting behind the traditional mythology and reaching right back into the origins of the conflict to cut an admirably clear path through the thicket.



The  
**Wars**  
of the  
**Roses**



**John Ashdown-Hill**

Bestselling author of *The Mythology of Richard III*

## Read an excerpt **What were 'The Wars of the Roses'?**

The term 'Wars of the Roses' is a relatively modern and in many ways rather regrettable invention, which raises a number of quite complex issues. As we shall see, it is debatable whether the conflict which is now commonly so described was really a single war. It may simply have been a series of different battles and other kinds of clash, not all of which were seen, by those who took part in them, as related to one another. Chronologically, some of the battles were widely separated. Also, not all of them had similar objectives. It is also questionable to what extent the conflict overall had anything to do with roses. Although later parts of the contest may have been related to two competing sides, who were popularly associated with different coloured rose emblems, this relates to the period from 1485 until the 1520s – a period when, according to most traditional versions of the story, the 'Wars of the Roses' had ended!

The sequence of events popularly known as the 'Wars of the Roses' is generally perceived as a kind of civil war. Today, the meaning of 'civil war' is normally seen as a dispute involving fighting between two opposing groups within a single nation state. In the Middle Ages, though, when the so-called 'Wars of the Roses' took place, the concept of a nation state was only just beginning to evolve. Thus, there was no clear nation state of 'England', in the modern sense of the term (indeed, some people may consider it questionable whether a clear nation state of 'England' exists even now).

Nevertheless, in the fifteenth century a 'realm' certainly existed, which at that period comprised England, Ireland, Wales and a small area of Continental European land in the vicinity of Calais. This realm was ruled by a single king, the realistic parts of whose title were 'King of England and Lord of Ireland',<sup>1</sup> and whose son and heir traditionally bore the

honorary title 'Prince of Wales'. It is true that the so-called civil war which is now known as the 'Wars of the Roses' took place within that realm, and that it basically involved English, Irish and Welsh fighters, together with members of the Calais garrison. Thus, in one sense, the contest was mainly an internal, English, Irish, Welsh and Calais struggle. Nevertheless, foreign rulers, including Kings of France, of Spain, and of Scotland, and also the Dukes (and Duchesses) of the semi-independent state of Burgundy, did sometimes become involved in the conflict on one side or the other.

What is more, foreign military forces sometimes took part. Indeed, they occasionally played a significant role in the fighting. As we shall see, the French government backed anti-Yorkist attempts on the throne of England in the winter of 1470, in 1483, and in 1485, and they considered doing so (though, in the end, with no real commitment) in the 1490s. In addition, the campaigns of 1470, 1483 and 1485 all included French men-at-arms. In fact it is almost certainly the case that Richard III would not have been defeated, and Henry VII would never have become king, if French soldiers had not backed Henry, and opposed Richard. At one level it therefore appears highly misleading to describe the campaign which culminated in the Battle of Bosworth as part of a 'civil war'.

Likewise, the Burgundian government supported the restoration of Yorkist power in 1471. Later, there was also a kind of Burgundian backing for the Yorkist campaigns of 1487 and in the 1490s. As for the government of Scotland, it was not even consistent in its involvement. For although it backed anti-Yorkist movements in the 1460s, James IV supported the Yorkist campaign of 'Richard of England' in the 1490s. This strongly suggests that the prime Scottish motivation focused on the interests of the kingdom of Scotland.

Within the realm of England, Ireland, Wales and Calais, the two opposing sides in the battles were ostensibly focussed around rival members of the late medieval Anglo-Norman royal family – usually referred to as the Plantagenets, though it is questionable how many of them would ever actually have used that surname. Thus the opposing sides are seen as comprising the opposing royal princes, together with their various supporters. In other words, on one level the 'Wars of the Roses' was basically a struggle between royal relatives, who were fighting over which of them should sit on the English throne – and/or wield the power behind the throne.

However, in another sense, the conflict clearly centred upon rivalry in the ranks of the aristocracy and gentry. In this second sense the fighting was only superficially linked to what has recently come to be sometimes referred to as 'the Cousins' War' (though the origins of that term are also extremely vague). Indeed, as we shall see, at least two of the battles within the period usually ascribed to the 'Wars of the Roses' were entirely private battles, completely unrelated to the contest for the throne. And if the period could be widened slightly, a greater number of private conflicts would be seen to form part of the picture.

As for the use of the term 'war' in this context, that also requires some examination. A modern war is normally an armed conflict involving a series of battles which may sometimes be separated in terms of their location and outcome, but which remain fairly closely related in terms of chronology. For example, the First World War lasted for approximately four years and four months (from 28 July 1914 until 11 November 1918). In the Second World War the fighting continued for almost exactly six years. In both cases, although a number of separate battles took place in various locations, the armed conflict was more or less continuous.

But the so-called Wars of the Roses is usually

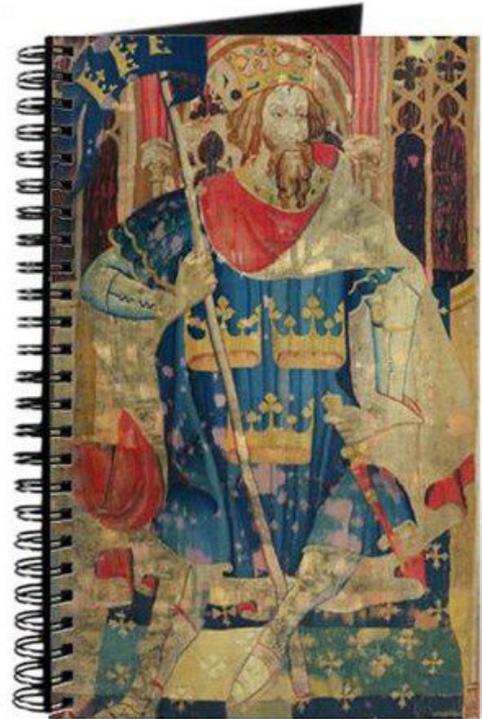
said to have lasted for thirty-two years, from 1455 until 1487. And although, as we shall see, those dates can be disputed, arguably the conflict went on, not for less than thirty-two years, but potentially for a considerably longer period. Moreover, the Wars of the Roses did not simply consist of the continuous fighting of battles, as we would probably expect in the case of modern warfare. In the Wars of the Roses there were sometimes long gaps of time between one battle and the next. Thus, for example, no fewer than four years elapsed between the first battle of St Albans and the battle of Blore Heath.

At some such times there was apparent peace in the realm between the battles. Indeed, it may well have seemed, to those living at that moment, that all conflict had then been resolved. For example, during the five years which elapsed between the battle of Hexham and the battle of Edgecote Moor, it looked as if the crown was now secure upon the head of King Edward IV. However, sometimes, even when there was no fighting of battles and no open warfare, the contest for the throne, or for power within the kingdom, nevertheless continued in other significant ways, despite the lack of military action. For the various people involved, these other ways included a wide and diverse range of activities, from plotting, scheming and changing sides to the making of marriages, legal disputes, the killing (or attempted killing) of rivals, and sometimes witchcraft and magic.

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