

GENDER AND HISTORY: NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
VII Congress of the Italian Society of Women Historians (SIS)
Pisa, February 2-4, 2017

Abstracts for the Panel “Masculinity and Violence”

“For he sa fele off harnys sched” – the Depiction of “Manful Men” in Barbour’s *The Bruce*

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The archdeacon John Barbour wrote his polygeneric masterpiece *The Bruce* about the Scottish king and hero-to-be Robert Bruce and his loyal knights in 1375. In current research, its genre and the actual intention of the text are controversial issues. This paper argues that *The Bruce* is a mixture of metrical and antique romance and that its objective is to depict and honour the fighting elite – the “manful men”.

The story of *The Bruce* begins with the wars fought between Scotland and England starting in 1306. Henceforth it focusses exclusively on the warlike enterprises of the fighting elite of Scotland and England. Other topics such as court life, courtly love or mystic or religious quests are completely absent. Because of this lack of narrative elements, *The Bruce* often is (mis-)understood as a kind of biographical chronicle, rather than a chivalric romance. Yet, the plot does not add up to a coherent historiographical narration either. People, events and places are deliberately (re-)arranged in order to provide the audience with a “good story” that is full of tension: a seemingly hopeless struggle that becomes increasingly successful – a plot that the “real” history did not supply.

However, what unites representatives of both sides is the idea, that *The Bruce* is an early expression of a Scottish national sentiment, that it features and celebrates Scottish independence.

In contrast to this dominant research opinions, I argue, that the centre of the story is neither the Scottish king nor Scottish independence, but the depiction of “manful man” acting “manfully” in times of highest distress and danger. Such men are mostly Scots, e.g. Robert and Edward Bruce, James Douglas or Thomas Randolph, but Englishmen as well, such as the English kings and the English aristocracy. The author depicts these men more or less detailed as well as he emphasizes different features. The stressing of various different character traits is always in relation to their ability to fight, to withstand pressure in dangerous situations and more generally: their behaviour against the background of a chivalric code for which war and warlike encounters are a necessary addition.

The result is a story that is neither history nor literature, but that can almost be read as a *specula principum* for fighters – a *specula pugnatorum*.

The current paper explores the different ways of the depiction of fighting men and the reasons for this depiction, both on story-level as well as against the background of the historical-cultural setting of the time of origin. How do the characters act, why do they (need to) act in this way and what can the depiction reveal about the internal and external perceptions of (fighting) men?

Courageous surgeons, enduring patients. The performance of masculinity in medieval military medicine. (14th-15th century)

JUDITH MENGLER (Mainz)

Without access to reliable anaesthetics, the treatment of battlefield injuries was quite an ordeal for the patient as well as for the surgeon. The ideal behaviour of the patient is recorded in chronicles and is based on the set of values of military masculinity: fortitude, bravery, temperance and the capacity to suffer. Likewise, the medical treatises describe the appropriate behaviour of the surgeon. Here, the competence to pluck up the necessary courage at the right time is the essential element. The proper conduct of both, surgeon and patient, in accordance with the canon of values of masculinity is thought to be the prerequisite for successful surgery.

As one can imagine, to keep a cordial manner and pleasant countenance while facing the screams of the wounded, the smell of pus and the sight of blood, guts, and bones was quite challenging. Moreover, the surgeon was, as well as the fighter or any other participant of war, exposed to a potentially harmful environment beside the battlefield. The risk of infection, poor weather conditions, and malnutrition were constant companions of the surgeon while on campaign or under siege. Depending on resources and ingredients, which are hard to obtain in times of war, surgeons were often forced to prioritize and improvise, not seldom with surprising results.

The experience gained in war could result in theoretical approaches, based on humoral pathology. The connection of the geographical origin of fighters with their fortitude was considered, just like the physical processes in the case of fear. The virtues of fighters as well as the vices could be explained scientifically. In addition, since humoral pathological medicine does not treat “the illness” but the individual disturbances of the person’s humors, similar war injuries were treated differently, depending on age, origin, profession, dietary habits of the patient, as well as season, climate, wind direction, and star constellations.

The paper focuses on medical treatises of the 14th up to the early 16th century, which were written by authors who had direct war experience. Especially the works of Henri de Mondeville (c. 1260-1316), Heinrich von Pfolssprundt (circa 1400-1466), and Hieronymus Brunschwig (circa 1450-1512) will be examined. I will try to trace the strategies of surgeons, which they developed in order to cope with – physically and mentally – challenging circumstances, the theoretical reappraisal of war injuries, and the set of values, which was intended to guide the actors of medieval military medicine to proper conduct – without damage to their masculinity.

Men as victims. Speaking and laughing about violence against men.

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That men were more often perpetrators of violence in history than women seems obvious. But men are also more often victims to acts of physical violence. This seems statistically true for contemporary societies and – due to the fact that men participated more often in violent actions – it was probably true for medieval societies.

If we look at cultural representations of violence and its victims, one may get another picture: Although depictions and narrations of men receiving violence occur frequently, men appear rarely as ‘victims’. The term ‘victim’ shall be understood as referring to someone that is object to another person’s treatment but not actively involved in the circumstances of his or her victimization. Following this conception it seems in most cases inappropriate to mark the male figures in heroic poetry or courtly epics as victims even though they suffer from violence to a certain extent. One prototypic victim of this kind of stories is the “damsel in distress”. Being a passive object to violence or an active agent of legitimate or illegitimate violence is determined strongly by a figures gender. Male protagonists occur therefore as “heroes”, as ideal men in the mode of martial masculinity. Women (and less often children and clerical men) appear as those to be protected.

Having this widespread stereotype in mind, one may wonder about the numerous depictions of men getting beaten by women (/their wives). The motif of the cowardly behaving (henpecked) husband occurs in humorous texts like the late medieval prose story “Ritter Beringer” or quite often in carnivalesque plays shown in late medieval cities. The male protagonists of these stories appear weak and passive and are exposed to heavy acts of violence without being able to resist in any effective way. Although this constellation seems like the consequence of a role reversal at first glance, the modification of the shown gender roles can be interpreted as more intense.

The paper asks for the meaning and the function of the representation of men as victims of physical violence, with the objective to get a grasp on masculine ideals through the investigation of stories of their non-fulfilment.

Cross-dressing in Medieval times: chivalric literature and gender roles.

«A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this» (Deuteronomy 22:5).

MARINA MONTESANO (Messina)

The prohibition of Deuteronomy appears to leave no legitimacy to cross-dressing in Christian society practices. Yet, in medieval literature the theme is recurrent and difficult to be judged according to the Old Testament. The early medieval hagiography, for example, is rich of Vitae in which women who have spent their lives disguised as men in monasteries are considered holy. The same can be said about chivalric literature: cross-dressing is common and rarely judged negatively. This paper aims to understand how it is possible that Medieval society acted so differently from the Old Testament's law; also, how cross-dressing is perceived in chivalric literature with relation to gender identity and gender roles.