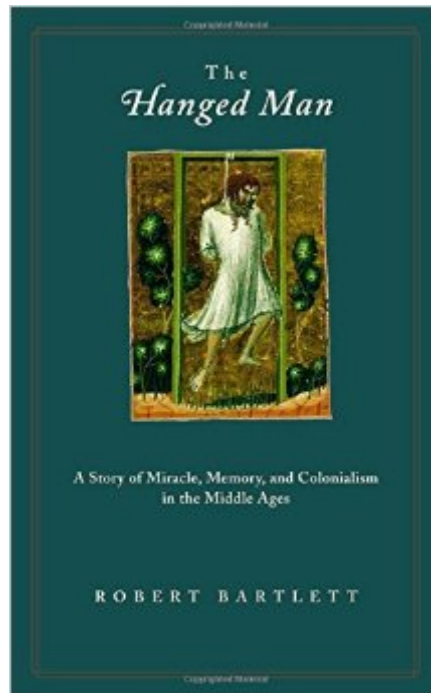


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The Hanged Man: A Story Of Miracle, Memory, And Colonialism In The Middle Ages



Synopsis

Seven hundred years ago, executioners led a Welsh rebel named William Cragh to a wintry hill to be hanged. They placed a noose around his neck, dropped him from the gallows, and later pronounced him dead. But was he dead? While no less than nine eyewitnesses attested to his demise, Cragh later proved to be very much alive, his resurrection attributed to the saintly entreaties of the defunct Bishop Thomas de Cantilupe. *The Hanged Man* tells the story of this putative miracle--why it happened, what it meant, and how we know about it. The nine eyewitness accounts live on in the transcripts of de Cantilupe's canonization hearings, and these previously unexamined documents contribute not only to an enthralling mystery, but to an unprecedented glimpse into the day-to-day workings of medieval society. While unraveling the haunting tale of the hanged man, Robert Bartlett leads us deeply into the world of lords, rebels, churchmen, papal inquisitors, and other individuals living at the time of conflict and conquest in Wales. In the process, he reconstructs voices that others have failed to find. We hear from the lady of the castle where the hanged man was imprisoned, the laborer who watched the execution, the French bishop charged with investigating the case, and scores of other members of the medieval citizenry. Brimming with the intrigue of a detective novel, *The Hanged Man* will appeal to both scholars of medieval history and general readers alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is only to be expected that seven hundred years ago, people did things differently than they do

them now. We have difficulty viewing so far back, certainly because language and culture were different, but mostly because detailed records are scarce. Robert Bartlett has provided a unique solution to give us as good an idea as possible "...of the spoken words of the past in the time before the tape recorder" in *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press). A professor of medieval history, he has examined closely a peculiar event for which there is rich documentation, a judicial commission which was an inquest into a supposed miracle. While it might seem that such an inquest would be too arcane to give us much of an idea of medieval times, Bartlett has found that the sometimes conflicting testimony of witnesses and the process of the inquiry gives us a window through which we can almost see and hear our ancient ancestors and understand matters important to them. Bartlett has produced an enjoyable volume of time travel. It was probably in 1290 that William Cragh was hanged in Swansea. William Cragh was perhaps merely a "notorious brigand," but in the words of the English rulers of his region he was one of the rebels "in the war between the Welsh and the lord king." In fact, he was hanged three times. The first time, the rope broke. The second time, the gallows from which it was suspended broke. The third time seemed to have worked just fine. His body was taken down and carried to a house in Swansea for preparation for burial. Its face was black, its eyes bulging, its black and swollen tongue extended. The son of the baron who had condemned him confirmed that William Cragh was dead.

In 1307 a papal tribunal met in England, pursuant to Pope Clement V's order of 1306. It was investigating a supposed miracle of Thomas de Cantaloupe, deceased (1282) Bishop of Hereford and candidate for canonization. The miracle was the resurrection of a dead Welshman, William Cragh, an alleged outlaw and traitor, whom the English Marcher baron William de Briouze had captured and hung in 1290. Cragh's gallows broke, so he was hanged again. The rope broke, but by then (according to the witnesses) Cragh was very dead. But he was "returned to life," supposedly by the intercession of De Canteloupe, to whom he had prayed. The tribunal consisted of three senior clergymen from England (one) and France (two) supported by notaries who provided verbatim transcripts of the proceedings (including witness testimony, some from non-English/French speakers). The tribunal heard testimony from 44 witnesses in all and reviewed documents. These records survive. From this author Bartlett has built a short (only 142 text pages) but brilliant book that allows us a window on medieval life based on the words and thoughts of men and women who lived it. Three examples illustrate the method. For Bartlett the tribunal highlights the overwhelming superiority of the Church's literacy, organization, learning and culture in a society where many even

of the aristocracy were not fully literate. The efficiency and power of the Church bureaucracy is shown by the tribunal's support staff described above, a staff that even provided standardized questionnaires for the inquiry.

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