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# The Golden Age of Female Trannies in Medieval Europe

## Pope Joan, Bearded Women and Other Saints to The Tragedy of Jeanne d'Arc

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Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 1995 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Poor Pope Joan hounded to her grave by genderphobes.

**H**istory has remained generally silent about females who lived as men. But during the Middle Ages many of them reached public prominence, and were even canonized by the Church, including the remarkable and tragic St. Joan of Arc, the best known of all the women who adopted a male role.

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### Carnival, Fiestas and Satanists

In Medieval Europe the Church was not only the centre of learning and knowledge and the foundation of Canon Law, it also shaped social attitudes.

Cross dressing or any form of crossing gender was unacceptable. It took the ancient Mosaic laws quite literally in this regard, notably Deuteronomy 22:5, by which a woman or a man dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex was considered "an abomination to the Lord your God." Yet, throughout Christian Europe in the fiestas and parades which took place in church yards cross-dressing was often a fundamental part of the ceremony, especially in the harvest rituals. All Hallows Eve (Halloween), the Mummings and Carnival, remnants of Pagan rites which had been incorporated into the Christian cycle of liturgical feast days. Thus, men were expected to don their wives clothing during the festivities, but were frowned upon if they did so at other times. For a man to want to act like a woman was considered socially inappropriate, since it meant lowering his status to that of a female. On the other hand, for a woman to want to act as a man was thought to be a natural desire of raising status, and people were less offended by this, unless she made a serious bid for the power that was strictly a male privilege.

Then there was the Christian concept of the Devil as a temptress, reaching its hysterical apogee in Jacob Sprenger's document, *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches), in 1486. In this belief Satan took the shape of a beautiful woman to tempt men to sin. It was thought to be a practice closely associated with Satanism, and so men who dressed as women were suspected of Devil worship, and many of them met their end on a funeral pyre along with the reported 300,000 women burnt to death as witches between the High Middle Ages and the late eighteenth century. It seems a terrible price to pay so that married men might have an excuse for their adultery: "the Devil made me do it" they cried as another innocent woman or cross-dressing man was led to the stake.

### The Woman who became a Pope

The Middle Ages produced many legends, but none is more enduring than that of 'Pope Joan', perhaps the most enigmatic figure of Medieval history. The story begins in Germany in the early ninth century with a teenage girl known as Joan Anglicus (so named because she was born in England), who was taught to read the scriptures by her father. When he died she took up with a monk named Ulfilas, with whom she had fallen in love, but since they travelled together through dangerous territory Joan dressed as a man. As a pair of monks they journeyed to Athens and then onto the Holy Land, and Joan, now known as John, gained a reputation for his scholarship. Unfortunately, en route to Rome Ulfilas suddenly took ill and died. Heartbroken, Joan alias John entered Rome alone. His reputation preceded him and he soon got a job translating the scriptures in the papal court of Leo IV. In a short time John was elevated to a cardinal.

When Pope Leo died in 855 John was elected to the papacy as John VIII. In the two years of his reign John was apparently an outstanding pope, making Rome a great seat of learning and bringing peace between warring Italian lords. Unfortunately, he was smitten by a Benedictine Monk from Spain who was employed in the papal court and John fell pregnant. Everybody thought John's swollen belly was due to his overeating, but then, so the story goes, he gave birth in the midst of a pontifical procession. One account has it that John and his baby son were torn to shreds by an outraged mob. Yet another account claims that the baby grew up to become Pope Adrian III. The Catholic Church has hotly denied the story of Pope Joan for centuries, and in time the Medieval history of the female pope passed into legend. But a few scholars of Medieval history have produced evidence in support of the existence of Pope Joan, and to this day there is a persistent rumour that in the Vatican since John VIII in the inaugural chair on which the newly elected pope sits there is a hole in its seat through which the cardinals supposedly check to see if their new pontiff possesses the appropriate genitalia.

## Bearded Women and Other Saints

In Medieval times it was not so much gender behaviours which determined the social differences between men and women, but the biological factors of menstruation and pregnancy in females. So long as women had periods and the potential for childbirth they could not assume a male role. On the other hand, men with effeminate inclinations were attracted to the holy orders and priesthoods as a means of avoiding such masculine pursuits as fatherhood, knighthood and mercenary soldiers. Conversely, women who wished to avoid traditional feminine roles often entered convents as nuns. But, in the more extreme cases of feminine aversion, women cross-dressed as monks and priests. Thus, the male holy orders became something of a common ground for gender-crossers of both sexes. Examples of women who crossed gender by disguising themselves as holy men abound in Medieval history and legends. What is extraordinary in these stories is the fact that these women usually crossed gender following some crisis or upheaval in their lives. Take the example of the so-called bearded saints like Sts. Galla and Paula, women who suddenly grew masculine facial hair in response to a shock of being forced into some form of ultra-feminine behaviour. The best known of the bearded saints is the Christian daughter of a Pagan Portuguese king, Uncumber, who grew a moustache and long curly beard to avoid having to marry the king of Sicily under her father's orders. Uncumber's enraged father had her crucified, and so she entered the kingdom of God as a Christian martyr. This is obviously a Medieval legend attempting to explain Uncumber's very unfeminine behaviour in biological terms, but turning her crossed gender behaviour into the chaste actions of a saint.

But there was some historical basis in the stories of other famous saints of the Middle Ages. Pelagia was one of these historic saints. She was a dancing girl and prostitute in Antioch, and an apparently beautiful woman converted to Christianity by the saintly Bishop Nonus. Pelagia found a way of disowning her wicked past by leaving Antioch dressed as a man. After many years of travelling in the Holy Land, Pelagia returned to Europe and entered a monastery, where he was given the task of looking after a nunnery as its prior. But, after being accused of raping a nun he chose to flee rather than admit to his biological sex. After that Pelagia returned to the Holy Land to become a desert hermit noted for his asceticism. Upon his death in old age still living a solitary existence in the wilderness, mourners who discovered that he was a female declared: "Glory be to thee O Lord Jesus, for thou hast many hidden treasures on Earth, as well female as male."

Another historical figure is Saint Hildegund, apparently the daughter of a knight of Neuss on the Rhine. The knight took his twelve-year-old daughter on a journey to the Holy Land dressed as a boy known as Joseph. But the knight died suddenly in Jerusalem and Joseph was forced to fend for himself. He was robbed of what money his father carried with him and in an effort to make his way back to Europe joined an old priest on his way to Rome. Joseph fell in with a band of robbers but was captured by Italian soldiers who were determined to hang him. But he proved his innocence by undergoing an ordeal of hot irons. Later he entered a monastery in Germany where he lived as a monk until his death in old age, when his fellow monks were genuinely shocked to discover that their famous old monk was actually a female. There were many other female saints throughout the Middle Ages who became monks. Truly was this the golden age of female gender-crossers.

## The Tragedy of Jeanne d'Arc

It is hard to imagine a more tragic figure in Medieval history than Jeanne d'Arc, better known as St. Joan of Arc. Born in the little French village of Domremy on the Meuse River to a peasant couple in 1412, Joan became a devout Christian who would rather kneel in church than enjoy festivities in her community. At thirteen she began hearing voices which she ascribed to angels. Over the next three years these voices became more and more political in their demands upon her. In 1428 they told her to lead a French army against the invading English and crown the Dauphin Charles king of France. After a period of ridicule she was eventually granted commandship over the French forces at the siege of Orleans. What convinced the Dauphin to appoint her military commander remains a secret, but some say Charles saw divinity in her eyes. However she achieved the appointment, Joan successfully led a French victory over the English at Orleans in 1429, despite receiving an arrow wound whilst scaling the city's walls. Joan followed this victory up with other victories at Reims, Compeigne and Beauvais, and received another wound during the siege of Paris.

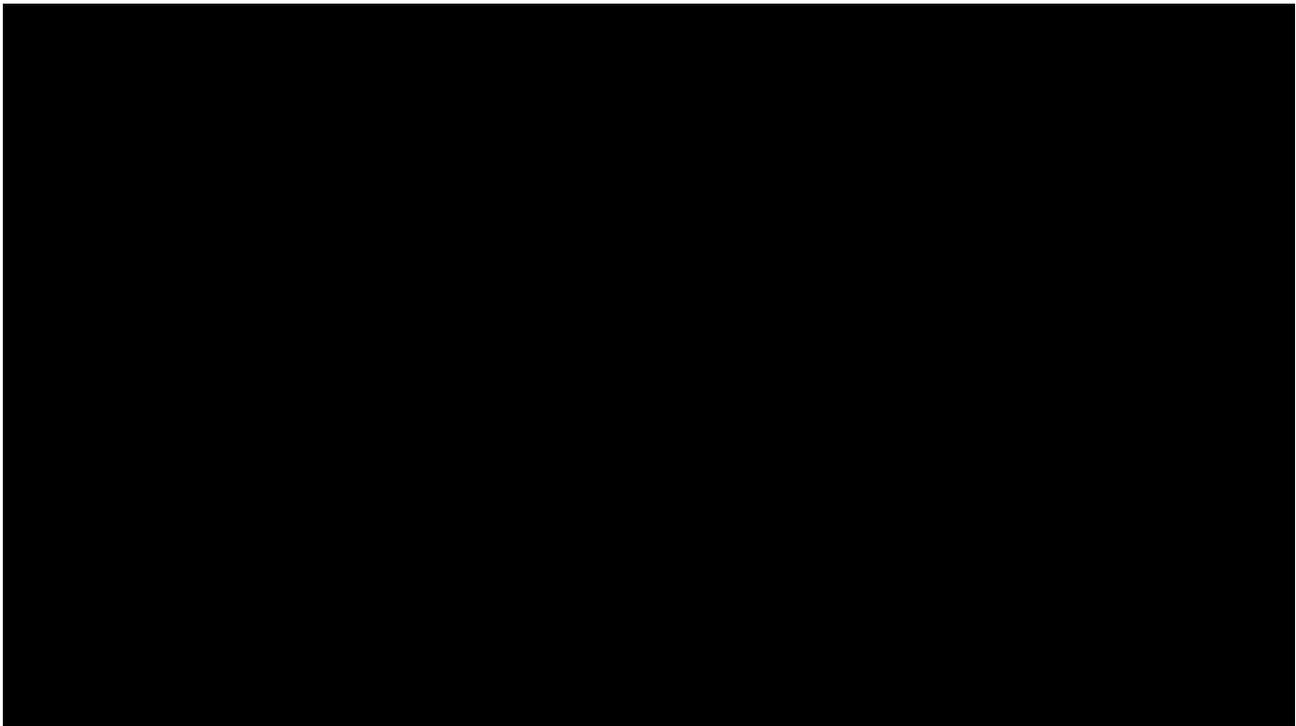
These were remarkable victories achieved by a flagging French army in a short time over triumphant English forces, and all the more remarkable for being led by a seventeen-year-old girl. Throughout this warring period Joan dressed entirely in masculine clothing, including cropping her hair short in the style of a French knight, and wearing chain mail, plate armour and helmet, spurs, sword and dagger. Even during moments of peace she continued to dress in men's hose, tunic and cap, including attending the coronation of Charles VII (formerly the Dauphin) at the king's side. Eventually the 'Maid of Orleans' was captured by the treacherous Burgundians and after failing to get a ransom from Charles they turned her over to the English, who were anxious to burn her immediately. However, the Church stepped in and demanded a trial. She was charged with treason against God.

Joan's trial was a sham. It was an obvious attempt at humiliating her and proving that she had demonic aid in defeating the English, because no mere girl alone could achieve such a feat. Faced with being burnt alive Joan recanted, agreeing she lied about her heavenly voices, and agreeing to wear female clothing thereafter. Remember, this was a time when a common belief about the Devil was that he disguised himself as a woman to cause men to sin. But, in her cell Joan chose to don her more familiar male garb and her inquisitors took this to mean she had relapsed and fallen back into the hands of the Devil. She was burnt alive as a witch on 30th May 1431. There is no doubt that Joan's cross-dressing was merely a political excuse to execute her. Joan threatened men much more than Pope Joan, Pelagia or the bearded saints, for as Medieval historian Vern Bullough remarked: "Quite obviously for a woman to assume a male guise to become more holy was permitted, but to compete with men on masculine grounds such as warfare was simply not permitted. Such competition represented not a gain in the status of women but a loss of status for men." Thus, Jeanne d'Arc was a true victim of genderisation; she died a sexual martyr for defying the boundaries of the prescribed social sex roles. In 1456, just twenty-five-years after her death, the papal court finally declared her innocent. In 1920 she was canonized, and today, rightly so, she is France's patron saint.

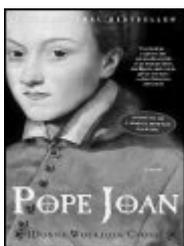
### Joan Anglicus (Pope Joan)

**From Wikipedia:**  Pope Joan was a legendary female Pope who allegedly reigned for a few years some time during the Middle Ages. According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the story first appeared in thirteenth century chronicles, and was subsequently spread and embellished throughout Europe. It was widely believed for centuries, though modern religious scholars consider it fictitious, perhaps deriving from historical folklore regarding Roman monuments or from anti-papal satire.

The first mention of the female pope was written early in the 13th century and appears in the chronicle of Jean de Mailly. In his telling, the female pope is not named, and the events are set in 1099. However the most popular and influential version, and the first to attach a name to the figure, was that interpolated into Martin of Troppau's Chronicon Pontificum et Imperatorum, later in the 13th century. He indicates that she was known as "John Anglicus" or "John of Mainz". He also changes the date from the 11th to the 9th century, indicating that Joan reigned between Leo IV and Benedict III in the 850s. Most versions of her story describe her as a talented and learned woman who disguises herself as a man, often at the behest of a lover. In the most common accounts, due to her abilities, she rises through the church hierarchy, eventually being elected pope. However, while riding on horseback, she gives birth, thus exposing her sex. In most versions, she dies shortly after, either being killed by an angry mob or from natural causes. Her memory is then shunned by her successors.

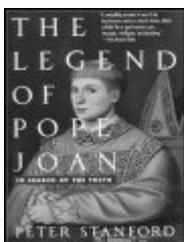


In 2009, the story of Pope Joan based on Donna Woolfolk Cross' novel was adapted into a Dutch movie directed by Sönke Wortmann, writers: Donna Woolfolk Cross (novel) and Heinrich Hadding (screenplay)



**Pope Joan: A Novel**  
Author: Donna Woolfolk-Cross  
Published by Broadway (2009)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0307452368

**From Amazon Books:**  For a thousand years her existence has been denied. She is the legend that will not die – Pope Joan, the ninth-century woman who disguised herself as a man and rose to become the only female ever to sit on the throne of St. Peter. Now in this riveting novel, Donna Woolfolk Cross paints a sweeping portrait of an unforgettable heroine who struggles against restrictions her soul cannot accept. Brilliant and talented, young Joan rebels against medieval social strictures forbidding women to learn. When her brother is brutally killed during a Viking attack, Joan takes up his cloak – and his identity – and enters the monastery of Fulda. As Brother John Anglicus, Joan distinguishes herself as a great scholar and healer. Eventually, she is drawn to Rome, where she becomes enmeshed in a dangerous web of love, passion, and politics. Triumphant over appalling odds, she finally attains the highest office in Christendom – wielding a power greater than any woman before or since. But such power always comes at a price ... In this international bestseller, Cross brings the Dark Ages to life in all their brutal splendour and shares the dramatic story of a woman whose strength of vision led her to defy the social restrictions of her day.



**The Legend of Pope Joan: In Search of the Truth**  
Author: Peter Stanford  
Published by Berkley Trade (2000)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0425173473

**From Amazon Books:**  The legend of Pope Joan - an Englishwoman who disguised herself as a man and became pope in the ninth century - has been a source of controversy for a thousand years. Fascinated by her story, but sceptical of its authenticity, British journalist Peter Stanford decided to investigate the facts. His search for the truth has produced the definitive account of one of the most

intriguing mysteries of the Catholic Church. With all the riveting drama of an historical detective novel, this exciting study utilizes a variety of sources and methods, from ancient papal tomes to present-day psychological profiling. And in an age when many women identify with Joan's struggle for recognition in a male-dominated institution, Stanford speculates on what her legend's longevity means for the church - and asks why she still has such a powerful grip on our imaginations.

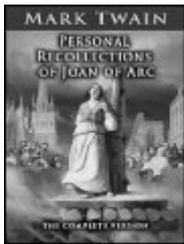
## Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc)

**From Wikipedia:**  Joan of Arc, nicknamed "The Maid of Orléans", is a folk heroine of France and a Roman Catholic saint. She was born a peasant girl in what is now eastern France. Claiming divine guidance, she led the French army to several important victories during the Hundred Years' War, which paved the way for the coronation of Charles VII of France. She was captured by the Burgundians, transferred to the English in exchange for money, put on trial by the pro-English Bishop of Beauvais Pierre Cauchon for charges of "insubordination and heterodoxy", and was burned at the stake for heresy when she was 19 years old.



Twenty-five years after her execution, an inquisitorial court authorized by Pope Callixtus III examined the trial, pronounced her innocent, and declared her a martyr. Joan of Arc was beatified in 1909 and canonized in 1920. She is (along with St. Denis, St. Martin of Tours, St. Louis IX, and St. Theresa of Lisieux), one of the patron saints of France. Joan said she had received visions from God instructing her to support Charles VII and recover France from English domination late in the Hundred Years' War. The uncrowned King Charles VII sent her to the siege of Orléans as part of a relief mission. She gained prominence when she overcame the dismissive attitude of veteran commanders and lifted the siege in only nine days. Several additional swift victories led to Charles VII's coronation at Reims.

To the present day, Joan of Arc has remained a significant figure in Western civilization. From Napoleon I onward, French politicians of all leanings have invoked her memory and many famous writers and composers have created works about her. Cultural depictions of Joan of Arc have continued in film, theatre, television, video games, music, and performances.



**Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc: The Complete Version**  
Author: Mark Twain  
Publisher: Empire Books (2012)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-1619492790

**From Amazon Books:**  Twain said, "I like Joan of Arc best of all my books; and it is the best; I know it perfectly well. And besides, it furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others; twelve years of preparation, and two years of writing. The others need no preparation and got none". Mark Twain's work on Joan of Arc is titled in full *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, by the Sieur Louis de Conte who is identified further as Joan's page and secretary. The work is

fictionally presented as a translation from the manuscript by Jean Francois Alden, or, in the words of the published book, "Freely Translated out of the Ancient French into Modern English from the Original Unpublished Manuscript in the National Archives of France". De Conte is a fictionalized version of Joan of Arc's page Louis de Contes, and provides narrative unity to the story. He is presented as an individual who was with Joan during the three major phases of her life - as a youth in Domremy, as the commander of Charles' army on military campaign, and as a defendant at the trial in Rouen. The book is presented as a translation by Alden of de Conte's memoirs, written in his later years for the benefit of his descendants.



**The Maid and the Queen: The Secret History of Joan of Arc**  
Author: Nancy Goldstone  
Publisher: Viking Adult (2012)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0670023337

**From Amazon Books:**  Politically astute, ambitious, and beautiful, Yolande of Aragon, queen of Sicily, was one of the most powerful women of the Middle Ages. Caught in the complex dynastic battle of the Hundred Years War, Yolande championed the dauphin's cause against the forces of England and Burgundy, drawing on her savvy, her statecraft, and her intimate network of spies. But the enemy seemed invincible. Just as French hopes dimmed, an astonishingly courageous young

woman named Joan of Arc arrived from the farthest recesses of the kingdom, claiming she carried a divine message - a message that would change the course of history and ultimately lead to the coronation of Charles VII and the triumph of France. Now, on the six hundredth anniversary of the birth of Joan of Arc, this fascinating book explores the relationship between these two remarkable women, and deepens our understanding of this dramatic period in history. How did an illiterate peasant girl gain access to the future king of France, earn his trust, and ultimately lead his forces into battle? Was it only the hand of God that moved Joan of Arc - or was it also Yolande of Aragon?

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.