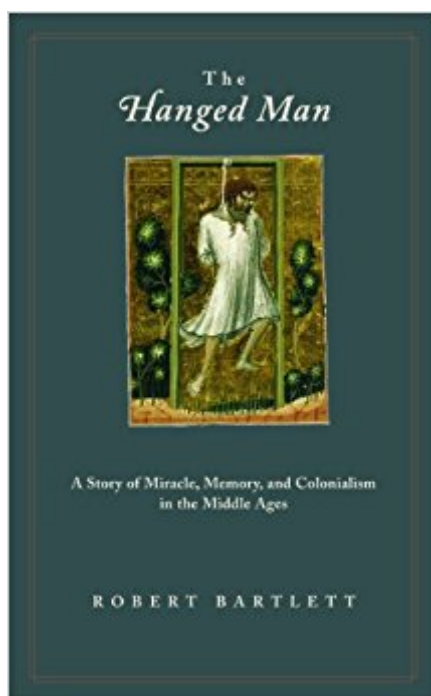


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# The Hanged Man: A Story Of Miracle, Memory, And Colonialism In The Middle Ages



## 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

Thoroughly researched, insightful, and well written, this book delves into a 700 year old event: The miraculous resurrection of a hanged criminal at the intercession of a recently deceased cleric. For an event of that era, there is an unusual wealth of extant historic records, because the miracle was the focus of an official Church investigation to determine whether the deceased cleric was worthy of sainthood. The author sets the scene, providing just the right amount of historical context during the English conquest of Wales. He methodically fills in the backdrop of the hanging, including the central characters in the drama. The author avoids the condescending, politically correct tone that sometimes characterizes modern popular histories of the Middle Ages. He avoids cynical speculation as to the motives of those urging beatification for their hoped soon-to-be local saint. I very much appreciated his fair, evenhanded approach, as it enabled me to immerse myself in the events with all their ambiguity and complexity of faith, miracle, power, pride, and greed. It's like reading an old newspaper, giving you the "you are here" feeling. I very much enjoyed this book.

The book places a miracle in the middle of a swirl of other activity. Political connections, war, religion, including a canonization, are all examined with this unusual event at the center. It is an interesting snapshot of life in the middle ages, with the camera focused on a man who was hanged twice in the same day and lived to tell about it.

Excellent guided walk through all the aspects of the miracle involving William Cragh and the canonization of Thomas de Cantilupe.

good product, great condition, speedy shipping, I was very impressed

a single event put into its context with rich detail about the historical context and participants.

Excellent book.

I don't know about you, but when I hear that a book features hangings, miracles, and politics set

against the backdrop of Medieval England, I think of a Showtime original TV series, not a book that probes into a true court case from 1307. Author Robert Bartlett (also author of *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal*) manages to craft an intriguing and in-depth account that makes the subject of Medieval Law interesting to both scholars and hobby historians alike in *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism*. The "hanged man" in question is one William Cragh, a Welshman who was hung not once, but three times and then resurrected as a result of what may or may not have been a miracle performed by Thomas de Cantilupe, bishop of Hereford. Twenty-five years later, an investigation was opened to get to the bottom of what really happened in an effort to determine if de Cantilupe deserved to be made a saint. Bartlett takes this fascinating event and uses it as a window into Medieval society. As he explains, "By analyzing the record carefully, as if with a magnifying glass, we can see details of life and thought in the Middle Ages that would otherwise not be known to us. Reading the statements that the witnesses made gives us as good an idea as we are likely to get of spoken words of the past in the time before the tape recorder." *The Hanged Man* is enjoyable, easy to read, and entertaining. Not many historical analyses can say that!

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. This leads easily to a brief discussion of the revolutionary change in

the canonization process made by Pope Innocent III's decision to replace the old primarily local process (beginning with popular veneration) by a centralized process under the exclusive control of the papal court. Second, the Welsh resistance to the English provides illustrates the colonial, guerilla and vicious local nature of much of the fighting. Much was insurrectionary action: raids, counter raids and punitive expeditions. In 1377, however, Edward I of England began the outright conquest of Wales for the English crown and the firm imposition of royal authority on all living there, including the Marcher barons. This began almost twenty years of wars and so-called rebellions as well as the building of a number of massive royal castles to hold Wales. This in turn allows discussion of the fractious nature of relations between the Marcher barons (traditionally nearly autonomous) and the English crown. Fiercely jealous of their rights and power, these families often found themselves at odds either with the crown or with one another. Between this and the Welsh wars, the whole region experienced endemic violence as well as equally bitter legal struggles. Bartlett also discusses the life of an aristocratic family in these conditions, with its constant round of disputes and war; and its worries over what rights and obligations are properly due to or from the lord. The penalties for not being touchy about these things were very real. Failure to be assertive could easily lead to loss of prestige, wealth, status and power. It was sometimes worthwhile to run dangerous risks to preserve one's rights. A corollary to this is a discussion of the role of noble women and marriage in a society where marriages were familial alliances and wives came equipped with dower and widow's rights that also had to be defended to protect offspring as well as the wife herself. Other subjects include the ceremonies of medieval hangings and what the actual hanging was like (haul them up by the neck and let them strangle), how most people thought of time and measured its passage and much more, all briefly illustrated by concrete examples from the records. The book is densely packed but written with clarity and wit. Bartlett says, "the carefully preserved record of the inquest, drowsing in the Vatican Library, allows the voices of many dead men ... to speak again." And, thanks to Robert Bartlett, their voices let us experience something of their world, otherwise vanished forever. A gem of a book.

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