



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

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Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

# Scissors and Swords

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## INTRODUCTION

### Scissors and Swords

**A**t the collapse of the Roman Empire in Europe, there were beginning to organize different independent nations and starts what historians have called "medieval" period, which stretches roughly from the fifth century until the fifteenth century. It was a period of strong influence of the Catholic Church, and life in general and customs of the people were very marked by this influence.



The Roman Empire fell by invasions of Germanic peoples, whom they called "barbarians"; they exploit the weakened situation of the empire to besiege their cities and to conquer their dominions. By this reason, when the first kingdoms of Germanics, Franks and Visigoths were formed, customs about hair dressings will be brought by them.

The medieval era was one that adhered to formal styles. Even in dress and hairstyles, people maintained formal elegance. The medieval hairstyle was a mix of varied formal styles and fantastic head-wear. The upper-class men and women used braids, buns, metallic wires and colorful silk ribbons to design intricate and artistic hairstyles.

Hair was given very much importance in the medieval period and acts like shaving a person bald was considered to be one of the worst punishments. It was humiliating for any individual to lose his/her hair entirely. Even spiritual monks shaved their heads but left a narrow strip of hair around the edges.

In this era, barbers, who, possessing razors and coordination indispensable to their trade, were called upon for numerous tasks ranging from cutting hair to amputating limbs.

# Barber Surgeons

The history of barbers and barbershops goes back over 6000 years. The earliest records of barbers show that they were the most important men in their community.

The first barbering services were performed by Egyptians in 5000 BC with instruments they had made from oyster shells or sharpened flint. Early razors made of bronze have been found that date back to 3500 BC.

**BARBER** "One whose occupation is to shave the beard and cut and dress the hair," c. 1300, from Anglo-French barbour (attested as a surname from early 13c.), from Old French barbeor, barbieor (13c., Modern French barbier, which has a more restricted sense than the English word), from Vulgar Latin \*barbatorem, from Latin barba "beard"

In some cultures, care of the hair was a religious matter. A barber was able to prevent certain evil spirits from entering a person's body through their hair. Before shaving became common, men still needed to have their beards trimmed and cared for and barbers would perform these functions. Men in Ancient Greece would have their beards, hair, and fingernails trimmed and styled by the *κουρεὺς* (*careus*), in an *agora* (market place) which also served as a social gathering for debates and gossip.

Sometimes the word "tonorial" is used to refer to barber shop services. It derives from the Latin noun "tonsor" which means *clipper* and the verb *tondere* meaning *to shear*. Further a "tonorium" is a place where trained barbers, or tonorial artists, perform their craft. In today's language, a tonorium would be the same thing as a barber shop.

Barbering was introduced to Rome by the Greek colonies in Sicily in 296 BC, and barbershops quickly became very popular centres for daily news and gossip. A morning visit to the *tonsor* became a part of the daily routine, as important as the visit to the public baths, and a young man's first shave (*tonsurā*) was considered an essential part of his coming of age ceremony. A few Roman



Figure 1 "The Barber" by Edwin Lord Weeks



On September 14, 1972, Pope Paul VI (above) ordered the abolition of the tonsure, the circular, shaving of the crown of the head that has marked preliminary steps on the way to priesthood. The command was contained in one of two documents reforming church ministry below the priesthood in which the Pope also maintained the age-old ban on women in any ministerial role, and reemphasized the rule of celibacy for priests. The Pope ruled that conferral of the first tonsure, which used to mark this event, would be replaced with a new rite "by which one who aspires to the diaconate or priesthood publicly manifests his will to offer himself to God and the church." The Pope abolished the orders of porter, exorcist and subdeacon and assigned their tasks to the offices of lector and acolyte at the same time.

*tonsors* became wealthy and influential, running shops that were favorite public locations of high society; however, most were simple tradesmen, who owned small storefronts or worked in the streets for low prices.

In the Latin or Western Rite of the Catholic Church, "first tonsure" was, in medieval times, and generally through 1972, the rite of inducting someone into the clergy and qualifying him for the civil benefits once enjoyed by clerics. Tonsure was a prerequisite for receiving the minor and major orders. Failing to maintain tonsure was the equivalent of attempting to abandon one's clerical state, and in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, any cleric in minor orders (or simply tonsured) who did not resume the tonsure within a month after being warned by his Ordinary lost the clerical state. Over time, the appearance of tonsure varied, ending up for non-monastic clergy as generally consisting of a symbolic cutting of a few tufts of hair at first tonsure in the Sign of the Cross and in wearing a bare spot on the back of the head which varied according to the degree of orders. It was not supposed to be less than the size of a communicant's host, even for a tonsuratus, someone simply tonsured, and the approximate size for a priest's tonsure was the size of a priest's host.



Figure 2 "St Bartholomen" by Carlo Crivelli, 1473

After the fall of the Roman Empire, barbers were a staple of monastery life. Monks required barbers to shave their faces and tonsures. At this time, physicians were forbidden to perform surgical procedures as the body was considered holy, and should not be violated by the hands of doctors. But monks, who also practiced as doctors, considered operations and surgical procedures as dirty and beneath their dignity, and passed those responsibilities to barbers, thus cementing them within the surgical field. Barbers who had a knack for handling sharp instruments such as scissors and razors assisted in bloodletting for the sick. As the profession progressed, barber surgeons not doctors were charged with conducting surgical operations and looking after soldiers during and after battle.

The following features some of the surprising - and often bizarre - things that medieval barbers did besides just cut hair.

## Bloodletting

Bloodletting was based on an ancient system of medicine in which blood and other bodily fluids were regarded as "humours" that had to remain in proper balance to maintain health. It is claimed to have been the most common medical practice performed by surgeons from antiquity until the late 19th century, a span of over 2,000 years.

The Talmud recommended a specific day of the week and days of the month for bloodletting, and similar rules, though less codified, can be found among Christian writings advising which saints' days were favorable for bloodletting. During medieval times bleeding charts were common, showing specific bleeding sites on the





## Barber Pole

The original barber pole had a brass wash basin at the top (representing the vessel in which leeches were kept) and bottom (representing the basin that received the blood). The pole itself represents the staff that the patient gripped during the procedure to encourage blood flow. At the Council of Tours in 1163, the clergy was banned from the practice of surgery. From then, physicians were clearly separated from the surgeons and barbers. Later, the role of the barbers was defined by the College de Saint-Côme et Saint-Damien, established by Jean Pitard in Paris circa 1210, as academic surgeons of the long robe and barber surgeons of the short robe. In Renaissance-era Amsterdam, the surgeons used the colored stripes to indicate that they were prepared to bleed their patients (red), set bones or pull teeth (white), or give a shave if nothing more urgent was needed (blue).

body in alignment with the planets and zodiacs. Islamic medical authors also advised bloodletting, particularly for fevers. It was practiced according to seasons and certain phases of the moon in the lunar calendar. The practice was probably passed by the Greeks with the translation of ancient texts to Arabic and is different than bloodletting by cupping mentioned in the traditions of Muhammad. When Muslim theories became known in the Latin-speaking countries of Europe, bloodletting became more widespread. Together with cautery, it was central to Arabic surgery.

As one medieval medical textbook boasted:

*“Bloodletting...clears the mind, strengthens the memory, cleanses the guts, dries up the brain, warms the marrow, sharpens the hearing, curbs tears, promotes digestion, produces a musical voice, dispels sleeplessness, drives away anxiety, feeds the blood, rids it of poisonous matter and gives long life,,it cures pains, fevers and various sicknesses, and makes the urine clear and clean.”*

## Advertising with a bowl of blood

Medieval barbers looking to advertise their bloodletting skills placed bowls of human blood in their shop windows. The blood congealed and got putrid. The people of London pushed for a law banning the displays. In 1307, the law passed, with the following wording: “No barbers shall be so bold or so hardy as to put blood in their windows.” Lawmakers advised them to throw it into the river Thames instead. Some historians think this is when the practice of wrapping a bloody cloth around a pole outside the shop started.

## Shampooing with stale urine

Human urine has its uses as a cleansing agent. The Romans knew it; in fact, they recycled their urine to help get their togas cleaner. Barbers in the Middle Ages knew it, too, and used stale urine - known as lotium - as a shampoo for their clients.

## Shaving with beer foam

A document from 1499 detailing the affairs of The Gild of Barbers of Oxford mentions ale-baisters. Research revealed that the lowest class of medieval barbers couldn't afford a plentiful supply of shaving soap, so they sometimes turned to froth of ale for basting their patients' faces instead.



Figure 3 Early woodcut of a barber surgeon



## Hippocratic Oath

is an oath of ethics historically taken by physicians. It is one of the most widely known of Greek medical texts. In its original form, it requires a new physician to swear, by a number of healing gods, to uphold specific ethical standards. The oath is the earliest expression of medical ethics in the Western world, establishing several principles of medical ethics which remain of paramount significance today. These include the principles of medical confidentiality and non-maleficence. The original oath was written in Ionic Greek, between the fifth and third centuries BC. Although it is traditionally attributed to the Greek doctor Hippocrates and it is usually included in the Hippocratic Corpus, most modern scholars do not regard it as having been written by Hippocrates himself. The oldest partial fragments of the oath date to circa AD 275.

## Removing kidney stones in public

Barbers in the Middle Ages were tasked with removing kidney stones, and they often did it with an audience watching. Traveling from town to town with a special “lithotomy” table in tow, talented barbers would perform the procedure in just a few minutes, in public, in order to help advertise their services. Some barbers were just showmen, looking to make a quick buck. These so-called “stonecutters” were heavily fined if their procedure didn’t go according to plan.

## Making wax organs and limbs

A number of medieval barbers also doubled as chandlers. Chandlers (candle makers) and barbers both used a lot of wax: barbers used it as a base in ointments, and chandlers had a great need for it in their candle-making. Sometimes barbers

practiced a strange procedure where they would treat a patient by using the wax to make a model of their diseased organs. They would then present the wax organ at a shrine in an effort to call upon the divine to ease their patient’s suffering.

Alternatively, they would make a limb-shaped candle and burn it at a shrine for patients with arm or leg issues.



Figure 4 Wax offerings

## Early anesthesia

Barbers performing minor surgeries in the Middle Ages sometimes offered anesthetic in the form of something

called a soporific sponge - a primitive form of chloroform, made by soaking a sea sponge in a mix containing ingredients such as opium, hemlock, mandrake, ivy, hyoscyamine, and mulberry juice, among others. The sponge is supposed to totally dry out “*in the sun during the dog-days until all the liquid is consumed.*” When the barber needed to knock someone out, they reconstituted the sponge by dipping it in water and then placed it under the patient’s nose.

## Dissections

Barbers for a long stretch in the Middle Ages didn’t receive the same level of respect as university-educated physician-monks. Blood-letting, kidney stone removal, tooth-pulling - the physicians and surgeons of the time didn’t want to do that kind of work (or with some procedures, like blood-letting, the Pope told them they could not).

Dissection is another example: barbers were asked to do the actual work of dissection while a physician or anatomist told them what to do, step-by-step.

Physician Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) helped change that when he argued, during his second-ever anatomical lecture, that the anatomist would be better served doing the work themselves.





## Beards

Throughout the course of history, societal attitudes toward male beards have varied widely depending on factors such as prevailing cultural-religious traditions and the current era's fashion trends. Some religions (such as Islam, Traditional Christianity, Orthodox Judaism and Sikhism) have considered a full beard to be absolutely essential for all males able to grow one and mandate it as part of their official dogma. Other cultures, even while not officially mandating it, view a beard as central to a man's virility, exemplifying such virtues as wisdom, strength, sexual prowess and high social status. In cultures where facial hair is uncommon (or currently out of fashion), beards may be associated with poor hygiene or an uncivilized, dangerous demeanor. In the Middle-Age Europe, a beard displayed a knight's virility and honor. The Castilian knight El Cid is described in *The Lay of the Cid* as "the one with the flowery beard". Holding somebody else's beard was a serious offence that had to be righted in a duel.

# Medieval Hairstyles

## Men

The precise sentiments attached to hair have fluctuated over the medieval period, but for the most part, a full head of hair was typically associated with privilege and power. Merovingian kings preferred to lose their heads rather than their hair, because a haircut was a sign of humiliation, even the loss of the claims to kingship as illustrated in the following story.

*"Whilst residing in Paris in the sixth century, Queen Clotild (d. 554), the widow of the Merovingian ruler Clovis, became the unwilling subject of the inveterate plotting of her sons, Lothar and Childebert, who were jealous of her guardianship of her grandsons, the children of their brother, Chlodomer. Childebert spread the rumour that he and his brother were to plan the coronation of the young princes and sent a message to Clotild to that effect. When the boys were dispatched to their uncles they were seized and separated from their household. Lothar and Childebert then sent their benchman Arcadius to the Queen with a pair of scissors in one hand and a sword in the other.*

*"He offered the Queen an ultimatum. Would she wish to see her grandsons live with their hair cut short, or would she prefer to see them killed? Beside herself with grief, Clotild stated that if they were not to succeed to the throne she would rather see them dead than with their hair cut short. Rejecting the scissors, she opted for the sword."*

The sequel to this story, told by Gregory of Tours (d. 594), reveals an alternative to death or short-haired dishonor. A third grandson, Chlodovald, was well guarded and escaped his uncles. Seeking to escape the fate of his brothers, he cut his hair short with his own hands and became a priest. Voluntary tonsuring did not carry the ignominy of shearing under duress.

Short hair in the Middle Ages most often denoted that a man was of low social standing. A peasant who toiled daily in the fields couldn't afford to keep his hair clean, so it was just as well to chop it off. Closely cropped hair could also mark a man as a serf, bound to the land and his lord. It also explains why the tonsure was such an important rite for monks and clerics. Just as the haircut is the first thing a modern man receives when entering military life, a monk or cleric traditionally received a haircut before entering those states of life to symbolize the cutting away of worldly glory and ambition.

During the 11<sup>th</sup> century and for some time thereafter, how you wore your hair in England depended on who you were. The invading Normans, for the most part, kept their hair short and part of their head might even be shaved. However, William II aka William Rufus, who became King of England upon his father's death in September 1087, was said to wear his blond hair long (as did many men at his court) and parted in the middle with his forehead bare. Generally, the Normans wore bangs and no beards, though they might have a mustache.

Saxons, like Hereward the Wake, who fought William the Conqueror would wear their hair long and they would have facial hair, most likely a beard as well as a

mustache. In places like York, once the capital of the Danelaw, the styles might have resembled their Viking forefathers.

Except for the Normans, men of medieval England and Scotland wore their hair long, at least to the chin and perhaps to the shoulders. Facial hair, even beards, abounded. In the later medieval period, the beards became shorter, more controlled and sometimes not worn at all.

## Women

Medieval movies have a great deal to answer for when it comes to the accurate portrayal of women's hair styling during the Middle Ages. Characters are usually shown with very long, flowing tresses and nothing or little more than a metal circlet around the forehead. Reality, however, was usually far from that.

Women's hair has long been associated with sinfulness and temptation, and with medieval life centering heavily on the church, it was the general opinion that the less it was displayed, the better. Any decent, God-fearing woman in England, France and some of Europe for the most part, went to great pains to conceal her hair in public. Even the upper classes and royalty restrained their hair.

Flowing tresses can be seen in some illuminations with some styles of costume, although it is more usual for only unmarried, young women to have hair loose. Italian women abandoned the veil considerably earlier than her other counterparts and during the 14th and 15th centuries chose to adorn the hair with elaborate plaits, beads and wound ribbons. Generally, during the bulk of the medieval period, a married woman would have covered her head with veils, wimples, cloths, barbettes, hairnets, veils, hats, hoods or a combination of them to avoid her hair showing. The notable exception on this hair-covering trend is Italy, where women usually tied their braids crisscrossed over the top of the head.

Broadly speaking, only a woman of very poor breeding or a prostitute did nothing with her hair and even peasant women made an effort to appear modest and decent. Only in some circumstances, like the marriage of a royal couple, can the bride be seen depicted with her hair out.

### Braids

Plaited and braided hairstyles were extremely popular during the medieval period for women of all ages and all classes. Shown at right is a detail from a painting *The Nativity* dated around the 1400s. It shows a young girl with a popular medieval hair style for workers- two plaits brought from the nape of the neck and crossed over the top of her head and tied together.



Not only was this style easy to dress at home oneself without assistance, it looked pleasing to the eye, was considered modest and kept the hair tied up and clean when performing manual chores. Often these plaits were interwound with ribbon for decoration and also for securing purposes. Very often, these ribbon-encased plaits

are mistaken for a padded roll of some kind with ribbon woven around it, which was not the case.



Figure 5 bust of Marie de France

By the early decades of the 14th century, fashionable women in England discarded the barbette and fillet combination in favor of plaits worn in front of the ear on each side of the face. The hairstyle originated in France before the end of the 13th century.

The bust at left is dated between 1327 and 1341 is of Marie de France and shows this hairstyle although worn with a fillet. This style was adopted by both the lower classes and the upper classes and can be seen in many illuminations and paintings of the period.

### Cornettes

Cornettes were the name often given to the hairstyle where the hair is either plaited or raised up onto the temples into horn-like shapes. In 1350, Bishop Gilles li Muisis was greatly displeased by the vanity of women who adopted these hairstyles which he called *cornes* and headdresses of a similar style known as *hauchettes*, and repeatedly sermonized against them. The Van Eyck painting known as *the Aldolphini Wedding* dated at 1434 shows the young woman with her fashionable cow-like cornettes under a veil with rows of pleats at the edges.



Figure 6 the Aldolphini Wedding by Van Eyck, 1434

### Ramshorns

Around the end of the 13th century, a very popular form of hairstyle was the ramshorn, which was created by parting the hair down the center and coiling the hair over the ears around into a scroll like that of a ram's horn. This style became popular again in Europe in the later 15th century with the addition of silks, ribbons and veils interwoven into the side horns. Jeweled brooches were often included as part of the dressing at the top of the head. Shown at left, a detail from the *Portrait of Battista Sforza* from 1465-1466 by Francesco showing the later ramshorn as it was worn by fashionable noble ladies. This style of hairstyle was not suited to the working classes, who would have found it most impractical.



Figure 7 Portrait of Battista Sforza by Francesco

### Hair Dressed European Style

While hair tended to be covered with veils and elaborate headdresses throughout France and England, veils seem to be discarded in Italy in favor of hair dressed with pearls, ribbons, beading and brooches. As with the later ramshorn style, these hairstyles would have been worn by the upper classes

only as the time and effort required to dress and finish off these hairstyles would not have suited the lifestyles of the working classes.

Shown at right is a detail from a painting from 1465, Pollaiuolo's *Portrait of a Young Woman*, showing a transparent veil containing some of the hair, wrapped over the ears and secured with both cords and beads with a decorative jeweled brooch at the top.



Figure 8 *Portrait of a Young Woman* by Pollaiuolo

### **False Hairpieces & Wigs**

In a time where modesty and virtue were embraced and desired, it seems unlikely that additional hair would be called for, but it appears that wigs and false tresses were in vogue and the makers of such were regulated and had a guild of their own. Hair extensions have been found in archaeological digs dating from early times although only one or two examples date to the medieval period specifically. A plaited silk hairpiece attached to a silk fillet which was probably jeweled, was found in London and dates to second quarter of the 14th century.

Not surprisingly, the clergy tried to discourage the wearing of false hair by women by denouncing false hair as the sin of vanity. Gilles d'Orleans, a preacher from Paris in the 13th century reminded his parishioners that the wigs they wore were likely to be made from the shorn heads of those now suffering in hell or purgatory. False tresses were known to be made of flax, wool, cotton and silk. The Old Woman from the *Roman de la Rose* offers this advice for a woman whose hair is lacking:

*And if she sees that her beautiful blond hair is falling out (a most mournful sight), or if it has to be cropped as a result of a serious illness and her beauty spoiled too soon, or if some angry roister should happen to tear it out so that there is no way in which she can regain her thick tresses, she should have the hair of some dead woman brought to her, or pads of light coloured silk, and stuff it all into false hairpieces. She should wear such horns above her ears that no stag or goat or unicorn could surpass them, not though their head were to burst with the effort..*

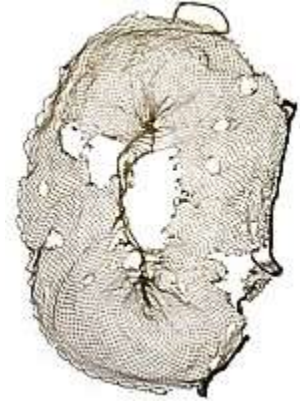
Stella Mary Newton, in her book *Fashion In The Age Of The Black Prince*, has this to say about the wearing of false hair:

*In 1310, the Bishop of Florence gave orders that nobody of any class or standing whatsoever was to indulge in fraud by wearing of the head, with intent to deceive, any stuffed out false hair- long falling hairpieces strands of hair or curls, although any woman whose own hair was manifestly inadequate might wear plaits of flax or wool or silk attached to her own hair, thus avoiding undue ornamentation while appearing natural.*



### Hairnets

Hairnets were known and extensively used in medieval times as the way of restraining a woman's hair. A hairnet could be used in conjunction with many of the beautiful and strange medieval headpieces. Hairnets were almost always worn under a veil of some kind during the medieval period. During the renaissance, the hairnet known as the snood was worn alone. The snood tended to be less fine and often set with jewels.



Shown at right is a hairnet found at a London dig, dated in the 1300s, which looks like the type that is available today. Four examples of hairnets have been discovered in London excavations- one made of silk from the late 13th century and three knotted silk ones from the 14th century. These are all the finer kind, hand knotted and with fingerloop braid around the edges which were popularly worn before the heavier mesh cauls became sturdier and jewels were attached.

### Eyebrows & hairlines

During a large portion of the medieval period, the beautiful woman emphasised her high, round forehead. If a woman was unfortunate to have been naturally cursed with a low hairline, the correct and fashionable look was artificially enhanced by the plucking of the hairline back up towards the crown of the head. This look was accentuated by reducing the eyebrows to a barely-there line.

Even though plucking the eyebrows and hairline at the top of the forehead was commonplace for many women, the church was, as always, extremely unhappy about this. In *Confessionale*, clergymen are encouraged to ask those who came to confession:



*If she has plucked hair from her neck, or brows or beard for laviciousness or to please men... This is a mortal sin unless she does so to remedy severe disfigurement or so as not to be looked down on by her husband.*

Many books cite small tweezers made from copper alloy or silver as part of medieval toiletry sets. The tweezers above are dated from the 15th century and feature brass tweezers, an earscoop and a nail pick, all hinged to fold away when not in use.

### Children

Medieval children's hairstyles were not very different from the hairstyles of the grownups. For boys, sometimes the head was simply shaved which was more common among the peasants and the lower classes. Among the nobility, exemplified earlier, the common custom for medieval children hairstyles was to let the hair grow long and sometimes part it from the middle, just like the grownups. Similarly, for girls, it was a common practice to arrange hair into two braids on each side with the hair parted from the middle. Another popular medieval children hairstyle which was more common among the working classes consisted of two plaits brought from the nape of the neck which were then crossed over the top of the head and tied together.



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