

Chapter 1 : Is there any truth about the legend of "Pope Joan"? - Catholic Straight Answers

Pope Joan, (Ioannes Anglicus) was, according to popular legend, a woman who reigned as pope for a few years during the Middle Ages. The story first appeared in chronicles in the 13th century and subsequently spread throughout Europe.

Pope Joan The claim that a woman, often called Pope Joan, became pope first appeared in a Dominican chronicle in 1275. It soon spread Europe-wide through preaching friars. The story grew in embellishment but centred on a set of claims. Jean de Mailly, a French Dominican at Metz, places the story in the year 1009, in his *Chronica Universalis Mettensis*, which dates from approximately 1280 and gives what is almost certainly the earliest account of the woman who became known as Pope Joan. His compatriot Stephen of Bourbon acknowledges this by placing her rule at approximately 1009. The Mystery of Pope Joan. Generally, there are two versions of the legend. In the first, an English woman, called Joan, went to Athens with her lover, and studied there. In the second, a German woman called Giliberta was born in Mainz. In time, she rose to the highest office of the church, becoming a pope. She was publicly stoned to death by the astonished crowd, and according to the legend, removed from the Vatican archives. As a consequence, certain traditions stated that popes throughout the medieval period were required to undergo a procedure wherein they sat on a special chair with a hole in the seat. A cardinal would have the task of putting his hand up the hole to check whether the pope had testicles, or doing a visual examination. It is probably a scurrilous legend based on the existence of two ancient stone chairs with holes in the seats that probably dated from Roman times and may have been used because of their ancient imperial origins. Their original purpose is obscure. The story may well be a satire that came to be believed as reality. This view is generally accepted among historians. Prophecy of the Popes[edit] According to the Prophecy of the Popes, some interpretations hold that after Pope Benedict XVI, who resigned on 28 February 2013, [1] there will be one pope left before the destruction of Rome. This individual is labelled by the prophecy as Petrus Romanus. Documents of Jesus Christ[edit] It is sometimes claimed that there exists a collection of documents that directly refer to Jesus, such as the execution order for Jesus signed by Pontius Pilate, or were personally written by Jesus, explaining to his followers how to conduct the formation of the Catholic Church after his death, or even the exact date of his return to judge mankind. These documents are said to be a closely guarded secret of the Catholic Church, and supposedly are hidden in the Vatican Secret Archives, or at past times in an underground vault in the event that Nazi Germany would invade the Vatican. However, there is no solid evidence for any of these claims; in history, only one document has ever been attributed to Jesus himself, the Letter of Christ and Abgarus. The correspondence was rejected as apocryphal by Pope Gelasius I and a Roman synod c. 495. Jewish legends[edit] Jewish legends related to the papacy include the Jewish pope Andreas and also concerning the fate of the Menorah, which some, including former Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs Shimon Shetreet, have believed is being held in secret by the Vatican, [4] and the idea of hidden Jewish manuscripts in the Vatican Secret Archives.

Chapter 2 : Legends surrounding the papacy - Wikipedia

Since the Pope Joan story was pretty well-known, it was assumed by many that an examination of a new pope's testicles had arisen from that scandal to make sure the pope was indeed male. Such a

September 16, And now, an analysis of ancient silver coins suggests that the ordained woman may have actually lived. According to legends from the Middle Ages, a pope named John, or Johannes Anglicus, who reigned during the middle of the ninth century, was actually a woman, Pope Joan. For instance, a story from the 13th century written by a Dominican monk from Poland named Martin claimed that Pope Joan became pregnant and gave birth during a church procession. The doubt stems in part from the great deal of confusion over the identities of popes during the middle of the ninth century. Discovering whether Pope Joan existed may not only solve a religious and historical mystery, but also factor in to modern arguments over the role of women in the church. Now, Habicht has suggested that symbols on medieval coins show that Pope Johannes Anglicus may have existed, and so, Pope Joan may have been real as well. The coins had the monogram of the pope, possibly Pope Joan, one on side and the name of the emperor of the Franks on the other. Michael Habicht The research began when Habicht was conducting unrelated work investigating burials of popes in Rome. Habicht analyzed silver coins known as deniers that were used in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. Their name comes from the ancient Roman silver coin known as the denarius. The archaeologist said that while some deniers possessed a monogram belonging to Pope John VIII, earlier ones had a significantly different monogram. He noted several historical sources that suggested a Pope John reigned from to Previous scientific literature suggested that these coins are not fakes, Habicht said. In addition, "there is almost no collector market for such medieval coins," Habicht said. As such, "forgers are not really interested in faking them. Some years ago, some papal coins of the ninth century A. Most of the coins were unsold and returned to the owner. A big mud-pie battle may follow. It might go on forever. Original article on Live Science.

Chapter 3 : The Legend of Pope Joan | Mental Floss

I became aware of the legend of Pope Joan a number of years ago upon reading Donna Woolfolk Cross's novel Pope Joan. Since then, I've come across mentions of the legend in a number of places, including some interesting papal histories.

There was a school run by English missionaries, but it only taught boys—so Agnes cut her hair and donned the robes of a student and became Johannes, or John. She learned several languages, reading and writing, and theology. She fell in love with a monk, who took her to Athens, and later to Rome, all the while disguised as a priest named John Anglicus, or John the Englishman. She apparently ruled the church pretty well for a couple of years, but then that fateful day came. And then she gave birth! The event blew her cover, and when the surrounding crowd realized that the pope was actually a woman, they threw rocks at her, killing both her and her child. Or maybe she was dragged behind a horse until she died. Or maybe she was sentenced to be hanged. Or maybe she survived the ordeal, and was driven from the Vatican to be confined in a nunnery. Sure, there are written accounts, and several clues in history that lend credence to the story. The earliest mention of the Pope Joan story was written in the 13th century. The better known version of the story is attributed to Dominican chronicler Martinus Polonus in CE. She reigned for two years before her sex was discovered when she gave birth on the streets of Rome. In one, Joan died right after the birth of her child, and in the other, she retired to a convent and lived a long life of penance, while her son grew up to be a bishop. It was so different that it was easy to remember, and a great tale to tell. Benedict was pope until his death in , which barely eclipsed the supposed reign of Pope Joan. But few people in the Middle Ages actually read those dry chronologies. The general consensus among historians is that both chairs, which may have once been toilets or birthing chairs, were taken from royal or imperial estates and were used due to their lavish appearance or their historical connections. Another school of thought is that any such examination was to make sure the new pope was intact and had not been castrated in accordance with Deuteronomy. However, one would think that if any such examination occurred, it would be before a priest rose to the level of cardinal. It represents hidden knowledge and unseen forces. Others say that is a misunderstanding, and the card originally represented the Mother Church. In any case, most decks changed the title to the Priestess. It is said that no pope will walk on the road, called the Vicus Papissa, where Pope Joan gave birth. It is also said that the street where it allegedly happened is just too narrow for the pope and his entourage to use. Pope John VIII in particular was derided by some for his weakness, and had been compared to a eunuch or a woman. Or it could have been a satirical story on the corruption and weakness of the papacy in the tenth century, called the Dark Age, or saeculum obscurum. The story was later used by Protestants to discredit the Catholic hierarchy. This is still being done. Any way you look at it, the legend of Pope Joan is nothing more than a legend—but the fact that it stuck around so long is in itself a fascinating piece of history.

Chapter 4 : Why the Legend of Medieval Pope Joan Persists -CathNewsNZ CathNews NZ and Asia Pacific

In the late Middle Ages, a popular legend advanced the story of a medieval woman who disguised herself in men's clothing and ascended to the role of pope. A dramatic ending to the tale ensued.

My adolescent mind, fascinated with the lurid and romantic, was intrigued by the tale of the medieval girl who dressed like a man in order to pursue a scholarly career. She infiltrated the College of Cardinals and was unanimously elected to the Chair of Saint Peter, only to have her hoax betrayed when she had the misfortune to give birth to a child in the street during a procession. However, my disillusionment and break with the feminist movement occurred during my senior year when I realized how radical feminism was entwined with abortion and sexual promiscuity. As I made a concerted effort to explore Catholic as well as historical truth, it became clear to me that lies about religion and lies about history march together on the wide slippery path to social and moral confusion. The problem with the torrid tale of the Popess Joan is not that it was completely impossible for a woman to have had such an adventure, but that there is no contemporary evidence that it ever occurred. The reigns of the popes were even in the Dark Ages extremely well-documented, not only by papal scribes but by papal enemies and secular rulers. The Popess story does not fit in anywhere. Also, as Patrick Madrid observes in *Pope Fiction*, a female imposter candidate for the papacy, if elected, would have merely rendered the conclave invalid. Unfortunately, the Pope Joan legend, which began circulating in the high middle ages as a way of poking fun at the more decadent pontiffs, has since the Reformation been used as a way of attacking the Church. Although many Protestant as well as Catholic scholars have shown the story to be false, it is now used as a feminist vehicle to show that a woman is just as capable of being Pope as a man, with a recent best-selling novel, soon to be a major motion picture. The origins of the satire of Pope Joan lie buried in the rather frantic sexual politics of tenth century Rome. Several wealthy and influential families vied with each other for high church offices, the papacy being the main prize. This in itself makes a strong case against the Pope Joan myth being reality – no one from outside the clique was at the time able to infiltrate the higher echelons of power, least of all a poor English scholar without family or connections, as the Popess was portrayed in the various accounts which became popular in the high Middle Ages. One of the most powerful of the rival clans was the Theophylact family, remarkable especially for its scheming, beautiful and corrupt female members, such as one Theodora, who saw to the election of her lover in as Pope John X. Indeed, Marozia was responsible for putting nine popes in office over a period of eight years; they were either murdered or disappeared under mysterious circumstances. In the century that followed came drastic reforms in the entire Church by popes and saints, particularly the abolishment of clerical concubinage. However, the specter of the mayhem that ensues when popes are not only unchaste but allow the women in their lives to govern the church continued to haunt the medieval psyche. Every fairy-tale is based upon some reality, be it a mere vestige of truth; the fairy-tale of the Popess is no exception. There were stories of a statue found on a side street near the Coliseum, representing a papal figure holding a child. The statue, which no longer exists, was discovered during the reign of Sixtus V and reputedly bore the inscription Pap. The folklore of Rome and fading memories of Marozia, Theodora and Raineria were gradually woven into a thrilling and scandalous story of the forbidden. It was the duty of preachers and teachers to transform the legend into a morality tale, which taught as well as shocked. According to *New Advent*, the first version of the Popess legend was written by the Dominican Jean de Mailly in the thirteenth century. He placed the story at around the year , when a woman scholar, whom he does not name, became a notary to the Curia, then cardinal, then pope. Stoned to death in the street while giving birth to a child, she was buried in the place where she died. It was a lesson to those who deceive as well as fornicate, especially if they happened to be prelates. A few decades later, the second version of the Pope Joan myth was promulgated by another Dominican, Martin of Troppau d. According to Martin, Leo IV was succeeded in the papal chair by the Englishman John of Mainz Johannes Anglicus who reigned for two years, seven months, and four days until it was discovered that the pontiff was a woman. She died and was buried in the same place, and the route was henceforth avoided by the pontiffs. She chooses disgrace, and so dies ignominiously in the street post partum. None of the stories of Pope Joan,

although popularly accepted in the Middle Ages before the dawn of historical criticism, were intended to glamorize women or extol their talents or potential. Indeed, the promulgation of the legend was intended to be a stern lesson to clergy and laity alike as to what happened when women were given too much power, especially in the Church, as well as the woeful consequences of the violation of celibacy in particular and chastity in general. It was what people now call misogynist literature and was anything but complimentary to women. That feminist novelists and historians should try to turn the Popess myth into a vehicle for showing that a woman was capable of being pope as well as exposing the cruelty of the male hierarchy is the farthest thing from the point of the original story. The crux of the matter, as far as the medievals were concerned, was not that a woman could not be Pope, but that she should not be Pope. In the sixteenth century, Catholic scholars such as Panvinio, Baronius and St. Robert Bellarmine denied the historical authenticity of the story of Pope Joan, which was then being used by the Protestant reformers as an example that the Catholic Church was capable of error. Leo Allotius connects it with the false prophetess Theota, condemned at the synod of Mainz in 1024. Robert Bellarmine thought perhaps the legend came from an incident that occurred in Constantinople, where eunuchs and ladies of the imperial court had often schemed to control the patriarchal chair. Protestant historians such as David Blondel and Ignatius von Dollinger also found the story untenable. Dollinger believed that the fable was built upon legends connected to the monuments of Rome, such as the enigmatic statue of the papal figure holding a child. There is no mention of the popess incident in any contemporary sources not even papal enemies, of which there were always many, neither does she fit chronologically between the reigns of any known popes, not in the ninth century, nor in the twelfth. There was no time between Leo IV and Benedict III, for Benedict succeeded Leo immediately in 855; charters and coins were issued in his name the same year of the conclave. The first written mention of her is in the mid-thirteenth century. The legend, nevertheless, continues to resurface. Feminists claim that the Vatican destroyed every trace of Joan which is why no records exist. Why the Vatican would try to do this while simultaneously allowing the work of a papal chaplain to continue to spread the legend is not explained. Share Posted by elena maria vidal at 5:

Chapter 5 : The Legend of Pope Joan: In Search of the Truth by Peter Stanford

Pope Joan: Pope Joan, legendary female pontiff who supposedly reigned for more than 25 months, from to , under the title of John VIII. It has subsequently been proved that a gap of only a few weeks fell between Pope Leo IV and Pope Benedict III and that the story is entirely apocryphal.

In his telling, the female pope is not named, and the events are set in Concerning a certain Pope or rather female Pope, who is not set down in the list of popes or Bishops of Rome, because she was a woman who disguised herself as a man and became, by her character and talents, a curial secretary, then a Cardinal and finally Pope. One day, while mounting a horse, she gave birth to a child. At the same time, the four-day fast called the "fast of the female Pope" was first established. This version, which may have been by Martin himself, is the first to attach a name to the figure, indicating that she was known as "John Anglicus" or "John of Mainz. According to the Chronicon: John Anglicus, born at Mainz, was Pope for two years, seven months and four days, and died in Rome, after which there was a vacancy in the Papacy of one month. It is claimed that this John was a woman, who as a girl had been led to Athens dressed in the clothes of a man by a certain lover of hers. There she became proficient in a diversity of branches of knowledge, until she had no equal, and, afterward in Rome, she taught the liberal arts and had great masters among her students and audience. A high opinion of her life and learning arose in the city; and she was chosen for Pope. While Pope, however, she became pregnant by her companion. Through ignorance of the exact time when the birth was expected, she was delivered of a child while in procession from St. After her death, it is said she was buried in that same place. The Lord Pope always turns aside from the street, and it is believed by many that this is done because of abhorrence of the event. Nor is she placed on the list of the Holy Pontiffs, both because of her female sex and on account of the foulness of the matter. According to this, she did not die immediately after her exposure, but was confined and deposed, after which she did many years of penance. Her son from the affair eventually became Bishop of Ostia , and ordered her entombment in his cathedral when she died. Other references to the female pope are attributed to earlier writers, though none appears in manuscripts that predate the Chronicon. The one most commonly cited is Anastasius Bibliothecarius d. However, the story is found in only one unreliable manuscript of Anastasius. This manuscript, in the Vatican Library , bears the relevant passage inserted as a footnote at the bottom of a page. It is out of sequence, and in a different hand, one that dates from after the time of Martin of Opava. Earlier manuscripts do not contain the legend. Some versions of the legend suggest that subsequent popes were subjected to an examination whereby, having sat on a so-called sedia stercoraria or "dung chair" containing a hole, a cardinal had to reach up and establish that the new pope had testicles , before announcing "Duos habet et bene pendentes" "He has two, and they dangle nicely" , [14] or "habet" "he has them" for short. Pope Joan has been associated with marvelous happenings. In France there appeared marvelous locusts, which had six wings and very powerful teeth. They flew miraculously through the air, and all drowned in the British Sea. The golden bodies were rejected by the waves of the sea and corrupted the air, so that a great many people died. Now in National Gallery in Washington, D. From the midth century onward, the legend was widely disseminated and believed. Joan was used as an exemplum in Dominican preaching. The book contains the following account of the female Pope: John, of English extraction, was born at Mentz Mainz and is said to have arrived at popedom by evil art; for disguising herself like a man, whereas she was a woman, she went when young with her paramour, a learned man, to Athens, and made such progress in learning under the professors there that, coming to Rome, she met with few that could equal, much less go beyond her, even in the knowledge of the scriptures; and by her learned and ingenious readings and disputations, she acquired so great respect and authority that upon the death of Pope Leo IV as Martin says by common consent she was chosen pope in his room. This story is vulgarly told, but by very uncertain and obscure authors, and therefore I have related it barely and in short, lest I should seem obstinate and pertinacious if I had admitted what is so generally talked. I had better mistake with the rest of the world, though it be certain, that what I have related may be thought not altogether incredible. Pope Joan giving birth. Giovanni Boccaccio wrote about her in De Mulieribus Claris This statue had never been mentioned by any

earlier writer anywhere; presumably it was an actual statue that came to be taken to be of the female pope. At his trial in , Jan Hus argued that the Church does not necessarily need a pope, because, during the pontificate of "Pope Agnes" as he also called her , it got on quite well. The tract applied humanist techniques of textual criticism to the Pope Joan legend, with the broader intent of supplying sound historical principles to ecclesiastical history, and the legend began to come apart, detail by detail. The famous bust of her, inscribed Johannes VIII, Femina ex Anglia, which had been carved for the series of papal figures in the Duomo di Siena about and was noted by travelers, was either destroyed or recarved and relabeled, replaced by a male figure, that of Pope Zachary. According to Pierre Gustave Brunet , [23] Various authors, in the 16th and 17th centuries, occupied themselves with Pope Joan, but it was from the point of view of the polemic engaged in between the partisans of Lutheran or Calvinist reform and the apologists of Catholicism. A Dialogue between a Protestant and a Papist, which purported to prove the existence of Pope Joan by reference to Catholic traditions. Even in the 19th century, authors such as Ewaldus Kist and Karl Hase discussed the story as a real occurrence. Modern analysis and critique[edit] The Popess tarot card from the Visconti-Sforza tarot deck, c. The Catholic Encyclopedia elaborated on the historical timeline problem: Coins exist which bear both the image of Benedict III and of Emperor Lothair , who died 28 September ; therefore Benedict must have been recognized as pope before the last-mentioned date. All these witnesses prove the correctness of the dates given in the lives of Leo IV and Benedict III, and there was no interregnum between these two Popes, so that at this place there is no room for the alleged Popess. For example, Photios I of Constantinople , who became Patriarch in and was deposed by Pope Nicholas I in , was an enemy of the pope. He vehemently asserted his own authority as patriarch over that of the pope in Rome, and would have made the most of any scandal of that time regarding the papacy; but he never mentions the story once in any of his voluminous writings. Indeed, at one point he mentions "Leo and Benedict, successively great priests of the Roman Church". The Mystery of Pope Joan, theorize that if a female pope did exist, a more plausible time frame is and , when there were several antipopes; during this time the reign of the legitimate popes Victor III , Urban II , and Paschal II was not always established in Rome , since the city was occupied by Henry IV, Holy Roman Emperor , and later sacked by the Normans. In Search of the Truth "Weighing all th[e] evidence, I am convinced that Pope Joan was an historical figure, though perhaps not all the details about her that have been passed on down the centuries are true". The Last Acceptable Prejudice suggests that the periodic revival of what he calls this "anti-papal legend" has more to do with feminist and anti-Catholic wishful thinking than historical accuracy. John Lateran the formal residence of the popes and center of Catholicism , is to be considered. This and other toilet-like chairs were used in the consecration of Pope Pascal II in The reason for the configuration of the chair is disputed. It has been speculated that they originally were Roman bidets or imperial birthing stools, which because of their age and imperial links were used in ceremonies by Popes intent on highlighting their own imperial claims as they did also with their Latin title, Pontifex Maximus. The pope sat briefly on two "pierced chairs" at the Lateran: However, there is no evidence that this practice dated back any earlier. The origin of the practice is uncertain, but it is quite likely that it was maintained because of widespread belief in the Joan legend, and it was thought genuinely to date back to that period. It is said this reflects a renumbering of the popes to exclude Joan from history. In the course of the 11th century, in the time after John XIX , the entry for John XIV had been misread as referring to two different popes of this name. When Petrus Hispanus was elected pope in and chose the papal name John, he decided to correct this error by skipping the number XX. In , an analysis of several silver coins from the s A. D, done by researchers from Flinders University indicated that they were inscribed with the name Johannes Anglicus. From the dating of the s, when there were missing papal records, led the researchers to believe the legend was genuine. The Story of the Only Female Pope There have been two films based on the story of Pope Joan: The play Top Girls by Caryl Churchill featured Pope Joan as a character, who was invited to a restaurant along with other historically important women in the past by a modern-day woman, Marlene, to discuss the restriction of feminism in the past. Pope Joan is referenced in the video game Persona 5 , as the inspiration for Johanna, one of the titular personas cognitive beings used by humans to battle demons belonging to Makoto Nijima.

Chapter 6 : The Legend Of Pope Joan, Part Athens by Rachel Dax

This was a fascinating book. It examines the historical evidence supporting the existence of Pope Joan, who, according to legend, was elected pope in the ninth century, reigned as a highly respected pontiff for about two years, until her true gender was discovered.

The Female Pope who Gave Birth in the Streets of Rome Sep 16, Helen Flatley According to official Vatican records, popes have been elected since the establishment of the Christian church, and every single one of them has been a man. However, one curious medieval legend states that around the year , an educated woman, disguised as a man, was elected as pope. The legend of Pope Joan is one of the most popular mysteries of the medieval papacy. This remarkable woman managed to rise to the most powerful religious office in the medieval world, in a time when women were completely excluded from church hierarchies. Vatican City State, August 21, According to popular myth, Pope Joan was respected and well-loved, and reigned for more than two years before she was discovered. Her story has inspired countless works of art and literature, and she remains a potent symbol of medieval female power. There are multiple references to a female pope in chronicles of the 12th and 13th centuries. However, the best-known account comes from *The Chronicle of Popes and Emperors* by Martin of Opava, written in the mid-13th century. According to Martin, Pope Joan was an English woman living in the 9th century, who had been brought to Athens by a male companion. There, dressed as a boy, she had acquired an education, and was admired for her knowledge, wit and intellectual gifts. Illustrated manuscript depicting Pope Joan with the papal tiara. She moved to Rome and began a career as a teacher. Her reputation grew, and she earned considerable respect throughout the city. When the time came to elect a new pope, there seemed to be no better choice. However, after two years, disaster struck. She gave birth right there, in the middle of the street, to the shock of the crowd and her fellow churchmen. The Popess tarot card from the Visconti-Sforza tarot deck, c. 1450. However, another version of his text suggests that she survived and went into exile. Her child grew up to have a distinguished career in the church, and eventually became Bishop of Ostia. In a darker version of the tale, as soon as Joan delivered her child, she was set upon by an angry mob. She was whipped and chased through the city of Rome before being finally stoned to death. The election of a female pope was seen as a great travesty of the natural order by many medieval commentators. In France, a plague of gigantic locusts swarmed across the countryside, causing death, destruction and illness. In Brescia, Italy, it was said to have rained blood for three days and three nights. The papal throne cathedra , in the apse of Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, symbolises the Holy See. One legend states that any subsequent popes needed to be subjected to a physical examination before they could be officially elected. A cardinal would then have to reach up through the hole and verify that the pope had testicles. This was a very popular legend throughout the Middle Ages, although there is little evidence that the practice ever took place. Legend says that Pope Joan died in childbirth on this spot c. 855. The story of Pope Joan has exercised a powerful hold over the popular imagination since the medieval period, inspiring art, literature, and more recently, a number of movies. For a brief time, there was even an image of her alongside other papal busts in the Cathedral of Siena. But is there really any evidence of a female pope, or is this simply a myth? The church has staunchly denied the existence of a female pope since the 17th century. Modern historians have also cast doubt on the story, arguing that the idea of a female pope was a popular myth, but had no basis in reality. Read another story from us: Helen Flatley is a medieval historian and freelance writer, specialising in the religious and culture history of medieval Spain.

Chapter 7 : Pope Joan - Wikipedia

The Legend Of Pope Joan (Trilogy) is a gender-bending, fast-paced medieval tale about the woman who became Pope. PART 1. Frankia When thirteen-year-old Joan, having gone past the age of schooling for girls, is banned from studying theology, she is devastated.

From this work, another Dominican Etienne de Bourbon d. So, she dressed as a man. Disguised as a man, she traveled to Athens accompanied by her lover and pursued higher learning again, that which would have been open only to men at the time. She then moved to Rome, where she taught science and gained a favorable reputation in academe. She eventually became a notary in the Papal Curia and then a cardinal. Upon the death of Pope Leo IV, she was elected pope, all the while keeping her disguise as a man. At some point she became pregnant by one of her lovers. It is hard to imagine her gender remaining secret amidst her lovers and the chatty curia officials. One day, during a procession from St. John Lateran, and somewhere between the Colosseum and St. Needless to say, the procession stopped. After that, the legend has various endings: One variation also asserts that her son became Bishop of Ostia. Please remember that all of the aforesaid is fiction. Apparently, the fable had such an impact that many believed it to be true just like the impact of The DaVinci Code. For instance, in the Cathedral of Siena, the busts of the popes line the nave, and her bust was included originally. Whether this was done as a joke or out of ignorance is left for debate. Also, she was not among the official portraits of the Popes that line the walls of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. He had proposed a more figurehead-type of papacy with the governance of the Church left to majority rule. Keep in mind that even in the fifteenth century, scholars like Aeneas Silvius Epistles and Platina Vitae Pontificum , using historical-critical methods, discredited the story as bogus. Even Protestant scholars found the fable untenable: Blondel Joanna papissa and Leibniz Flores sparsae in tumulum Papissae. However, some Protestants, especially in America, have continued to use the fable to discredit the papacy, even though the fable is truly a fable. There was some controversy because the Byzantine Emperor attempted to have his own excommunicated son, Anastasius, installed as Pope. The imperial forces with Anastasius invaded Rome, seized the Lateran palace, and imprisoned Pope Benedict. The faithful of Rome, however, refused to accept Anastasius and rebelled. They freed Pope Benedict who was officially installed on September 29, Interestingly, Pope Benedict was merciful to Anastasius, and eventually made him an abbot. Therefore, there is no room for Pope Joan. A few other sources of the fable place Pope Joan during other Pontificates. However, the extant historical accounts become even more specific and numerous as to events and dates regarding the papacy. Historically, there is no Pope Joan, who supposedly was pope by disguise for over two years. Second, no mention of a Pope Joan arises until the mids. Obviously, the legend was made up years later. Third, other possibilities for the source of the fable exist. Robert Bellarmine posited that the legend was brought from Constantinople to Rome to discredit the legitimacy of the papacy. Remember that with the decline of Rome and the western side of the old Roman Empire, the Patriarch of Constantinople believed he should be the head of the Church, which eventually was one reason for the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Baronius posits that perhaps the legend arose from the alleged effeminate weakness of Pope John VIII , although this charge is also disputed. In reality, the newly elected Pope was installed on a marble throne, oftentimes an ancient bath stool which were not uncommon in Rome. Such bath stools had been used for papal events long before any mention of a Pope Joan. Due to the long duration of papal ceremonies, the Pope did use such a throne to relieve himself. To suggest otherwise is vulgar let alone erroneous. They insinuate that these carvings were of Pope Joan giving birth. Bernini was a devout man, who is buried along the altar rail of the Basilica of St. A better explanation is what Jesus said during his farewell discourse to the apostles at the Last Supper: When she has borne her child, she no longer remembers her pain for joy that a man has been born into the world. Despite our labors and sufferings here and now, we too should rejoice that at each Mass, Christ comes again to us in the gift of the Holy Eucharist. In sum, there is no truth to the legend of Pope Joan.

Chapter 8 : The Female Pope who Gave Birth in the Streets of Rome

Thus was born the legend of Pope Joan. Martin may have got this idea from earlier writers, although mentions in sources apparently written before Martin's time have only survived in manuscripts that were copied later, and are therefore suspect for that reason.

Variations of the fable First version: Jean de Mailly The first who appears to have had cognizance of it was the Dominican chronicler Jean de Mailly Archiv der Gesellschaft fur altere deutsche Geschichte, xii, 17 sq. The story runs that a very talented woman, dressed as a man, became notary to the Curia, then cardinal and finally pope; that one day this person went out on horseback, and on this occasion gave birth to a son; that she was then bound to the tail of a horse, dragged round the city, stoned to death by the mob, and was buried at the place where she died; and that an inscription was put up there as follows: In her reign, the story adds, the Ember days were introduced, called therefore the "fasts of the popess". Martin of Troppau A different version appears in the third recension of the chronicle of Martin of Troppau Martinus Polonus possibly inserted by the author himself and not by a subsequent transcriber. Through this very popular work the tale became best known in the following form: He was, it is alleged, a woman. When a girl, she was taken to Athens in male clothes by her lover, and there made such progress in learning that no one was her equal. She came to Rome, where she taught science, and thereby attracted the attention of learned men. She enjoyed the greatest respect on account of her conduct and erudition, and was finally chosen as pope, but, becoming pregnant by one of her trusted attendants, she gave birth to a child during a procession from St. Peter's. There she died almost immediately, and it is said she was buried at the same place. In their processions the popes always avoid this road; many believe that they do this out of abhorrence of that calamity. Here occurs for the first time the name of Johanna Joan as that of the alleged popess. Martin of Troppau had lived at the Curia as papal chaplain and penitentiary he died, for which reason his papal history was widely read, and through him the tale obtained general acceptance. One manuscript of his chronicle relates in a different way the fate of the alleged popess: Her son, it is added, became Bishop of Ostia, and had her interred there after her death. Later versions Later chroniclers even give the name which she bore as a girl; some call her Agnes, some Gilberta. Still further variations are found in the works of different chroniclers, e. According to the latter, the popess was given the choice in a vision, of temporal disgrace or eternal punishment; she chose the former, and died at her confinement in the open street. Early evaluations of the legend Credulous acceptance In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries this popess was already counted as an historical personage, whose existence no one doubted. She had her place among the carved busts which stood in Siena Cathedral. The heretic Hus, in the defense of his false doctrine before the Council of Constance, referred to the popess, and no one offered to question the fact of her existence. She is not found in the "Liber Pontificalis" nor among the papal portraits in St. Peter's. Critical evaluation This alleged popess is a pure figment of the imagination. In the fifteenth century, after the awakening of historical criticism, a few scholars like Aeneas Silvius Epist. Since the sixteenth century Catholic historians began to deny the existence of the popess, e. IV, Baronius Annales ad a. Protestant evaluation A few Protestants also, e. Numerous Protestants, however, made use of the fable in their attacks on the papacy. Even in the nineteenth century, when the untenableness of the legend was recognized by all serious historians, a few Protestants e. Kist, ; Suden, ; and Andrea, attempted, in an anti-Roman spirit, to prove the historical existence of the popess. Proofs of its mythical character The principal proofs of the entirely mythical character of the popess are: Now it is incredible that the appearance of a "popess", if it was an historical fact, would be noticed by none of the numerous historians from the tenth to the thirteenth century. Coins exist which bear both the image of Benedict III and of Emperor Lothair, who died 28 September, ; therefore Benedict must have been recognized as pope before the last-mentioned date. Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims, informed Nicholas I that a messenger whom he had sent to Leo IV learned on his way of the death of this pope, and therefore handed his petition to Benedict III, who decided it Hincmar, ep. All these witnesses prove the correctness of the dates given in the lives of Leo IV and Benedict III, and there was no interregnum between these two popes, so that at this place there is no room for the alleged popess. Further, is

is even less probable that a popess could be inserted in the list of popes about , between Victor III and Urban II or Paschal II , as is suggested by the chronicle of Jean de Mailly. Origin of the legend This fable of a Roman popess seems to have had an earlier counterpart at Constantinople. Indeed, in his letter to Michael Caerularius , Leo IX says that he would not believe what he had heard, namely that the Church of Constantinople had already seen eunuchs, indeed even a woman , in its episcopal chair Mansi "Concil. Concerning the origin of the whole legend of Popess Joan, different hypotheses have been advanced. Baronius Annales ad a. Mai has shown Nova Collectio Patr. Other historians point to the degradation of the papacy in the tenth century, when so many popes bore the name John; it seemed therefore a fitting name for the legendary popess. Other investigators endeavour to find in various occurrences and reports a more definite basis for the origin of this legend. The legend has also been connected with the pseudo-Isidorian Decretals , e. He recognizes the fable of Popess Joan as a survival of some local Roman folk-tale originally connected with certain ancient monuments and peculiar customs. An ancient statue discovered in the reign of Sixtus V , in a street near the Colosseum, which showed a figure with a child, was popularly considered to represent the popess. In the same street a monument was discovered with an inscription at the end of which occurred the well-known formula P. This could easily have given origin to the inscription mentioned by Jean de Mailly see above. It was also observed that the pope did not pass along this street in solemn procession perhaps on account of its narrowness. Further it was noticed that, on the occasion of his formal inauguration in front of the Lateran Basilica , the newly-elected pope always seated himself on a marble chair. This seat was an ancient bath-stool, of which there were many in Rome ; it was merely made use of by the pope to rest himself. But the imagination of the vulgar took this to signify that the sex of the pope was thereby tested, in order to prevent any further instance of a woman attaining to the Chair of St. Erroneous explanations " such as were often excogitated in the Middle Ages in connection with ancient monuments " and popular imagination are originally responsible for the fable of "Popess Joan" that uncritical chroniclers, since the middle of the thirteenth century, dignified by consigning it to their pages. About this page APA citation. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. Robert Appleton Company, This article was transcribed for New Advent by Marie Jutras. The editor of New Advent is Kevin Knight. My email address is webmaster at newadvent. Dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Chapter 9 : From Sherlock to Pope Joan: actor Louise Brealey on writing her first play | Stage | The Guardian

A flimsy argument for the existence of a female pope in the ninth century. Stanford, former editor of London's Catholic Herald and author of The Devil: A Biography (), has resurrected a wonderful legend: that a young medieval Catholic woman disguised herself as a man, became educated, climbed the ecclesiastical ladder and served as pope for more than two years, only to be unmasked when.