Afterword: The Aftermath of Wounds

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The chapters above cover wounds from a wide variety of perspectives. Skeletal evidence provides the most physical means for understanding medieval wounds, wounding, and recovery, as might forensic pathology today (Woosnam-Savage and DeVries, Geldof, Skinner, MacInnes, Kellett). In written records, observers and participants left behind first-hand accounts of battles, accidents, or other encounters. These were mostly formal reckonings by way of chronicles, reports, or manuals of battle strategies or fighting techniques (Kellett). More personal medieval letters and journals enhance scholarly understanding of emotional strain of pain and suffering associated with wounds or correlated lost loved ones. Some primary materials contain hearsay or imagined scenes of battles, such as in poems, songs, or tales; and, while fictive, these are no less poignant as a means of understanding the mentalité of the Middle Ages.

1 I owe many thanks to Larissa (Kat) Tracy and Kelly DeVries for their friendship and for inviting me to write this afterword; and to my husband, Nathan Yanasak, for making dinner most evenings while I work.
3 A good primary example of a fighting manual: Royal Armouries manuscript, Fechtbuch 1.33 (once at the Tower of London and now in the Royal Armouries, Leeds, it carries a British Museum number Tower Fechtbuch, ms. 1.33, no. 14 E iii, no. 20. D. vi), which most interestingly depicts at least one woman at practice fighting. There are also many depictions of “marital duels” – in effect, trial by combat between husband and wife. The woman normally held a cloth wrapped stone and the man was in a pit with a club; the examples show possible outcomes. See: Hans Talhoffer, Medieval Combat: A Fifteenth-Century Manual of Swordfighting and Close-Quarter Combat, trans. Mark Rector (rpt. Bansley, UK: Frontline Books, 2014); Paulus Kal’s fightbook: Paulus Kal Fechtbuch, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Munich, Germany), Cgm 1507; <http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Paulus_Kal_Fechtbuch_(Cgm_1507); Paulus Kal Fechtbuch, MS KK5126, Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna, Austria) > (accessed 1 July 2015).
Medical knowledge of wounds is found in medieval *Materia medica*, commonplace books, herbariums, recipe books, and medical tracts. Such works offer fascinating details of facial disfiguration (Geldof, Sayers, Skinner, Livingston), amputation (MacInnes, Ferragud), and other injuries that might have been survivable but more often than not led to death. All in all, the topic of “wounds” cuts to the quick of medieval society. High to low, physicians, surgeons, soldiers, peasants, nobles, men, women, and children – everyone would have understood wounds, large or small.

**Physical Wounds**

Certainly the medieval fighter, like any fighter before or since, tried to protect him- (or occasionally her-) self.6 The “knight in shining armor” iconic image of the Middle Ages only remained “shining” until he began to fight in earnest. Weapons could dent, pierce, crush, or otherwise damage armor and the person beneath it.7 There is evidence of wounding to aristocrats – including kings,8 princes,9 and other ranked nobles, as well as average soldiers. Aristocrats, especially those with their sigil on their shields, seem to have been targeted for attack; they represented much to their troops – and, as Iain A. MacInnes points out in his translation, shields of these leaders might be “shattered not once but often in the fiercest of battles.”10 Peasants, frequently on the front lines, wore only the simplest armor, which, while effective for most hand-to-hand combat, could not stop or deflect a direct blow from something sharp – bolt, arrow or lance.11

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6 There has been a lot more scholarship on the topic of gender and war in recent years, from individuals to general histories on female warriors and fighting including: Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Susan Edgington and Sarah Lambert, eds., *Gendering the Crusades* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Linda Wilkinson, *Women in Thirteenth-Century Lincolnshire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007) chapter 1 on Nicola de la Haye (1191–1217), the female defender of Lincoln. See also: the manuals in note 3 above.

7 See: notes 2 and 3 above.

8 Most notable is King Richard III, found in 2014, see: Woosnam-Savage and DeVries, 44-5.

9 Such as Henry V, while still a young man (Livingston).


11 While the unnamed “Towton 16” (Geldof, 58–9) might be part of the aristocracy, he, like so many in battle, was probably gentry at best.