

MEDIEVAL ENGLISH THEATRE



VOLUME FORTY-FIVE (2023)

MEDIEVAL & ENGLISH & THEATRE

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Executive Editor: Meg Twycross

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D. S. BREWER

Medieval English Theatre is an international refereed journal publishing articles on medieval and early Tudor theatre and pageantry in all its aspects (not confined to England), together with articles and records of modern survivals or equivalents. Most issues are illustrated. Contributions to be considered for future volumes are welcomed: see end of this volume and website for further information:
<www.medievalenglishtheatre.co.uk>

This volume contains material and terminology
that some readers may find distressing

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NOTES

COVER IMAGE

The image on the cover is from Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España MS RES/285, *Códice de Trajes* ('Costume Book') c.1548–1549, fol. 1r; online in the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica at <<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000052132&page=1>> #5. It shows a rider in the *juego de cañas* ('game of canes'). He is dressed as a Moor, with turban, scimitar, and the characteristic heart-shaped shield with tassels, the *adarga*. He is riding with very short stirrups, like a jockey. The spear, which is made out of cane, nonetheless has a vicious-looking head.

The manuscript was commissioned by Christoph von Sternsee, captain of Charles V's German imperial guard. The artist is unknown, though Katherine Bond argues for the involvement, possibly as source material, of Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, who was also in the Emperor's entourage.¹ He produced the cartoons for the tapestries of the 1535 Conquest of Tunis from personal experience.² In March 1539 he painted a *juego de cañas* played before the Emperor Charles V and Isabella of Portugal in Toledo: see <<https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/49155>>. The jousting figures are reminiscent of this one. The painting is owned by the Stopford Sackville family, and is currently in Drayton Huse, Lowick, Northamptonshire. There is a preparatory sketch in the Louvre: see <<https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/53800>>.

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ONLINE LINKS

An active list of all the URLs referred to in the current volume is posted on the METH website at <www.medievalenglishtheatre.co.uk/urlsvol45.html>. This enables the reader to view coloured images and link to video, besides giving access where possible to online texts and articles.

- 1 Katherine Bond 'Mapping Culture in the Habsburg Empire: Fashioning a Costume Book in the Court of Charles V' *Renaissance Quarterly* 71 (2018) 530–79.
- 2 See <<https://canon.codart.nl/artwork/vermeyen-tapestry-cartoons/>>. The cartoons (1546) are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
- 3 See note on page <<http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000052132&page=1>>.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DMLBS</i>	<i>A Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i> edited R.E. Latham, D.R. Howlett, and R.K. Ashdowne (British Academy: Oxford, 1975–2013): available online via subscribing libraries or from < http://logeion.uchicago.edu > (search by headword).
<i>EETS</i>	<i>Early English Text Society: OS Ordinary Series, ES Extra Series, SS Supplementary Series.</i>
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission.
<i>Letters and Papers</i>	<i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII</i> edited J.S. Brewer, James Gairdner, and R.H. Brodie (London: HMSO by Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1862–1932); online at < https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/letters-papers-hen8 >.
<i>MED</i>	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> : online version © 2001, the Regents of the University of Michigan < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary > available via subscribing libraries.
NRS	National Records of Scotland.
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> : online version (Oxford UP, 2004–ongoing) at < https://www.oxforddnb.com/ > available via subscribing libraries.
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> : online version © 2019 Oxford University Press < www.oed.com > available via subscribing libraries.
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> edited J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne, then Garnier, 1844–1891). Online at < https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007035196 >.
<i>REED</i>	<i>Records of Early English Drama.</i>
<i>STS</i>	<i>Scottish Text Society.</i>
TNA	Kew: The National Archives.

EDITORIAL

The forty-fifth meeting of *Medieval English Theatre* in 2023 celebrated a return to in-person gathering, after three years of remote conference. The topic of the conference, 'Bodies and Embodiment', warmly hosted by Liv Robinson at the University of Birmingham, seemed particularly apt for the creative and collegial discussion that this enabled, both in and out of the seminar room.

In an opening panel on 'The Body as Signifier', Clare Egan investigated how early seventeenth-century performed libels could be enacted upon the body of the libelled. Two thoughtfully complementary papers followed, on the highly body-focused Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. Mark Chambers set the view of the disabled body that the play enacts against the surviving record evidence for performers with disabilities, while Sadegh Attari explored how the liveness of performance might affect its dynamic of bodily wholeness and fragmentation. In a panel on 'Embodiment and Spectatorship', Gillian Redfern considered how Garcio's lively relationship with the spectators in the *Mactacio Abel* sets his physical and spiritual flexibility against the stasis of Cain. Then, exploring the so-called 'abstractness' of allegorical plays, Greg Walker demonstrated powerfully how the materiality of the actor's body is the primary agent of the audience's response. The afternoon was devoted to various kinds of 'Creating/Performing the Body' for audiences in the here and now. A video reading of the fifteenth-century *A Disputation Betwix the Body and the Worms*, devised by Meg Twycross, brought out its range of comic and deeply poignant views of mortality. Ivan Cutting reported on a local touring company's performance of medieval plays, not as a 'heritage' endeavour but by lively adaption of the texts to modern preoccupations. This was followed by Jeff Stoyanov's characteristically lively and engaging remote presentation on *Dux Moraud*, and some compelling and thought-provoking extracts from a video version of the fifteenth-century Huy play of *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*.

METH 45 opens on an important topic from the previous volume, before expanding on two themes from the conference. In volume 44, Nadia van Pelt explored in depth the documentary evidence for the career of John Blanke. Now Meg Twycross presents the first scholarly investigation of the image of the Tudor trumpeter in the *Westminster Tournament Roll*, questioning recent speculation and uncovering the

surprising complexity of the visual representation of Islamic dress at the court of Henry VIII. Two articles arising from papers from the conference then discuss issues of bodily integrity, both beginning from the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. Sadegh Attari questions the assumed medieval privileging of the whole over the damaged body and, drawing on Deleuze's concept of *becoming*, proposes how, in performance, the play can move to obliterate the distinction between Jewish and Christian bodies. Mark Chambers considers how recent Disability Studies have taken the play as a model for medieval views of disabled and damaged bodies, before inviting us to consider the scanty but often contrasting evidence of lives lived, and performances informed, by actual disabled performers.

The three final contributions all reflect on twentieth and twenty-first-century performances of medieval material, and its adaptation for later times and sensibilities. Janet Cowen analyses the surviving documentary and visual evidence for a scarcely known 1924 church performance of a fifteenth-century Liégeois Nativity play, translated by the Imagist poet Richard Aldington, which reveals much about early twentieth-century views of medieval drama. It offers a fascinating comparison to the essay in *METH 40* on the recent investigation, translation and performance of the original play as part of the University of Fribourg's Medieval Convent Drama project. The 2023 coronation of King Charles III, the first coronation in England for seventy years, prompted Aurélie Blanc's analysis of the celebration, and reception, of a spectacular ceremony apparently balanced between asserting its medieval origins and demonstrating its modern relevance. The volume closes with a review of a storytelling performance based on a late fifteenth-century version of *The Seven Sages of Rome*, which addressed the problematic material of the original both through the original tales and in modern re-imaginings. This volume displays our continuing commitment both to the rigorous pursuit of evidence to understand early theatre in its own times, and to modern performance as a means of engaging us with that theatre in our own. Our 2024 *METH* meeting on *Dramatic Margins* will doubtless offer new opportunities for both.



JOHN BLANKE'S HAT AND ITS CONTEXTS

Part 1: Turbans and Islamic Dress at the Court of Henry VIII

Meg Twycross

Last year I had the pleasure of acting as editor for Nadia T. van Pelt's ground-breaking article on 'John Blanke's Wages'.¹ This acquainted me with the website of the Project devoted to John Blanke,² one of the trumpeters to Henry VII and Henry VIII, and the claims being made on his behalf as 'the first person of African descent in British history for whom we have both an image and a record'.³ The existence of visual as well as documentary evidence for John Blanke has proved irresistible; it gives him a face, however fictitious, and one apparently sufficiently characterised for a modern viewer to relate to. A name and a handful of appearances in administrative accounts are not nearly so evocative – though his surname and the tag, 'the blacke Trumpet', that often accompanies it are intriguing.

To summarise what we know of him:⁴ he first appears in November 1507 in Henry VII's Chamber Books as 'John Blanke the blacke Trumpet'. He is paid 20s a month, half the wages of the elite King's trumpeters, until January 1508/1509, when he appears to have been added to the strength on full wages of 40s a month. On 21 April that year, Henry VII dies, and John Blanke, with the other King's trumpets, is granted mourning livery for the funeral on 9 May 1509; then on 24 June 1509 comes the coronation of Henry VIII, for which nine named 'Kyngs Trompyttes', including John Blanke, are given scarlet livery. Some time around December 1509 he asks, apparently satisfactorily, for his salary arrangements to be regularised: he seems to have dropped back to 20s, possibly in the administrative confusion that always followed the death of one monarch and the accession of the next. On 12–13 February 1510/1511 he appears at the Great Tournament in Westminster, not by name, but as a presumably

1 Nadia T. van Pelt 'John Blanke's Wages: No Business Like Show Business' *Medieval English Theatre* 44 (2022) 3–35.

2 <<https://www.johnblanke.com>>.

3 <<https://www.johnblanke.com/about-copy.html>>.

4 For a comprehensive account of the records, see Nadia van Pelt's article.

identifiable image in a commemorative heraldic painting.⁵ On 14 January 1511/1512, not quite a year later, he is given a suit of clothes of violet cloth for his wedding⁶ – and that is the last we hear of him. The next time the king’s trumpeters are listed by name, in February 1513/1514, his is not among them. His time in the limelight of the English court could have lasted as little as four years, or as long as six.

So far, no one has found out what happened to him. He may have retired, he may have died, he may have moved on to another court, his new wife may have been a wealthy widow and set him up in business: we just don’t know. Nor do we yet know where he came from, though there are several more-or-less plausible suggestions.⁷ We really know very little about him. The invitation by Michael Ohajuru, the initiator and driving force behind the John Blanke Project, to ‘imagine the black Tudor trumpeter’ gave his contributors a lot of room to manoeuvre.⁸

It is his image that has captured the imagination. It is recorded, twice, in the College of Arms ‘Great Tournament Roll of Westminster’,⁹ produced to commemorate the lavish tournament celebrating the birth on New Year’s Day 1510/1511 of Henry VIII’s son and heir. The roll records the second day of jousting: he and five other trumpeters (there were actually 15)¹⁰ appear heralding the joust on membranes 3–4 and blowing

- 5 Sydney Anglo was the first to identify him: see ‘The Court Festivals of Henry VII’ in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 43 (1960) 42, and *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster* edited Sydney Anglo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) 85 note 2.
- 6 TNA E101/417/6 #50; image online at <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/E101/E101no417/E101no417no6/IMG_0161.htm>. Calendared in *Letters and Papers 1* 505 #1025 (14 January 1512); online at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp502-510>>; also BL Egerton MS 3025 fol. 18r, which records their making, and that they were made of violet *velvet*.
- 7 See van Pelt ‘John Blanke’s Wages’ 5 note 10 for a list.
- 8 ‘So, if John Blanke’s image is not true to life, being only a caricature then just as artists and patrons were free to create their own ideas of The Black Magus and St Maurice so artists should be free to portray John Blanke as they might imagine him from his role and his record, while historians were invited to comment on John Blanke’s presence and significance’; <<https://www.johnblanke.com/about.html>>. The subtitle to the Project is now ‘Imagine the Black Tudor Trumpeter’; <<https://www.johnblanke.com>>.
- 9 London: College of Arms MS Great Tournament Roll of Westminster, mbb 4 and 28.
- 10 BL Additional MS 21481 (Household Book of Henry VIII for the years 1509–1518) fol. 53r: ‘Item to the kinges xv Trumpettes vpon theyr warraunte signed for thir duetyes belongyng to their office of Auncientie appertaynyng for the Justes

A l'hostel to end the day's proceedings on membranes 27–8 (FIG.1). The images are slightly different but clearly drawn on the same model. One possible model might of course have been John himself, though this seems unlikely, for reasons that I will discuss in due course.

He looks rather wistful, insofar as one can look wistful when playing the trumpet: young and vulnerable. Possibly the artist based him on the image of the youngest of the Magi *qui fut moriane* ('who was a Moor')?¹¹ We could do with a thorough investigation of the sources of the image. The puffed-out cheeks and the fact that in the second version his face is slightly shorter than his colleagues', also make him look youthful.¹² The skin colour he has been given, especially again in the second version, draws attention by contrast to his eyes, though they are in fact constructed in the same way as those of his lighter-skinned colleagues. He is a very attractive and compelling figure onto whom to project one's emotions.

holden at Westmynster the xijth day & xiiijth day of ffebruary last passed: xxvj li xiiij s iijij d'; transcription online at <https://www.tudorchamberbooks.org/edition/folio/LL_BL_AddMS_21481_f0053r.xml>, image online at <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_21481_fs001r>. £26 3s 4d is 40 marks, which must be a flat fee: it is not easily divided between 15. Fifteen trumpet banners were ordered for the occasion; see BL Additional MS 18826 fol. 16, printed in Anglo *Great Tournament Roll* 137; and TNA E101/417/4 fol. 21r; warrant issued 12 February 1511 in *The Great Wardrobe Accounts of Henry VII and Henry VIII* edited Maria Hayward (London Record Society 47; Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Society, 2012) 111.

- 11 Observation on Philip the Fair's visit to Cologne Cathedral, which holds the relics of the Three Kings; Antoine de Lalaing 'Relation du Premier Voyage de Philippe le Beau en Espagne en 1501' in *Collection des Voyages des Souverains des Pays-Bays: Tome Premier* edited M. Gachard (Bruxelles: F. Hayez, 1876) 332. He is identified as Balthazar. There has been a great deal of activity on the subject of the Black Magus, but Paul H.D. Kaplan *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor MI: UMI Research Press, 1985) remains a good introduction to the subject.
- 12 The same is true of the trumpeters in the *Retabulo de Santa Auta* used as a cover image on the previous volume of *Medieval English Theatre*; 'Shawm band with sackbut player', detail showing the *Encontro de Santa Úrsula e do Príncipe Conan* ('Meeting of Saint Ursula and Prince Conan'), from left panel interior of the *Retábulo de Santa Auta* ('Retable of St Auta') (1522–1525), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. For full image see <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bottega_di_lisbona,_retablo_di_sant%27auta,_1522-25,_matrimonio_di_s._orsola_e_il_principe_conan_3_musici.jpg>. The trumpeters here look down in concentration as they blow, and are more convincing as players: Blanke and his colleagues look as if they had paused in the act to consider something, or perhaps were just about to start.



FIG. 1: The second row of trumpeters sounding *A l'hostel*.
London: College of Arms MS Westminster Tournament Roll, mb 28 detail.
Reproduced by permission of the Kings, Herald, and Pursuivants of Arms.

And it is very difficult, as I have discovered myself, not to talk about the image as 'him', as if it were alive, or at least a genuine representation of what he looked – and felt – like. We must keep reminding ourselves that this is a painting, and is subject to all the usual caveats about portraiture

at the time; if, again, it was intended as a 'real' portrait. Any emotions we may feel are ours, not the painting's.¹³

Michael Ohajuru asked for imaginative responses to this image, both pictorial and verbal. The difference in the reactions to these responses has been interesting, in that they point up an apparent difference between the way we react to images and the way we react to words. No one could take the pictorial responses to Blanke as being anything but imaginary¹⁴ – though Ohajuru, a trained art historian, had to sound a note of caution when some of his contributors started talking about the image in the Roll itself as if it were a photographic record. Verbal responses are much more difficult to keep under control, especially when they come up with snippets of documentary evidence. All too quickly speculation can harden into historical 'fact'.

John Blanke's 'Turban'

One such conjecture is about his headgear. It is noticeable in the painting that John Blanke is the only one of the six trumpeters to wear something on his head. His fellow trumpeters are bareheaded. The object in question is rather like a modern beret: soft, brimless, slightly padded in appearance (although that might just be his hair), and brown in the first image, green in the second, with a yellow network pattern sketched lightly over it. It has been identified as 'a turban' (FIG. 2 (a) and (b)).¹⁵

13 For example, the downcast eyes of Dürer's 1521[?] drawing of Katherina, the black servant of the Portuguese royal factor João Brandão in Antwerp (see <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albrecht_D%C3%BCrер_-_The_Negress_Katherina_-_WGA07097.jpg>), have been interpreted both as her response to her enslavement – for example, in <<https://blackcentraleurope.com/biographies/albrecht-duerers-katharina-mj-montgomery>> – and the properly modest way for a young woman of 20 to direct her gaze; Ulinka Rublack *Dressing Up* (Oxford UP, 2010) 185. In fact, almost none of his female (or indeed male) portraits are looking directly at him, and most of them are looking downward. It is one of the facts of portraiture. The only person looking directly at us is the artist himself, because it is difficult not to do a self-portrait without looking straight in the mirror. Another of the dangers of selective interpretation.

14 Ohajuru had asked for the images to be in black and white; <<https://www.johnblanke.com/about.html>>.

15 The identification was originally made by Anglo *Great Tournament Roll*: 'All bare-headed except for a negro (in the centre of the second row) who wears a brown turban latticed with yellow' (85); 'the negro in the centre of the second



FIG. 2: Images of 'John Blanke'.

(a) Westminster Tournament Roll mb 4 detail (some paint loss);

(b) Westminster Tournament Roll mb 28 detail.

Reproduced by permission of the Kings, Herald, and Pursuivants of Arms.

It is a point of faith among most of the website contributors that John Blanke was unique, and so he is in the 1511 Roll because of his skin colour and the shape of his face. He is also marked out from the other five trumpeters by the fact that his head alone is covered. This has become a major point in the discussion of his uniqueness; but more than that, it is assumed that the painter is recording something that he wore in real life, and that this is an indicator of his free-spirited autonomy. The painted image has been given human agency: John Blanke has made a choice. Kate Lowe's blog gives the most detailed version of this view:

Not only is his skin colour different to that of his 'white' colleagues – a difference about which no choice could have been made either by him or by others – but in addition a major form of difference *that is of his own choosing*¹⁶ – his head-gear – also sets him apart from his fellow trumpeters.¹⁷

row has changed into a turban of green with a linear design in gold' (98). This has been taken up as '[he] alone wears a turban'; <<https://www.johnblanke.com/s-i-martin.html>>.

16 My italics.

17 See <<https://www.johnblanke.com/kate-low.html>>.

This is significant, it is suggested, because it not only demonstrates private choice, and thus a personality, but must say something about his acceptance into the social fabric of the Tudor court, and thus their toleration of people who might have been considered outsiders (provided, it is suggested, they were assertive enough to demand it). Not only has he 'chosen to wear (insisted on wearing?)' this head covering, but:

he has been officially sanctioned to do this not in the private sphere but as a salaried member of a royal corps processing publicly at Westminster, the seat of English monarchical power, in celebration of the birth of the heir to the throne, and to top it all the image of him wearing this major marker of difference was recorded twice at the time, and has survived for 500 years.

There is of course no proof of this contention. The painting *may* record both the gesture of choosing his own headgear and the authorities' (declared or tacit) permission for him to do so, but we have no documentary evidence either of his choice or their acquiescence – or how serious a deviance this might have been. Was it a 'major marker of difference'? All we know is that in the painting he is wearing some form of headgear, whereas his five companions are not. It is possible that the painter has recorded something that was a trademark costume of this particular trumpeter; on the other hand, it may merely have been a feature of another painting, possibly of the Black Magus, which had served as his model for the image of an African. But Anglo's identification as 'a turban' has been enthusiastically seized on, because it is also assumed by some to underline a further potential point of difference – religion:

The multicoloured (brown and yellow/green and gold) patterned cloth of the head-gear is a religious and cultural, rather than a fashion, statement, and must signal that John Blanke was a Muslim, or at least had been raised in a Muslim cultural context.¹⁸

18 <<https://www.johnblanke.com/kate-lowee.html>>. Nadia van Pelt points out that Kate Lowe, in her chapter on 'The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe' in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* edited T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge UP, 2005) 17–47, does not refer to it as a turban, though she insists on it being 'vital to his cultural identity' (39); Nadia T. van Pelt 'John Blanke's Hat in

One imagines that of the three or four colours mentioned (the yellow was probably meant to indicate gold), it is the green that has attracted attention. There is a general impression today that green is the colour of Islam.¹⁹ It is mentioned in the Qur'an as being the colour of the robes worn in Paradise, and is popularly said (on what authority I do not know, but those who have lived in the Arabian desert will understand why) to have been the Prophet Muhammad's favourite colour.²⁰ But was this the case at the time?

John Blanke's Headgear in its Sixteenth-Century Context

It is too easy to apply our twenty-first-century assumptions to a sixteenth-century image, especially one that comes without any written explanation. We need to look into Tudor knowledge and understanding of Islamic dress, especially headgear, and most importantly, their attitudes towards it. Was it, and therefore also those who wore it, viewed with toleration, as is being suggested? The standard response, which was to refer to them as 'God's enemies', suggests not: 'hys entent was to make warre on the Moores, beyng Infideles and enemies to Gods law'; 'surely it is agaynste my hart, whiche euer hath desired to fight agaynst Gods enemyes'.²¹ With curiosity? With fear? Would they even have recognised what it was? In what follows here, I hope to give answers to some of these questions. Some of them are rather surprising. For the time being we shift away from focusing on the figure of John Blanke, but we shall

the Westminster Tournament Roll' *Notes and Queries* (December 2021) 387–9 at 388; <<https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjab156>>.

- 19 'Tradition is unanimous that the Prophet never wore a green turban, and there is no support for the colour green in law or tradition. But green is the colour of Paradise, and it is also said to have been the Prophet's favourite colour; some say that the angels at Hunayn (or also at Badr) had green turbans'; W. Björkman 'Tulband' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam 10* (Leiden: Brill, new edition 2000) 610; online at Gale eBooks (subscription).
- 20 Unsurprisingly, there are many references in the Qur'an to Paradise, but the specific one is Surah 76:21: 'they will wear garments of green silk and brocade'; *The Qur'an* translated M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (World's Classics; Oxford UP, 2005, corrected reprint 2016) 401. In Surah 55:76 'They will all sit on green cushions and fine carpets' (355).
- 21 Edward Hall *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548) 'The triumphant reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII' fol. xj recto (of Ferdinand of Aragon); fol. xij verso (Lord Darcy on being dismissed by Ferdinand from the Moorish expedition).