

Women and Armor: A Timeline

Although generally men held knightly occupations, throughout history there are several legendary examples of women as warriors, armor bearers and defenders of entire countries. The following outlines a few stories of the more famous examples.

- 61 C.E. **Boudicca** - Queen of the Iceni tribe of the Britons. Following the death of her husband, Boudicca led a revolt against Rome to secure her land holdings for her daughters, killing over 70,000 Romans. Although eventually defeated, a monumental statue of Boudicca resides beside the Thames near Big Ben in London.
- 500 **Hua Mu Lan** - Characterized most recently in Disney's "Mulan". According to legend, she took her father's place to go to war for her Emperor. Her fighting skill and prowess reputedly matched or bettered her male peers.
- 1149 **Order of the Hatchet** - The Count of Barcelona established this chivalric order to honor the townswomen of Tortola who defended their land against the Moors.
- 1173 **Petronilla, Countess of Leicester** - Wore a mail hauberk and carried a sword and shield in defense of her lands against Henry II of England.
- c.1147 **Eleanor of Aquitaine** - Queen of France, then England and mother of two kings. Eleanor also was known for her exploits on Crusade with her then husband, King Louis VII of France. Although the outcome was not favorable, Eleanor led her troupes from Aquitaine.
- 1343 **Maria of Pozzuoli** - Defended her lands against local enemies while wearing armor. Known for her incredible strength and skill, Petrarch visited with and wrote of her.
- c.1350 **Jeanne de Danpierre, Countess de Montfort** - Known to have worn armor twice. First while defending the city of Hennebont against a French assault and, second, while during an attack at sea near Guernsey.
- 1431 **Joan of Arc** - Although a young woman, Joan claimed to be guided by spiritual voices that motivated her to raise an army in support of the Dauphin. Wearing armor and leading her army into battle, Joan is victorious over the English and saw her Dauphin crowned King of France. Following this victory, her Burgundian enemies captured her and the English burned her at the stake for heresy in 1431.
- 1451-1504 **Isabella I of Castile** - While wearing armor, Isabella led her troupes to defend southern Spain against the Moors. She was respected for her military strategy and leadership on the battlefield.
- 1556 **Graine ni Maille (Grace O' Malley)** - Granted an audience with Queen Elizabeth I, Graine pressed for land claims acquired more likely from piracy than inheritance. Graine controlled a significant number of ships and was reputed to have conducted attacks against England's ships and shoreline. Disregarding Graine's reputation, Elizabeth grants her the territory.

Further Reading:

Fraser, Antonia. The Warrior Queens: The Legends and the Lives of the Women Who Have Led Their Nations in War. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Kenyon, Olga, ed. & P.D. James. 800 Years of Women's Letters. New York: Penguin Publishing, 1994.

Moriarty, Catherine, ed. The Voice of the Middle Ages in Personal Letters 1100-1500. Lincolnwood, IL: Peter Bedrick Books, 1991.

World Wide Web Resources:

The following resources have been earmarked due to the breadth and quality of the material they present.

<http://www.smu.edu/ijas/> - Site for the International Joan of Arc Society

<http://www.heraldica.org/topics/orders/wom-kn.htm> - Good narrative regarding depictions of women in armor and as represented in the knightly class

<http://www.lothene.demon.co.uk/others/women15.html> - An excellent site for beginning research. Scholars and amateur historians contribute brief descriptions of women and warfare from pre-history through the contemporary period.

<http://britannia.com/NEW-bios/boudicca.html> - Britannia provides not only biographies of important persons but also narratives, timelines and relevant articles regarding the history of Britain.

<http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/biographies> - An index of famous and influential women throughout history.