

HPHI 7016: Past Peoples, Present Societies

Fall 2021

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Contextualizing Research Task: Medieval Swansea/City Witness Activity

Selected Witness: Adam of Loughor

I selected Adam because he was only a teenager at the time of the incident. Though interviewed when he was around 30 years old, I was interested to see how a child processed the events and what kind of recollection he gave as an adult looking back at the event.

Assignment Questions:

1. What was the occupation and social status of your chosen witness?

Adam is a freeman working as a laborer for William de Briouze, aged around 30 years at the time of his witness statement. This would place his social status low, but as a freeman he would not be among the lowest of society.

2. What is their relationship to the 'hanged man'?

Adam testified that he had known William around 2 years before the incident, which would place Adam to be about 10 years old when they met. He added that he did not know William's parentage or what parish he was from. William would have been around 25 at the time of the incident, so it seems reasonable that William would not be living with his parents by this time (or possibly that his parents were dead), for Adam to have known who they were. In his testimony, William shares his parentage and parish (Llanrhidian), which looks to be west of Oystermouth Castle.

Adam's testimony does not include any further details as to the nature of their relationship. The 15 year age difference between the men would likely mean they knew each other but were not necessarily close (I assume).

3. What was their involvement in the events surrounding the miracle?

Adam was a spectator to the hangings from his vantage point on the town wall. Following the hanging, he testified that he saw the body transported to the house of Thomas Mathews, the burgess. Adam also testified that he saw the body in the burgess' home but was too scared to get near it. He described the condition of the body, which was pretty horrific and likely to make quite an impression on a young person.

4. How did they use the space in medieval Swansea?

There isn't any detail in Adam's testimony as to how he lived in Swansea at the time. For the hanging itself, Adam testified that he was on the town wall. Being a young man at the time,

around 10-13 years old, it seems reasonable that a person of this age would need to find a high vantage point to view the event from. It is also interesting that Adam provides estimates of distances with respect to certain personal experiences. For example, he describes the length of time that William hangs in terms of how long it would take him to walk a mile on flat road and he describes his distance from the event in terms of the length a crossbow arrow would travel (about 2 crossbow shots).

5. How reliable and how valuable do you think their testimony is?

I believe this testimony to be reliable and I feel it is valuable to corroborate what others were saying at the same time. There doesn't seem to be any personal gain to be made from providing a false testimony and I also feel that this experience would have been very formative in a young person's mind – regardless of the era in which it happened! I would be skeptical about Adam's declaration of William's status as "dead" following the hanging. Adam admitted he did not approach the body at the burgess' house and only relied upon the opinion of others that William was, in fact, dead. Even if Adam had approached the body, I'm not sure I would trust that a person of 10-13 would be able to determine if a person were dead or alive.

The fact that the deposition comes 20 years after the event also means there is a strong potential for embellishment and reconciliation of stories amongst all of the involved parties after the fact, but again I return to questioning the motive for why Adam (or others) would fabricate such an elaborate tale. There is the possibility that pressure from the church influenced (directly or not) the recollection of the events of William Cragh's miraculous recovery. This skepticism comes from Harriett Webster's observations of the documents themselves, since she notes that it appears changes and edits were made following the initial transcription. There could have been motivation for the church (especially Bishop Swineford) to embellish the reports in order to push for the canonization of Thomas de Cantilupe and increase the popularity of the site for financial gain.