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MEDIEVAL & ENGLISH & THEATRE

VOLUME FORTY-FOUR (2022)

MEDIEVAL & ENGLISH & THEATRE

VOLUME FORTY-FOUR (2022)

Executive Editor: Meg Twycross

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D. S. BREWER

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NOTES

Cover Image

'Shawm band with sackbut player', detail from Master of the Retable of Santa Auta *Encontro de Santa Úrsula e do Príncipe Conan* ('Meeting of Saint Ursula and Prince Conan'), left panel interior of the *Retábulo de Santa Auta* ('Retable of St Auta') (1522–1525), © Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Rua das Janelas Verdes, 1249-017, Lisbon, Portugal. Inventory number 1462-A. Oil on oak panel. Photographer Luísa Oliveira (2018). Reproduced by kind permission of the Direção-Geral do Património Cultural/Arquivo de Documentação Fotográfica (DGPC/ADF).

The painting was originally made for the Convento da Madre de Deus ('Convent of the Mother of God'), Xabregas, Lisbon, which was founded in 1509 by Queen Leonor (Eleanora) of Viseu, widow of John II of Portugal and sister of King Manuel I. St Auta was one of the eleven thousand virgins martyred with St Ursula at Cologne. Her relics were sent to Dom Manuel I by their cousin the Emperor Maximilian in 1517, and enshrined in the chapel built in the convent by Leonor.

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/urlsvol44.html>. This enables the reader to view coloured images and link to video, as well as giving access where possible to online texts and articles.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AND</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Dictionary Online</i> edited William Rothwell, David Trotter, Geert De Wilde, and others, Aberystwyth University, 2005– < https://anglo-norman.net >
<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</i> <i>ES</i> <i>Extra Series</i> <i>OS</i> <i>Ordinary Series</i> <i>SS</i> <i>Special Series</i>
<i>HMC</i>	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 > available via subscribing libraries
<i>NRS</i>	National Records of Scotland
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> : online version (Oxford UP, 2004–) 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

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> edited J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne, then Garnier, 1844–91). 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	The National Archives

EDITORIAL

The forty-fourth meeting of *Medieval English Theatre* in 2022 was the third held online, as COVID restrictions continued. The conference took the theme of *Editing and Adapting*, being held in memory of Peter Happé and Martial Rose, two recently lost eminent scholars of medieval theatre, especially in the fields of editing and modern performance. Hosted by Jodi-Anne George from Dundee, the meeting was generously enabled by Clare Egan when the pandemic struck down its host. A tribute having been offered to Peter Happé last year, the day opened with a memorial from Phil Butterworth, recalling Martial Rose's influential and ground-breaking production of 'The Wakefield Plays' at Bretton Hall (1958) and at the Mermaid Theatre in London in the early 1960s, and sharing vivid extracts from his correspondence.

Several papers addressed early and recent issues in the editing of texts of medieval theatre. Meg Twycross gave a wide-ranging account of the problems confronting would-be editors in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, from lack of access to the manuscripts to an anti-Catholic mindset that inevitably distorted their narrative. Garrett Epp brought home the importance of modern editors' sensitivity to performance, as well as text, in supplying stage directions for early playscripts, while Diana Wyatt opened up the very different editorial techniques needed to unpack the theatrical implications of the record evidence gathered by the REED project. Pamela King offered an insight into the importance of detail in editing as she explored the potentially revealing meanings in just two words of the Towneley *Noah*.

On adaptation, Bart Ramakers and Elsa Strietman reported on a major project to stage a fascinating Dutch *tafelspel*, and the fundamental questions it poses about engaging modern audiences with historically based performance. Eleanor Bloomfield and Tom Straszewski each considered modern adaptations of York plays, Eleanor addressing the revivals since 1951 that engage the plays with contemporary concerns, and Strasz the *bricolage* shaping of a site-specific production of the plays of Our Lady for the church of All Saints, North Street, York. Hilariously visual – and thought-provoking – entertainment was provided by Jeffery Stoyanoff's 'TikTok-ing The Fall'.

The papers in this volume take forward a number of rich, often interlocking, strands and themes that have been developing in recent

Medieval English Theatre issues and conference meetings. Nadia van Pelt's timely and topical paper presents the first in-depth scholarly investigation into the employment by Henry VII and Henry VIII of the now-famous Black Tudor trumpeter John Blanke. While nuancing our understanding of the international nature of court entertainment, it continues the royal theme that dominated the last volume. Pamela King's discussion of 'Stafford Blue' reveals a new insight into a local reference in the Towneley *Noah*, contributing to current scholarship by helping to point towards a mid-sixteenth-century date for the play. In 'Understanding the Blanket Toss', Ben Parsons and Bas Jongenelen provide a translation of a spirited Dutch *rederijkers* play: a lively farce that combines traditional horseplay and stereotypes with a surprisingly sympathetic interest in problems of domestic abuse. The paper also adds to our understanding of Towneley, this time the *Second Shepherds' Play*, as the action climaxes with the drunken protagonist, like Mak, being tossed in a blanket. The wide-ranging exploration of contemporary blanket-tossing practices in Europe in their introduction throws revealing light on the social context of what today still remains the most widely known medieval English play. Ernst Gerhardt's essay on the Tudor interlude *The History of Jacob and Esau*, arising from the 2020 *METH* meeting on *Consumption*, addresses the play's pervasive interest in food, used as a means of both persuasion and control between characters. Close analysis of its foodstuffs not only heightens our understanding of the interlude's play on contemporary feasting but suggests a Shrovetide context for its performance that it shares with the very different Dutch farce. Another essay that had its genesis at the *Consumption* meeting is Elisabeth Dutton and Olivia Robinson's consideration of the complexities of staging the Eucharist. This explores the choreography and props through which the bread of Passover, the Last Supper, and the Mass could be evoked, layered, and shared in performances in which the audiences' experiences of theatre and of communion overlap and inform each other. Such questions may well be explored more variously in the next *METH* meeting in 2023, which addresses *Bodies and Embodiment*.



JOHN BLANKE'S WAGES No Business Like Show Business

Nadia T. van Pelt

John Blanke (also spelled 'Blak' or 'Banke'), a Tudor court trumpeter of African descent, participated in some of the key ceremonial events of the early Tudor period. He was granted mourning livery for the funeral of Henry VII on 9 May 1509,¹ was issued with 'scarlet' as one of the nine 'Kyngs Trompyttes' for the coronation of Henry VIII on 24 June six weeks later,² and rode in the opening and closing processions at the two-day tournament organised in honour of the birth of the second Tudor's first son Henry, Duke of Cornwall, on 12–13 February 1511. This event is commemorated visually in the Westminster Tournament Roll, where a black musician appears as one of a group of six royal trumpeters, and has been identified, originally by Sydney Anglo, with Blanke.³ Blanke's established position as one of the king's servants is underscored by his receiving 'a gown of violet cloth, a bonnet and a hat' as a marriage gift from the king on 14 January 1512.⁴ The records also appear to reveal that

- 1 TNA LC 2/1 fol. 126; calendared in *Letters and Papers 1 14* (#20, 11 May 1509); online at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp8-24>>. See *Records of English Court Music* edited Andrew Ashbee, 9 vols (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993) 7 25.
- 2 TNA LC 9/50 fol. 207v; calendared in *Letters and Papers 1 42-3* (#82, 24 June 1509); online at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp36-55>>. See *English Court Music* edited Ashbee 7 29. Here the musician's name is spelled 'Banke'.
- 3 London: College of Arms MS Westminster Tournament Roll, 1511; from the workshop of Garter King of Arms Sir Thomas Wriothesley. Sydney Anglo was the first to identify the black trumpeter with John Blanke: 'The Court Festivals of Henry VII: A Study Based Upon the Account Books of John Heron, Treasurer of the Chamber' *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 43 (1960/1961) 12–45, at 42 and note 3. The identification is repeated by Miranda Kaufmann in *Black Tudors* (London: Oneworld, 2017) and 'John Blanke (fl. 1507–1512)' *ODNB*; at <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/107145>>.
- 4 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; online at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp502-510>>; referred to in *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII* edited Maria Hayward (Leeds: Maney, 2007) 231. The original is very worn and in places illegible; most studies depend on the *Letters and Papers* version.

following the death of his – presumably Italian⁵ – colleague Dominic Justinian, John Blanke (in this document called Blake) formally petitioned Henry VIII to request permission to take on Justinian's position, and with that, to ask for a raise in wages.⁶ Like the majority of petitions, this one was not dated; they rarely are. But Dominic Justinian was last seen in the records on 24 June 1509, when he was listed as one of the trumpet players present at Henry VIII's coronation.⁷ And, given that, as we will see below, Blanke asked to be paid in arrears for work done in lieu of the deceased from 'the furste day of Decembre last passed', this day in the year 1509 could be considered a theoretical *terminus post quem* for Blanke's request.

Blanke's petition pleads that 'his wages nowe and as yet is not sufficient to maynteigne and kepe hym to doo your grace lyke seruice as other your Trompetours doo',⁸ suggesting a discrepancy between the other trumpet players' wages and his own. The petition reads in full:

To the king *our souuerain lorde*

In moost humble wise besecheth *your* highnes *your* true and faithfull *seruaunte* John Blake oon of *your* Trompetours That where as his wages [*sic*] nowe and as yet is not sufficient to maynteigne and kepe hym to doo *your* grace lyke seruice as other *your* Trompetours doo It may therfore please *your* highnes in consideracion of the true & faithfull seruice Whiche *your* *seruant* daile doeth vnto *your* grace and so during his lyf entendeth to doo To yeue and graunte vnto hym the same Rowme of Trompetour whiche Domynyc Decessed late had / To haue and enioye the said

- 5 Theodor Dumitrescu *The Early Tudor Court and International Musical Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 68: 'A name such as "Dominic Justinian" ... surely points to Italian origins'.
- 6 TNA E101/417/2 #105; image online at <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/E101/E101no417/E101no417no2/IMG_0158.htm>. Transcribed (slightly inaccurately) in Kaufmann *Black Tudors* 21.
- 7 TNA CL 2/1 fol. 126r. Calendared in *Letters and Papers* 1 42–3 #82; online at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp36-55>>. The record lists 'The King's trumpets': 'Mr. Peter, marshal of the Trumpets, Jaket, Franke, John de Cecill, Domynyk, Audryan, Christopher, John Broun, John Banke, John Hert, Thomas Wrethe, John Frere, John Scarlett, John Strett, Robert Wrethe'. This list is also transcribed in *English Court Music* edited Ashbee 7 29.
- 8 TNA E101/417/2 #105. See note 6.

Rowme to *your* said *seruant* from the furste day of Decembre last passed During *your* moost gracious pleasour *with* the wages of xvjd by the day And that this bill signed *with your* moost gracious hand may be sufficient warrant and discharge vnto John heron Tresourer of *your* Chambre for the payment of the said wages accordingly And he shall dailie pray to god for the *preseruacion* of *your* moost noble and royall estate longe to endure.⁹

The king's signature at the top left-hand side of the document is the standard official authorisation to Heron 'for the payment of the said wages accordingly'. And, indeed, all the documents in E101/417/2 are signed in this way.

John Blanke's origins are not known, and we cannot – at this moment – firmly situate him in a context prior to his showing up in the English court records. He may have been English, or perhaps, as some scholars have speculated, Continental European, or African.¹⁰ In recent years, a focus of interest in the trumpet player has intensified, to the extent that – to borrow the words of Michael Ohajuru – 'John Blanke has become the poster boy for the Black presence in Tudor England'.¹¹ This interest in the court musician was in part raised through *The John Blanke Project*, which is described on its webpage as 'an art and archive project *celebrating* John

9 TNA E101/417/2 #105. See note 6.

10 Imtiaz Habib *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (London: Routledge, 2008) 39: 'he was very likely a surviving member of the Spanish princess's entourage'. Habib based his claim on K.J.P. Lowe 'Stereotyping Black Africans' in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* edited T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge UP, 2005) 17–47, at 39. Some scholars take a less certain tone and allow for the *possibility* that John Blanke was part of Katherine of Aragon's retinue, e.g. Tess Knighton 'Instruments, Instrumental Music and Instrumentalists' in *Companion to Music in the Age of the Catholic Monarchs* edited Tess Knighton (Leiden: Brill, 2017) 116. Others leave open a variety of possibilities for John Blanke's heritage. See, for example, Peter Fryer *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2018) 4: 'Whether he [John Blanke] came straight from Africa or from Scotland – or, indeed, as is quite possible, from Spain or Portugal – is not recorded'; Miranda Kaufmann, 'John Blanke (fl. 1507–1512)' in *ODNB*, at <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/107145>>: 'Blanke may have come from Spain, Portugal, or Italy, all of which had growing African populations at this time'.

11 Michael I. Ohajuru 'Insights into John Blanke's Image from The John Blanke Project' in *The Tudors: Passion, Power, and Politics* edited Charlotte Bolland (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2022) 26–8, at 26.

Blanke, the Black trumpeter to the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII, the first person of African descent in British history for whom we have both an image and a record' [*emphasis mine*].¹² Yet, without undermining the importance of the project or the celebration of the historical performer, Onyeka Nubia warns on the project webpage: 'be careful of superstardom. By making John Blanke an exception we marginalise and make strange his existence. Exceptionalism can help us keep our prejudices.' From the point of view of the black presence in sixteenth-century England, indeed, John Blanke was not unique. During this time many other persons of African descent lived in England, as Onyeka has observed, some of whom 'may have had a greater impact on that society than Blanke did'.¹³

Current scholarship has set out to fill a gap and redress a balance by studying the lives of persons of African descent in Tudor England more widely and intensively. The branch that takes the life and career of John Blanke as its focus could benefit from a closer study of the original documentary material to provide a context that enables scholars to look beyond the trumpet player's 'poster boy' status to give a fuller and more balanced understanding of the professional career of this instrumentalist as a member of the royal household and his place in the high-achieving and international community of musicians in the service of Henry VIII.¹⁴ In the current essay I seek to contribute to the discussion by exploring how John Blanke's petition to Henry VIII relates to the evidence of trumpet players' wages generally and to other musicians' petitions, within the contexts of the early Tudor court. As I will show, the financial evidence from the Tudor Chamber Books,¹⁵ which record in detail the

12 Michael Ohajuru 'About the John Blanke Project' in *The John Blanke Project*; at <<https://www.johnblanke.com/about-copy.html>>.

13 Onyeka Nubia 'The Author of *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England*' in *The John Blanke Project*; at <<https://www.johnblanke.com/onyeka.html>>.

14 For recent work on John Blanke, see also Michael Ohajuru 'The John Blanke Project' in *Britain's Black Past* edited Gretchen H. Gerzina (Liverpool UP, 2020) 7–25; and *The John Blanke Project* website at: <<https://www.johnblanke.com>>; Michelle L. Beer *Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain* (Royal Historical Society Studies in History NS 101; Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for the Royal Historical Society, 2018) 94; Nadia T. van Pelt 'John Blanke's Hat in the Westminster Tournament Roll' *Notes & Queries* 68: 4 (2021) 387–9; online at <<https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjab156>>, downloadable as <gjab156.pdf>.

15 *The Chamber Books of Henry VII and Henry VIII, 1485–1521* edited M.M. Condon, S.P. Harper, L. Liddy, S. Cunningham, and J. Ross (Collaborative Project

Court's monthly (and sometimes weekly) expenditure, enables the researcher to create a continuous payment history. The other manuscript collections in which petitions and warrants are filed are the source of the documents that are usually quoted as examples of John Blanke's uniqueness; but, seen in context, it becomes plain that, for example, the grant of a wedding garment was nothing out of the ordinary, and the terms in which he makes his requests are standard formulae drafted by a clerk. Taken all in all, the records suggest that John Blanke was not remunerated differently from other trumpet players working in the same professional context or treated either favourably or disadvantageously compared with other court musicians. In other words, professionally speaking, he was not 'marginalised'.

The second part of this essay is concerned with the financial implications of John Blanke's petition, for which, as a starting point, I address the question posed by Miranda Kaufmann in *Black Tudors*: 'what did Blanke want, or need, that 8d a day would not cover? Like other court servants, he had his livery, board, and lodging paid for by the king.' As possible explanations for Blanke's request she put forward that 'when the court travelled, servants often had to pay for their own accommodation and transport', and that 'perhaps Blanke wanted to buy more expensive clothing'.¹⁶ In the current contribution I consider this question in relation to both the purchasing power connected to wages received by a trumpet player at court and the additional costs of living and sources of income that should be considered alongside registered wages. Finally, gifts of clothing as an additional perk for royal servants, including musicians, are considered. As such, I provide a context to facilitate a better understanding of John Blanke's petition.

I

John Blanke the trumpet player is first seen in the payment records by name in December 1507:¹⁷ 'Item to John blanke the blacke Trumpet

between The University of Winchester, The National Archives and The Digital Humanities Institute at the University of Sheffield); online at <<https://www.tudorchamberbooks.org/>>.

¹⁶ Kaufmann *Black Tudors* 22.

¹⁷ Sean Cunningham has recently discovered a record in the National Archives from June 1488, which mentions a 'John Blank' who worked as a footman for King Henry VII; Sean Cunningham 'Are the 1507 John Blanke (sic) Trumpeter and