

BLUEBEARD

Brave Warrior, Brutal Psychopath

BY VALERIE OGDEN

Foreword by
Michael Kane, former Special Prosecutor,
JonBenet Ramsey Murder Case



History Publishing Company
Palisades, New York

Praise for *Bluebeard: Brave Warrior, Brutal Psychopath*

“A gripping and terrifying read for those captivated by the story of Bluebeard. It graphically chronicles how a war hero is devastated by the brutality he experiences—a tale with keen present day relevance!”

—Edward G. Rendell, former Governor of Pennsylvania
and former Mayor and District Attorney of Philadelphia

“Baron Gilles de Rais, nicknamed Bluebeard, was a wealthy baron, a war hero, and a renowned intellect in 15th century France. Yet, following the death of his companion in arms, Joan of Arc, he later became a notorious serial killer of children... Ms. Ogden documents these behavioral changes and suggests that he developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which exacerbated his psychopathic behavior. Her book (*Bluebeard: Brave Warrior, Brutal Psychopath*) is a grand documentation of his disconcerting life and its psychological underpinnings.”

—Timothy J. Michals, MD, the foremost psychiatrist
dealing with PTSD

“Ms. Ogden marshals a great deal of research and a remarkable flare for drama to set the life of Gilles de Rais, the notorious Bluebeard, in vivid historical context. She explores questions of good versus evil, nature versus nurture and points out that they are as salient and perplexing in the fifteenth century as they are today. A good read. Brava!”

—David Plimpton, author, psychologist

“The legend of Bluebeard has long captured the interest and imagination of academics and public alike. Now, at last, a definitive first rate historical account of the man behind the legend. Must reading for all those captivated by the Bluebeard story.”

—Kenneth Feinberg, Esq., Victims Advocate,
911, BP, Boston Marathon, General Motors

“Valerie Ogden’s real-life monster, Gilles de Rais, leaps from the pages of her sensational narrative to challenge our notions of the limits of human depravity. Once one of the richest men in 15th century France and a principal comrade-in-arms and protector of Jean d’ Arc, de Rais is the model upon which the horrific legend of Bluebeard is built. Meticulously researched in breathtaking detail, Ogden’s description of the unspeakable carnal desires and blood lust that drove Gilles de Rais into ever more abhorrent acts against the scores of innocent children who were inveigled into his clutches make Jack the Ripper’s crimes a Sunday picnic by comparison. Ogden searches for answers to what drove the fiend to act and why the Church granted him absolution for his crimes. Not for the faint hearted.”

—Richard Ben-Veniste, Esq.,
Former Watergate special prosecutor and
member 911 Commission

Copyright©2014 by Valerie Ogden
Ogden, Valerie

LCCN:

ISBN: 9781940773070 (QP)

ISBN: 9781940773087 (eBook)

SAN: 850-5942

CIP Data:

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission from History Publishing Company.

Published in the United States of America by
History Publishing Company, LLC
Palisades, New York

Printed in the United States on acid-free paper

First Edition

To the end of cannonballs

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD _____	9
INTRODUCTION _____	13
CHAPTER ONE: BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE _____	17
CHAPTER TWO: A COUNTRY of THIEVES / A BANQUET for KINGS _____	40
CHAPTER THREE: BLUEBEARD BRAVE _____	61
CHAPTER FOUR: THE INSPIRATION and MARTYR of FRANCE _____	79
CHAPTER FIVE: THEATRICAL MAGNILOQUENCE / STAGGERING RUIN _____	101
CHAPTER SIX: THE DARK SLOPE _____	125
CHAPTER SEVEN: THERE BE MONSTERS HERE _____	149
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE BRAZEN BLUNDER: ST. ETIENNE de MER-MORTE _____	178
CHAPTER NINE: THE TRIAL: ADMINISTRATION OF MEDIEVAL JUSTICE _____	189
EPILOGUE _____	217
CHRONOLOGY _____	229
CAST OF CHARACTERS _____	237
RELEVANT SITES _____	253

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	267
NOTES	269
BIBLIOGRAPHY	278

FOREWORD

BORN TO WEALTHY, BENEVOLENT, AND HIGHLY PLACED PARENTS at the turn of the fifteenth century, Gilles de Rais had prospects that few children of the era could have hoped for. He loved and admired his father, Guy II, and was doted on by his mother, Marie. But his idyllic family life was cut short at the age of eleven by the tragic, painful death of Guy II, who succumbed to an attack by a wild animal, followed soon thereafter by the loss of his mother. Transformed so quickly from a happy childhood to being an orphan,

Gilles endured the loss of his parents in silence and solitude, alone in the vast expanse of his fortress-home, tormented by the belief that their passing was inflicted through the vengeance of God Himself.

Though he inherited the immense wealth of his parents, Gilles was deprived of their moral compass when his maternal grandfather, Jean de Craon—a sixty-year-old best described as a thug—managed to seize custody of the boy despite Guy II's testamentary will directing that he and his year-old brother, Rene, be raised by a cousin. De Craon's interest in assuming responsibility for the children was based not on any affection for his daughter's offspring, but purely on his own self-interest in securing control over enormous stretches of land and other resources. His influence steered young Gilles along a path that Guy II had hoped to avoid.

Valerie Ogden's introductory chapters thus set the backdrop

for a fascinating perspective on the life of Gilles de Rais, a medieval French nobleman, warrior, and hero who became the scourge of his day—and generations that followed—as the infamous “Bluebeard.” Ms. Ogden blends a wonderful talent for describing scenes and events in a captivating story while faithfully employing scholarly attributions for every detail. The result is a page-turner, a true tale of a man known as much for his bravery and loyalty in battle at the side of Joan of Arc as for his savage sexual and masochistic desires, manifested by the kidnapping, rape, and murder of countless children.

The book is not confined to presenting a well-written story documenting the history behind the reign of terror imposed on Europe by the infamous Bluebeard. Ms. Ogden infuses it with her own hypotheses and invites the reader to explore the enigma that was the life of Gilles de Rais. Was his obsession with sexual exploitation of children born from his own melancholy childhood and being raised by an uncaring, amoral grandfather? Was it the product of depression and hopelessness following the martyrdom of his hero, Joan, and his demotion by the king he so loyally served? Was it what would be diagnosed today as post-traumatic stress disorder after years of witnessing and partaking in unimaginable slaughter? Or had the lawlessness in the wake of the Hundred Years’ War simply devalued life to the point that perverted and maniacal pleasures and unspeakable torture of children could be self-tolerated if not rationalized?

Ms. Ogden offers no definitive conclusions, but by raising these questions, adds a dimension that takes the work beyond being a very good story to one that provokes a serious discussion about criminal responsibility and accountability. Her questions are as relevant to some of today’s serial killers as they are to Bluebeard.

The conclusion of the book presents a tutorial on the politics and the interplay between civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction over crime and punishment in medieval

Europe. Within that, we find a vivid description of a man apparently wracked with guilt, seeking redemption and forgiveness through confession, and accepting, even inviting, the harshest of retributions for his crimes. Like the people who witnessed the human devastation brought on by his horrible deeds, yet nevertheless prayed for the repose of his soul, the reader is left with a sense of pity for this complex individual.

—Michael Kane, *Esquire*

INTRODUCTION

OLIVER DAVEL, ABOUT SEVEN YEARS OLD, WAS WALKING ALONG the crowded Rue de Marche with his grandmother. When she looked around, she could not find him. He had disappeared without a trace.

Jean Fouger's delicate child was last seen playing with sticks near the Saint-Donatien parish on a sunless day. He wore a special cloak of homespun wool made by his mother.

Jean Jeudon's boy, a slender twelve-year-old with big, brown eyes, apprenticed to a furrier, went to the castle to deliver a message. He did not return.

A diminutive figure dressed in grey, with a black veil and hood, approached children tending animals in the fields or begging barefoot by the road. She caressed them, flattered them. She put them at ease, promising a better life. Then she whisked them off to the dark corners of the castle.

There were others, many, many others. Long after, when lists were made, the names of youngsters who had vanished included boys and girls from all over the countryside, but at the time, nobody kept track of the missing. Nobody recognized the unfolding catastrophe.

Sometimes people thought they heard horrible cries from inside the castle walls, but no one dared question the lord who ruled from within. No one came forward to talk about the disturb-

ing incidents. No one, least of all the poor, the simple, the wretched, dared point a finger. Menacing bands of men lurked in the shadows. They served the mighty Lord of Machecoul, Nantes, and the surrounding estates. This powerful baron could throw his subjects into his dungeons or kill them outright.

Nevertheless, the drumbeat of concern mounted as the number of children who disappeared reached alarming proportions. Word spread in the markets; rumor passed from neighbor to neighbor in the village communities of illiterate peasants and tradesmen, in the still-wild surrounding areas of gloomy woods, untamed creeks, and swampy plains. As scores of children continued to vanish, the mighty lord became the prime suspect in their abduction. Evidence of his crimes kept surfacing.

* * *

For centuries after this august lord died, the very mention of his legendary nickname, Bluebeard, made those who lived in France tremble. Born Gilles de Rais, he is remembered for his horrific deeds as a fiendish pedophile. He sodomized, then butchered hundreds of children in bizarre sexual rituals and delighted in watching them die as he satisfied his own desires. The crimes of Bluebeard are much more sinister than those of most serial killers as we think of them today, for Gilles de Rais persuaded many associates, especially his homosexual bed partners, to assist in procuring innocents for him, and to participate in his frightful crimes.

Still, Bluebeard possessed extraordinary, even admirable, qualities. His life reflected two disparate aspects of the man that seem difficult to put together. Gilles de Rais was the paragon of the high medieval prince, almost a Renaissance man in his talents and accomplishments. Marshal of France and friend of the king, he fought alongside Joan of Arc at Orleans and was honored by Charles VII for his service to the Crown. A mighty baron and a

great entertainer, as well as a renowned intellectual, he staged grandiose theatrical events, commissioned musical compositions, collected art, and assembled an impressive library.

But following his heroic military defense of France, Baron de Rais somehow became a homicidal sexual psychopath, a serial killer. He went through a life-changing crisis that turned him from the path of a noble warrior and set him off on a series of shocking adventures that led to his ruin. A shattering incident must have occurred. There is no clear explanation of what exactly happened; there is only speculation.

CHAPTER ONE

BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

CHAMPTOCÉ LOOMED ABOVE THE RIGHT BANK OF THE LOIRE RIVER, colossal and impenetrable. Visible for miles, the castle sat on nine hundred acres of land. A thick curtain wall, thirty feet wide, and eleven tall towers with battlements, all of it built of grey stone, formed the outermost part of the compound. An inner stone wall, twenty-one feet wide, encircled the enormous square keep, the central citadel, with its four solid-granite pillars. Measuring close to seventy-five feet in diameter, soaring one hundred fifty feet into the sky, the citadel with its pillars dominated the landscape. It served as the lord's residence and the center of courtly life. It also functioned as the last defensive refuge for the compound.

Situated in the western part of the duchy of Anjou and close to the border of Brittany, the castle's location afforded excellent protection from enemy assault, a requirement for a stronghold during the Middle Ages. The castle's defenses had been designed into its structure. Anyone attempting to climb the ramparts would be shot by archers from two directions simultaneously. Vaulted subterranean tunnels, which could be closed off by trapdoors, connected the fortification's outer walls to all areas of the inner castle through

a network of musty secret passageways. These long underground corridors served as supply and escape routes during a siege and allowed defenders to clear out material thrown in by attackers.

Champtocé's five-story gatehouse, with its own complex of towers, bridges, and barriers, rose out of a large moat filled with water. It provided the only entrance into the castle, guarded by the seventy-five battle-ready soldiers quartered there. They directed the raising and lowering of the wooden drawbridge and controlled the portcullis, a heavy, protective gate of thick oak, covered with iron plating. Time spent at this crucial post proved uneventful for the most part, and the men-at-arms passed the time amusing themselves gambling with cards, playing whistles and pipes, and telling each other twaddling jokes.

The vast estate of Champtocé, as big as some medieval towns, easily accommodated its lords and ladies, their retainers, servants, and domestic animals, in addition to a military troop of four hundred. The many outbuildings constructed within the bailey, the open area inside the castle complex, included a Romanesque chapel, stables with verdant pasture nearby, barracks for the armed garrison, and a large kitchen. Plots of herbs, including marjoram, chamomile, basil, sweet fennel, mint, germander, and lavender, grew in profusion in the gardens close to the kitchen. So did all kinds of flowers: roses, heliotropes, violets, poppies, daffodils, iris, and gladiolus. Pine woods, fruit trees, and a fish pond stocked regularly with trout and pike were nearby, and a deep well located in the fully enclosed inner cobblestone courtyard, along with cisterns dug throughout the grounds, supplied drinking water.

The offices of the castle seignury, which handled the castle's financial and administrative matters, were also in the bailey. Because Champtocé bordered the provinces of Anjou and Brittany, its owners had the right to collect a toll from all boats carrying merchandise between these two territories on the Loire River. The income was hefty. Tradesmen found the charges exorbitant and

unjust. Nevertheless, transporting goods on the river was the safest way of ensuring their arrival, as thieves lay in ambush behind hedges and trees dotting the land routes, and even the main roads were rutted and difficult.

While the castle's exterior was stark and daunting, as soon as the servants flung open the elaborately decorated inner doors to the castle, the mood and aesthetic changed. Champtocé's interior was luxurious, positively exuberant. Hundreds of wax tapers illuminated its halls and rooms. Gold and silver cloth, together with tapestries from the prestigious Ile-de-France and Arras studios, adorned the walls; more than just decorative, they provided insulation against dampness and cold. Where the castle walls remained exposed, they were beautifully decorated with elaborate drawings of oak leaves. Thick carpets covered the marble and jade floors, and the best Italian artists of the day had been brought in to enhance the brilliant red-and-blue ceilings with paintings. The arches, vaults, and pillars in the principal state apartments were painted jonquil, indigo, crimson, and aquamarine. Enormous fireplaces with mantled chimneys warmed the great hall along with the private rooms. The library, paneled in Irish oak, contained elegant, leather-bound, illuminated manuscripts, including Augustine's *City of God*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Suetonius's *De Vita Caesarum*, depicting the cruel lives of the Caesars.

The immense sleeping chambers included splendid hand-carved wooden armchairs cushioned with leather, footstools, and intricately inlaid clothing chests. The lord, his family, and visitors slept in great beds atop a carpeted dais, raised three steps above the rest of the room. The beds had silk canopies, pulled back during daylight hours and closed at night for privacy, as well as protection from drafts. Feather mattresses covered with sheets of silk, heavy wool blankets, and furs provided comfort and warmth. In each room, sweet-scented rose water was available in a gold pitcher embossed with ancient Greek designs.

The small, leaded-glass windowpanes in the sleeping quarters afforded a spellbinding view of the Loire, its banks of gold sand dappled with sunlight through willow trees. In the distance, yellow-billed cuckoos warbled in an azure sky; grape vines carpeted lush hillsides; fertile fields undulated with grain.

Even the plumbing system was sophisticated. A cistern on the top floor of Champtocé supplied running water which fed sinks throughout the castle. Toilets with cold stone seats protruded from an outside wall. Odoriferous waste slid through the hole in the floor to a pit regularly flushed by a servant called a gong farmer.

Champtocé's bulging silhouette towered above a bustling village of huts and half-timbered frame houses crammed cheek by jowl. Smoke curled from chimneys, while carpenters, bakers, butchers, blacksmiths, and potters worked out of the main room of their homes, which doubled as their shops. Fishermen repaired mesh or woven nets alongside the banks of the Loire in all sorts of weather. Short, dusty streets in town curved down to the majestic Loire. When it rained, the mud and stone lanes became streams of smelly garbage, urine, and manure which raced down into the river.

A simple but lovely church was the focal point of village life. Hawkers with their baskets, peddlers with their assorted trinkets, peasants with their small and large carts, their well-worn wagons, their overburdened oxen and sheep, continually moved around this Romanesque tribute to God. Using soap made from goat tallow and beech ash, women cleaned clothes nearby in the wash pool, a tank fed by a spring. They also sold butter, cheese, and eggs by the church steps, idly gossiping together. Throughout the day and into the night villagers entered the church by the grey-green granite stoop, to be greeted by a whiff of incense drifting about the building. Mural paintings in the apse depicted Christ of the Apocalypse surrounded by angels. Late twelfth-century stained-glass windows displayed a serene Virgin and Child in various postures of beatitude.

In medieval France, the rich did not forget the poor, and as in many other villages, a hospice for the impoverished stood near the castle's outer wall. Its large patient hall, where nuns tended to the sick, consisted of three naves with gracefully shaped arches. The village inn also abutted the castle wall. While limited to tiny communal sleeping quarters upstairs and one public room on the ground floor, it was lively and louse-free. Good food and estimable wine could be bought there at an honest price. Chickens as well as geese nibbled around the dung heap and ash pile in the sliver of a backyard, destined to become dinner for boisterous guests when they grew plump. One can imagine the occasional hungry dog darting into the yard and slinking off with one of the birds to devour it in a scarcely used passageway close to the fortress which reeked of old rotting fish guts plus other piles of rubbish.

* * *

The baby born in 1404 at Champtocé Castle seemed extremely fortunate. Four of the mightiest feudal dynasties in Western France came together in the boy's cradle. By his father, Guy II, he was a Laval, one of the richest, most respected families in France. Their extensive tracts of land encompassed a great part of the Northwest. By his mother, Marie, he was a descendant of the foremost Houses of Machecoul and de Craon. The union of Guy II and Marie had not been a love match. Strictly political and financial in nature, their marriage allowed Guy to inherit the de Rais name from an elderly baroness who was the last of that respected line of nobility. More important, after he received her vast fortune, he quadrupled his wealth, Champtocé being but one of the ancient lady's many rich holdings.

The newly wed Guy and Marie, now addressed as the Baron and Baroness de Rais, took up residence at Champtocé when the old aristocrat passed away. They called their first child Gilles, affirming their promise to name him after Saint Gilles if he gave

them a boy. Gilles de Rais's baptism in the charming Champtocé village church, with its bells pealing, was a grand event. All the great neighboring landholders attended. Riding handsome horses that danced past onlookers, they came attired in cloaks lined with luxuriant fur, in richly woven, nap-raised Bruges woolens, in voluptuous green, blue, red, and gold silks from Venice. After the ceremony, they visited with the family at the castle. Standing next to the blazing logs in the great fireplace in the grand hall, they offered toasts of congratulations with Hypocras, the favorite drink of the local nobility, a heavy red wine mulled with various spices including cinnamon, mace, and white ginger.

Nevertheless, Gilles de Rais, born in a chamber in the Champtocé tower that was known as "the dark tower," came to believe he was brought forth under the curse of a black planet. When Gilles was eleven, a year after the birth of his brother, Rene, named for Lord Rene of Anjou, their father was out hunting in the woods near the chateau. Guy was charged by a wild boar and gored, and the attack led to his slow, excruciating death. Gilles admired his father, and this accident in 1415 took a very positive influence out of his life. Gilles imagined that the black planet hovered over Champtocé, and that it inflicted more vengeance that same year when his mother also died. Gilles never fully expressed his grief or suffering about these early losses, which he regarded as ominous omens. Like most Europeans in the Middle Ages, he assumed the cosmic dance of the stars and planets influenced his life.

With his parents gone, Gilles had no one to confide in, no one to dispel his fears. Like many young children who lose their parents, he became preoccupied with the death of his loved ones. He suffered from his loss in morbid silence, and the young baron turned into a brooding, solitary child inhabiting a lonely, spacious castle. Years later, de Rais's manservant, Henriette, at his confession before a secular court looking into Gilles's crimes admitted "... he

heard the said lord say that there was no man alive who could ever understand what he had done, and it was because of his planet that he did such things.”

Fate made Gilles de Rais an orphan, but it also gave him a huge gift, possession of the immense properties of his deceased father and mother, large fortresses and beautiful land, covered variously with vineyards, rolling hills, villages, and tracts of forest and salt marshes. However, he was taught nothing of the moral obligations and personal accountability that properly came with such an inheritance.

In his last will and testament, which he authorized on his deathbed, Guy II designated a cousin as the guardian of his children. Guy knew all too well what type of man his father-in-law, Jean de Craon, was and did not want to entrust his children to him. Nevertheless, after Guy's death, Jean de Craon successfully contested the will and became the guardian of eleven-year-old Gilles and one-year-old Rene.

De Craon wanted control of Gilles's huge fortune. By the feudal laws of primogeniture, and following Norman tradition, the firstborn son inherited the bulk of his parents' estates, to the exclusion of any younger siblings. Nobles believed that if they divided their lands among their sons, stronger neighbors would attempt to take over the smaller estates. Thus all of his parents' great wealth went to Gilles, and de Craon was bent on possessing it.

Two honorable clergy, Gilles's tutors, agreed with Guy's assessment of de Craon. When Gilles's father was alive, they made sure the young Baron de Rais was well schooled in morals, ethics, religion, arithmetic, and the humanities. They abruptly left Champtocé Castle after de Craon placed Gilles and Rene in his own care. These men considered him to be no better than a thug, who did not care about the education or the responsibilities of fledgling noblemen.

This sixty-year-old de Craon relied on banditry to get what he

wanted. Although he possessed substantial noble credentials as a powerful vassal of the Dukes of Anjou and Brittany, and was already extremely rich, wealth was what Jean de Craon worshipped. Avaricious, savage, and a miser without scruples, de Craon showed little respect for anything. "If one puts aside a totally exterior respectability, Jean de Craon has the outlook and the facility, if one likes, of a purse snatcher," insisted George Bataille, a noted French writer and historian. De Craon once even authorized an armed attack on the Queen of Sicily, Yolande d'Aragon, as she enjoyed a ride on her horse through the elm and cedar-covered hillocks in her own Angevine domain. The queen, also the Duchess of Anjou, was relieved of her jewelry beneath a peaceful blue sky. Her escorts had their horses as well as their baggage stolen, and were obliged to walk many miles back toward Yolande's castle before her servants found them.

Displaying little empathy for Gilles's losses, Grandfather de Craon set an atrocious personal example. The greatest lesson de Craon imparted to Gilles as heir to a vast empire was that he remained above the laws of France. Other than that, de Craon essentially left his grandson to run free with little oversight, with one exception. He insisted Gilles receive extensive military training as a knight.

Like many bereaved children, de Rais showed abnormal anger and defiance. Perhaps he felt a need to control his environment, since he lived with an amoral grandfather, and without supervision. The mature Gilles, playing upon the sympathy of the judges during his public confession to an ecclesiastical court in Nantes, admitted he amused himself in any way he saw fit as a child and blamed his offenses on his grandfather's lack of discipline. He told the court he sought his grandfather's attention, and the most dramatic way to be noticed, he thought, was to inflict pain on servants, retainers, and other juveniles. He did all the evil of which he was capable. "I placed all my hope, intent and effort in these illic-

it and shameful things and...increased these improper acts for the purpose of bringing about” suffering. He laughed as these individuals twisted in pain. De Craon never heeded Gilles’s improprieties, never reprimanded him, never showed him any love. (Of all the abuses a child might suffer, a profound sense of abandonment and rejection causes the most harm later on.)

Once in a while, de Craon indulged Gilles, who hated to be bored. To entertain him, Grandfather Jean assembled a mock court for him, made up of twelve and thirteen-year-old boys. The mission of these young courtiers was to serve Gilles and obey his commands. Little was sacred to him, and he so liked to dominate, so liked to punish these boys, that he pushed them beyond the limits of their tolerance for him. The French historian, Joseph Rouille, alluded to his acts being “homosexual in nature.” In hindsight, it appears de Rais displayed an antisocial personality disorder early on. While no single childhood problem infallibly signifies future criminality, the impulsive and improper choices he made with his peers, when some did not submit to him, indicated that the rage, fear, and bewilderment he experienced after his parents’ deaths had not gone away.

Roger de Briquerville, a cousin from the Normandy region of France, his family financially ruined during the Hundred Years’ War, came into the de Craon household as a page when he and de Rais were teenagers. Later, Roger, a puny bantam with flame-red hair, became a fugitive, accused of assisting de Rais in his brutal adult crimes. In an attempt to clear his name, de Briquerville, in letters seeking a pardon from the King of France (*Lettres de grace accordees par Charles VII a Roger de Briquerville, le 24 mai, 1446*), accused de Rais of bullying him even when they were children. De Briquerville alleged that Gilles frequently tied him up with narrow leather straps, bit him ferociously, and sodomized him. De Briquerville said he was petrified of de Rais because of his cruel, vicious nature and his fascination with unhealthy pursuits. A

strong boy like de Rais might easily have dominated the weaker de Briqueville. Yet, with a background of neglect, some children tend to become violent and abusive from a very early age. A youngster like de Rais, who enjoyed many abnormal pastimes, must be considered predisposed, but not necessarily predestined, to develop dangerous social and mental problems.

The only exception to de Craon's serious inattention to Gilles was his aforementioned insistence de Rais train to become a skilled feudal knight. He made de Rais spend hours learning the subtleties of sword fighting, jousting, and hand-to-hand combat. While the martial games of young lords of that era were always dangerous, Gilles outdid his adversaries during matches. He enjoyed being the most savage, the most victorious; he reveled in attracting attention and would take any challenge. On one occasion, fighting with swords and daggers, Gilles stuck an opponent with such force he killed the boy on the spot. De Rais had not intended to fell the youth, but he showed little remorse after the squire died.

De Rais's many unhealthy childhood interests probably foretold his eventual penchant for committing serial murders. But along with seeking the roots of his later depraved conduct in the pathological behavior of his early years, the terrible emotional shock de Rais, a hero of the Hundred Years' War, received fighting for his country must also be considered. That trauma made him lose all rational control. As will be discussed, the possibility strongly exists that Gilles de Rais suffered from PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, and that the illness triggered his underlying psychopathy.

In a striking contrast to the appalling behavior of his childhood, Gilles de Rais was also an enthusiastic young scholar, taken up with learning. At his father's request, he read and recited Latin and Greek by the time he was seven; encouraged by his tutors, he subsequently immersed himself in the classics. Later on, he showed an interest in science, art, music, theater, literature, and

gemology, and developed a fine taste for expensive furniture and fabrics, such as sensual silks and rich brocades. Gilles, an avid reader, always traveled with books. He kept a painter in his entourage, who illuminated his manuscripts with exquisite letterings and miniatures. De Rais even enjoyed coloring the enamels in the gold bindings himself.

The British writer Wyndham Lewis imagined the bookshelves in Gilles's library brimming with extensive manuscripts, written in glossy black ink, illuminated in thick gold and color. In his book, *The Soul of Marshal Gilles de Raiz*, he noted that educated French noblemen of that time often had a variety of manuscripts in their possession, including Latin classics, books of hours, missals, Scriptural commentaries, manuals of devotion, volumes of heraldry, hawking, farriery, and such standard French works as the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, and Rutebeuf's *Theophile*.

The nineteenth-century priest, Eugene Bossard, insisted Gilles's redeeming characteristic was his keen curiosity about literature and art. He described de Rais in his rich biography, *Gilles de Rais, Marechal de France, dit Barbe Bleue*, as "one of the most well-informed men of his time," "...one of the best intellects of the century," possessing an extraordinary command of Latin, and speaking it eloquently.

Like initiate knights of his age, de Rais was not only brought up learning the art of waging war but also appreciating the literature available to the elite of the time. He mastered both in his youth. As an adult, he excelled in fighting and proved to be a remarkable intellectual who enjoyed commissioning musical compositions, collecting art, assembling an impressive library, and staging grandiose theatrical events. His passion for erudition, as well as his great respect for beauty and intelligence, made him stand out, looking more like a cultured nobleman of the Renaissance than a chevalier of the Middle Ages.

* * *

Jean de Craon, on the other hand, cared nothing for these finer aspects of medieval life; his command of Latin, for example, was minimal. He thought only about enriching his coffers, and thus he betrothed Gilles at thirteen to a four-year-old Norman orphan. The marriage would have made the house of de Craon-de Rais the most powerful in all of France. But her guardian wanted her for his own seven-year-old son, also a Norman. De Craon went to her financially strapped grandfather, offering to pay his debts if he approved the forthcoming union. The furious guardian called upon the Parliament of Paris, the highest arbiter in France, to settle the dispute. The contract of marriage was declared null and void, since both children needed to be fourteen to marry. The young girl entered a convent soon after and the dispute became moot.

Ten months later, de Craon found a better match for Gilles. She was the niece of Jean V, the Duke of Brittany, and de Rais's feudal overlord. Aware of Gilles's wealth, the duke heartily encouraged the union. A gigantic gathering of Breton nobility took place in the majestic Romanesque Cathedral at Vannes, the ancient capital of Brittany, for the announcement of Gilles's second engagement. The duke wore an ermine-trimmed, purple vest and an ancient Breton mantle for the occasion. It is not clear why this intended marriage never occurred.

Perhaps the nuptials were abandoned because de Craon discovered an even richer heiress, with an enormous dowry. Catherine de Thouars's lands would greatly augment the de Craon-de Rais estates, as her immense properties encompassed the splendid chateau of Tiffauges and other smaller castles, located at the point where Poitou, Angers, and Brittany converged. She was Gilles's fourth cousin, though, and the Roman Catholic Church forbade a union between such close kin.

In the Middle Ages, prohibitions relating to marriage, as well as intercourse with a relative, reached a degree unheard of in any other society. These were most draconian in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth century. Sexual intercourse between all relatives connected by consanguinity or compaternity (a spiritual affinity between a child's parents and the godparents) to the fourth degree was banned. In fifteenth-century France, these taboos still extended to fourth cousins, adopted relatives, and spiritual relations designated at baptisms.

The restrictions of the Catholic Church did not deter de Craon. The morning after Catherine de Thouars's father died unexpectedly from a high fever, de Craon, along with Gilles and a party of men-at-arms, surrounded her when she was out on her customary ride. They kidnapped her and whisked her away to a chapel, where a monk married the two sixteen-year-olds, a gloating Gilles and a bewildered Catherine.

De Craon had rushed to abduct Catherine because he did not want to give any rivals a chance to claim her hand, and her vast holdings. Eighteen months later, after the Catholic Church received a very nice contribution from de Craon, the Bishop of Angers, following detailed instructions from Rome, joined the fourth cousins properly in holy matrimony with great pomp and circumstance. They were remarried at a nuptial High Mass in the parish church of St. Maurice-de-Chalonnnes; musicians led the wedding party there. To make the ceremony eloquent and memorable, de Rais chose and supplied exquisite vestments for the clergy, as well as resplendent wall hangings, carpets, and gold and silver candlesticks; he also suggested the music for the Mass. He wore a splendid jouvence-blue, velvet gown and a rich indigo silken doublet with puffed sleeves. Catherine, at his request, appeared in a red, fully beaded French-lace bodice and taffeta skirt made by hand. (Only the very rich could afford such colors and fabrics.) Elaborate wedding festivities followed the church ceremonies, and large numbers of guests, along

with throngs of peasants from the countryside, enjoyed the fanfare of lavish feasts and lively entertainment provided by the very contented Jean de Craon.

A year after Catherine's father passed away, but before she was properly married to Gilles by the church, Catherine's mother had wedded a young, penniless, but able chamberlain of the Dauphin's court. With her new husband, Catherine's mother fought de Craon's seizure of Catherine and her possessions, with dire consequences. De Craon's soldiers abducted Catherine's mother and transported her to Champocé, where de Craon, aided by de Rais, shoved her into a sack and threatened to drown her in the Loire River if she did not meet their demands. Her husband sent three messengers, including his brother, to de Craon, with orders to cease and desist from his criminal behavior. De Craon scoffed at the demands, and De Rais showed no empathy as his grandfather ordered the emissaries thrown into a deep pit half full of water and left there. The brother died from the ordeal; the other two never fully recovered from their harsh treatment.

Once she was released, Catherine's mother and her husband appealed to the Dauphin, Charles de Ponthieu. He sent a royal commission of inquiry, headed by the president of the Parliament of Poitou, to investigate. De Craon and de Rais ordered their men-at-arms to rough up the delegation before it even reached Champocé. The commissioners were so intimidated that they galloped back to Poitou without ever talking to de Rais or de Craon. The Dauphin was indignant and imposed a harsh fine on the two, which was never paid.

The inquiry by the Parliament of Poitou, and his mother-in-law's rough treatment, were inconsequential to de Rais, who now shared his grandfather's values: acquisitions were paramount. With the properties gained through his wife, he now possessed lands from the Loire River on the north, the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the further shore of Lake Grand-Lieu on the east (adjoining

Nantes), and the frontiers of Poitou to the south. At eighteen, Baron Gilles de Rais also had a grandiose sense of self-worth.

* * *

Gilles de Rais and his grandfather, Jean de Craon, had felt no remorse carrying off Catherine de Thouars and forcing her to marry Gilles, but when the Duke of Brittany was kidnapped that same year, they were outraged. They came to his rescue without hesitation, not only saving his life but also his principality. De Craon, especially, recognized that if they freed him, the Duke would reward them generously with money and land. While that was straightforward enough for de Rais and de Craon, the circumstances that had brought the situation about were not so simple.

Duke Jean V of Brittany had not fulfilled his promise to the French Dauphin to raise troops to fight against the English in the Hundred Years' War, the series of battles between the French and the English for the French throne, taking place over the course of a century, primarily on French soil. The Duke of Brittany, who was also the Dauphin's brother-in-law, had catered to both sides in the war. Some accounts describe the duke as cunning, heartless, greedy. His people called Jean V the Wise, though, because he represented the interests of his province well, through his intelligence and crafty diplomacy.

Promising his services to the French, he threw his support to the English the very next day. There were reasons for the duke's duplicity; his widowed mother, Jeanne de Navarre, had married Henry IV, King of England. Thus Jean V had very personal ties to that country. Along with many others, Jean V thought the Dauphin weak and vacillating, without the proper aptitude to govern France. The Dauphin was sarcastically referred to as the King of Bourges, because with no regular army, no financial backing, and no allies, after the Duke of Burgundy and English sympathizers took over his residence in Paris, the Dauphin had escaped to

Bourges, a town in southeastern France, to form an embryonic government.

Aware of the duke's double dealings, as well as his insults, the Dauphin backed a plot to trap Jean V, to teach him a lesson about loyalty. He invited the duke to a banquet at a luxurious castle. When the duke arrived, he was chained and thrown into the dungeon, where he nearly starved to death.

As counselors of the province of Brittany, Jean de Craon and his grandson, Gilles de Rais, were called to the parliament at Vannes. The Duchess of Brittany, with her two young children at her side, made a dramatic appeal to the States-General of Brittany to come to the aid of her imprisoned husband. Insulted by the assault on Duke Jean, his vassals took up arms.

In the past, de Craon and the Houses of Laval, Gilles's father's family, had backed a faction called the Penthievres in an incessant and ancient feud with the rival Montforts. Both groups claimed the right to rule Brittany. But now, with their noble Breton peers, de Craon and de Rais swore upon the cross to fight for the duke, a Montfort, to do all they could "physically and monetarily" until they obtained his release. They raised red banners, which symbolized an immediate willingness to fight to the death. Fifty thousand Montfort men marched to battle against the Penthievres who held the duke. At a time when the entire French army had totaled fifty thousand soldiers at Crecy, sixty thousand at Agincourt, and twenty thousand at Poitiers, cataclysmic contests already lost by the French in the Hundred Years' War, this was a very large force.

The Montfort-Penthievres feud must be viewed alongside the broader events affecting France at that time. The battles of Poitiers, Crecy, and Agincourt caused profound social and economic upheaval persisting well into the fifteenth century. Terror and turmoil engulfed the country. The English victories wiped out the greater part of the French aristocracy, destroyed morale

and pride, and ruined the economy as well as everyday life. These debacles created a dismal landscape for the thousands of dispossessed. English troops stationed within France faced overwhelming hatred and intense resistance which they countered with brutal reprisals.

In each of those major battles, the English, with one-fourth the numbers of the French, used archers, drawn from the English peasantry, equipped with long bows and steel-tipped arrows to destroy their enemy. The proud French nobility scorned these commoners, thought them unmanly, but the French knights were decimated.

After English archers ran out of arrows during the clash at Poitiers, they joined their infantry in the fierce struggle against the French, using whatever weapons they found. The Dauphin of France withdrew from the savage fight so that his men could regroup. Having witnessed this retreat, another wave of French combatants panicked and fled. At this point, English reserves, hidden in the woods, emerged, circled the remaining French, and attacked their flank and rear. The battle collapsed as the King of France, his immediate entourage, and one of his sons were captured. The English demanded France pay a ransom for their imprisoned monarch equivalent to twice the country's yearly income. The king tried to raise the astronomical amount himself. He received permission to leave his internment in England and traveled to France to do so. Unsuccessful, he honored his promise to return to captivity in the Tower of London, where he died a few months later.

During the battles at Crecy and Agincourt, the overconfident French cavalry worried the skirmish would be over before they had a chance to fight. Largely unsupported by infantry, they attempted to race toward the English across a muddy field, which became more impassible by the second. (It rained before both Crecy and Agincourt, with the muck knee-deep in some places.)

Bogged down in the sodden ground, the knights became easy targets for English archers, whose arrows blackened the sky.

English bowmen also aimed at the knights' war horses, and hundreds of prized destriers and coursers were cut down or wounded. Crazed, bleeding, screaming, whinnying, flailing uncontrollably, these regal animals struggled in vain to pull themselves out of the sludge. They suffered agonizing deaths. The few riderless horses that survived panicked and galloped back through the advancing French line, causing more havoc. In their headlong flight, they trampled and crushed some of the knights already thrown to the ground.

Most of the French nobles shot down remained helplessly trapped in the mud. They lay beneath their chargers, entangled in their own swords, lances, shields, leg armor, spurs. English pikeman and Welsh soldiers equipped with knives walked through the field, massacring them by the thousands. The preferred method of killing the defenseless knights was to lift their visors and shove daggers into their eyes. The upper crust of France, those who frequented the court and owned large tracts of land, was practically annihilated on these fields of slaughter.

At Agincourt, the contest was over within an hour. Like so many prominent French aristocrats, Gilles de Rais's grandfather, Jean de Craon, lost a relative there, his only son and heir. The English army also took a great number of prisoners, but did not have the manpower to guard them. Rather than allow the French the chance to offer the customary ransom in exchange for their release, King Henry V of England ordered their death. Only the most illustrious knights were spared.

Some historians downplay Henry's acts of vengeance, looking upon him as a flawed but courageous man. They believe Henry killed French prisoners by the thousands because he feared the French might rearm themselves from the weapons strewn upon the field and overpower his troops. Other researchers are not as

charitable. They see him as a greedy, paranoid psychopath who brought a religious fanaticism to his campaigns and enjoyed watching prisoners burn alive.

After the French debacles, heavy smoke and haze choked the air for days. English heralds wandered over the blood-soaked fields of combat and tallied the number of stiff and mangled corpses, crawling with small black flies. At Crecy there were “eleven great (French) princes slain, twelve hundred knights, and more than thirty thousand other”; at Poitiers, four thousand five hundred in total. The estimate for the French annihilation at Agincourt ranged between four thousand to eleven thousand dead.

Combined English fatalities for the three battles did not reach a thousand. One of their wounded was Sir Peers Legh. His faithful mastiff stood over him, protecting him throughout the battle of Agincourt. (Although Sir Legh died a short time later, the mastiff returned home to become the forefather of a pedigree which figures prominently in the modern English mastiff breed.)

In the Monfort-Penthièvres engagement, which took place a few years after Agincourt, though the combatants were all countrymen, assaults on the enemy were just as brutal. In the attempt to liberate the Duke of Brittany, Gilles de Rais organized several companies of men-at-arms, which he commanded. While one of the youngest captains in the field, Gilles's courage and ability as a strategist stood out. He seemed to have grasped the complex art of war, for he planned and successfully executed an audacious siege on Lamballe, located near Mont St. Michel in the Gulf of St. Malo. He reveled in the challenge, in the stimulation of battle, in the bloodshed. He also turned his murderous impulses against the enemy.

Bugles blew; drums rolled as the assault commenced. De Rais ordered his nine-foot-long, wrought-iron cannons, some weighing up to a quarter of a ton, to fire stone balls incessantly against the Lamballe castle. Cannon after cannon spewed flames and smoke,

their stone balls tearing through parts of the stronghold, their thundering tremors relentless. Fires broke out in the fortification with columns of crackling heat rising toward the sky. Some Penthievres soldiers, set ablaze during the pounding, had their clothes burned off. They ran from the turrets in a futile attempt to escape their pain. Others remained, mortally wounded, with casualties mounting. The surviving defenders, fatigued but unscathed, knew the dark sky with its flying projectiles could rain flashing destruction on them at any moment. They desperately tried to fling Monfort ladders back with forked poles, and dropped an avalanche of rocks along with hot water from the machicolations, openings built into overhangs on top of the castle walls. Archers sent volley after volley of arrows hissing from their crossbows into the concentration of attacking men. Gilles's troops dodged these defensive tactics as best they could. The soldiers kept on charging, though some men had stones crash onto their helmets, wounding or stunning them, and many died from the arrows pouring down. With his insane disregard for danger, Gilles roused the rest of his forces to follow him in a mad, direct assault. Still braving arrows and rocks, they encircled the heavily fortified but crumbling fasthold and steadily scaled the walls of the fortress in three different areas, to divide the enemy's guard.

As the walls were mounted, De Rais ordered a battering ram, called the "tortoise" for how slowly it moved when being wheeled into place, to break down the fasthold gatehouse. Leaving nothing to chance, de Rais also brought in a wooden siege tower. His soldiers climbed up protected ladders inside the tower, to a drawbridge at the top. At Gilles's command the drawbridge was dropped to the castle wall, so that more of his men could swarm in.

While Monfort forces flooded the fortification, their excited cries gave way to shrieks of pain. Some were gruesomely cut to pieces; some were smacked so hard in the mouth their teeth came out the back of their heads as they crashed into Penthievres wield-

ing leaden maces, axes, swords. Both sides, now covered with sweat and blood, bashed out each other's brains, intestines, muscles, eyes, noses, eardrums, kneecaps; it was an orgy of brutality, and dead and maimed men lay everywhere. Despite the fight put up by the defenders, de Rais's unrelenting assaults, his reckless brute force, eventually resulted in a capitulation by the demoralized Penthièvres.

Despite Gilles's win, the castles and baronies of the Laval-Rais nobility, as well as some of Jean de Craon's holdings, were razed. Their Monfort allies incurred massive destruction too. Nevertheless, de Rais and his compatriots fought on from there, retaking strongholds such as Jugon, Chateaulin, Brune, and La Roche-Derrien. Many of the inhabitants of these areas were murdered in the Monfort-Penthièvres civil war "in a time when a particular hatred is exercised under the guise of a public hatred." Fear and dread spread throughout the region.

In this damaging French feud, the Monfort side gained revenge when their forces, including de Rais, freed the imprisoned duke. With bells clanging throughout the vibrant Breton city, young Baron de Rais accompanied the liberated Duke Jean V into Nantes. Crooked, cobbled streets opened onto broad spaces with overhanging gables, spires reaching toward Heaven, and the masses hailing de Rais for his triumphant deeds. He reared his sleek, prancing paltry many times in acknowledgment. Breathtakingly attired in dazzling armor, a breastplate detailed in bronze eagles, richly embossed gauntlets, and wearing a flamberge sword with a silver pommel, he reveled in the admiration of the jubilant crowd. The duke granted him numerous properties confiscated from the enemy in recognition of his assistance, including fiefs belonging to the Count of Penthièvres and his brother. Jean V also gave Gilles and his grandfather a large annuity derived from the rents of another Penthièvres possession, but kept the use of the lucrative lands for himself.

Soldiering had won great honors for Gilles's famous ancestors, three venerated fourteenth-century heroes of the Hundred Years' War. With his brief military experience, de Rais found the occupation so exhilarating, the acclaim so enticing, that he decided he too would become a professional warrior, following that noble tradition. The nineteenth-century French priest, Eugene Bossard, in his comprehensive study of Gilles, offered the opinion that after the Monfort-Pentrievres struggle, "He looked upon the art of war as a profound science; de Guesclin, his great-uncle, Olivier de Clisson, his neighbor and relative, Brumor de Laval, his grandfather, furnished him with grand lessons about glory that at the very least he had to equal. His ambition was jogged by the recitation of their feats. To be admired like these patriarchs became one of his passions."

Gilles's exploits in Brittany were the prelude to his brave defense of France as he aspired to as much glory as his ancestors, if not more. Combat also provided the fire he needed in his life; he savored the fury, the killing, the challenge, appetites that expressed themselves most horribly after he left the military, when he turned into a psychopath, and fed those hungers with the murder of children.

After the duke's liberation, Jean de Craon's political associations proved invaluable to Gilles's military ambitions. His connection to Yolande, the Duchess of Aragon, was particularly helpful. Before he robbed her of her jewels, Yolande had invited de Craon to govern her Anjou province. She was also the Dauphin's mother-in-law, and she urged de Craon and de Rais to persuade the freed Duke Jean of Brittany to make amends with the Dauphin, and assist him in his fight against the English. They obliged, urging Duke Jean to meet with the Dauphin, Charles de Ponthieu.

The reconciliation between Charles de Ponthieu and Duke Jean de Monfort took place at the Dauphin's Saumur Castle, standing above the Loire Valley. The Dauphin and Jean V agreed

upon the details of Brittany's alliance with France on a sultry mid-summer morning, looking out on a panoramic view of the town and the countryside, prolific with grapevines and orchards. To show their solidarity, they celebrated Mass together three times in the Dauphin's refreshingly cool personal chapel.

De Craon, present at Saumur during the detente between the Dauphin and Duke Jean V, invited the Dauphin to Champtocé, despite the uncertainty of the Dauphin's reign as the future King of France. By the Treaty of Troyes, the Dauphin's father, Charles VI, suffering from schizophrenia, had recognized Henry V of England as his successor. Nevertheless, de Craon hoped the Dauphin would recognize from the grandeur of Champtocé that Gilles could sponsor numerous armed engagements against the English if given a serious military command.