

a history of celibacy

A History of Celibacy: From Asceticism to Modern Perspectives

Author: Dr. Eleanor Vance, Professor of Religious History and Gender Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Vance has published extensively on the history of religious practice, particularly focusing on the roles of women and the evolution of monasticism. Her expertise directly informs her authoritative approach to a history of celibacy.

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Introduction: Understanding A History of Celibacy

A history of celibacy is far more than a simple chronicle of abstinence; it's a complex tapestry woven from religious dogma, social pressures, personal choices, and evolving understandings of sexuality and the human condition. This exploration delves into the multifaceted narrative of celibacy, examining its historical manifestations across diverse cultures and time periods, while also considering contemporary interpretations and challenges to traditional views. Understanding a history of celibacy requires acknowledging its intertwined relationship with power, gender, and spirituality.

Ancient Roots: Celibacy and Asceticism

The earliest forms of celibacy are deeply rooted in ancient religious and philosophical traditions. In many ancient cultures, asceticism – the practice of self-denial and rigorous discipline – often included sexual abstinence. A history of celibacy in this context is inextricably linked to the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment or divine favor. Ancient Greek and Roman societies, though not characterized by widespread celibacy, saw figures like the Cynics and some Pythagorean sects embracing chastity as a path to virtue and self-mastery. Early Christianity significantly shaped a history of celibacy, elevating virginity and celibacy to a highly revered state, particularly among the clergy. This elevation, however, often had a deeply gendered dimension, placing a greater emphasis on female chastity.

The Rise of Monasticism and A History of Celibacy

The growth of monasticism in the early centuries of Christianity profoundly influenced a history of celibacy. Monasteries and convents provided structured environments where individuals could dedicate their lives to religious devotion, often involving vows of celibacy. A history of celibacy within monastic orders reveals a fascinating blend of spiritual idealism

and practical considerations, including the control of property and inheritance. The lives of influential figures like St. Benedict and St. Clare provide crucial insights into the daily realities and internal dynamics of monastic celibacy. The development of different monastic orders, each with its own rules and traditions, further diversified a history of celibacy within the Christian context.

Celibacy in Medieval and Renaissance Europe: A History of Celibacy and Social Control

The medieval and Renaissance periods saw the continuation and further development of monastic celibacy. However, a history of celibacy during this era also reveals its intersection with broader societal structures. The Church's emphasis on clerical celibacy served, in part, to control Church property and maintain its hierarchical power. Conversely, the idealization of female chastity often became a tool for controlling women's sexuality and social mobility. This period highlights the complex interplay between religious doctrine, social norms, and the lived experiences of individuals navigating a history of celibacy.

A History of Celibacy: The Reformation and Beyond

The Protestant Reformation significantly altered a history of celibacy in Western Christianity. The rejection of monasticism and clerical celibacy by many Protestant denominations led to a shift away from widespread institutionalized celibacy. However, this didn't entirely erase celibacy from religious practice. Some Protestant groups continued to value chastity, albeit within a different framework than Catholicism. The Enlightenment and subsequent periods saw further secularization, leading to a gradual decline in the societal pressure to embrace celibacy.

A History of Celibacy in Non-Christian Traditions

While this discussion has largely focused on Western Christianity, a history of celibacy extends far beyond this context. Numerous non-Christian religions and spiritual traditions have also incorporated celibacy into their practices. Buddhist monasticism, for example, has a long and rich tradition of celibacy, often viewed as essential for spiritual advancement. Hinduism displays a more varied approach, with some ascetic traditions emphasizing celibacy while others do not. Understanding a history of celibacy demands a global perspective that accounts for the diverse ways in which different cultures have understood and practiced sexual abstinence.

Modern Perspectives on Celibacy: A History of Celibacy in the 21st Century

Today, a history of celibacy is marked by increased diversity and complexity. Celibacy is no longer primarily defined by religious institutions but can be a personal choice based on

various reasons, including spiritual pursuits, career focus, or simply a preference for a non-sexual lifestyle. The rise of asexual identities and the growing acceptance of diverse sexual orientations further enrich the contemporary understanding of a history of celibacy. Modern discussions about celibacy often grapple with questions of sexual liberation, autonomy, and the societal expectations surrounding sexuality.

Conclusion: Revisiting A History of Celibacy

A history of celibacy is a multifaceted and continuously evolving narrative. From its ancient roots in asceticism to its modern expressions, celibacy has played a significant role in shaping religious, social, and personal lives across cultures and historical periods. Understanding a history of celibacy requires engaging with its diverse manifestations, acknowledging its complexities, and respecting the diverse motivations behind individual choices regarding sexual expression. Further research and critical analysis are essential for a comprehensive appreciation of this enduring aspect of the human experience.

FAQs

1. What is the difference between celibacy and chastity? While often used interchangeably, celibacy usually refers to complete abstinence from sexual activity, while chastity can encompass a broader range of practices, including moderation or abstinence depending on religious or personal beliefs.
1. Was celibacy always associated with religion? No, while religious contexts significantly shaped a history of celibacy, it has also been practiced for non-religious reasons, such as personal preference, focusing on career, or philosophical convictions.
1. What are some common misconceptions about celibacy? Misconceptions include the assumption that all celibates are unhappy, repressed, or lack sexual desires. Celibacy is a diverse practice with various motivations.
1. How has the social perception of celibacy changed over time? Societal views on celibacy have dramatically shifted, ranging from reverence in some religious contexts to suspicion or stigmatization in others. Modern society shows greater acceptance of diverse lifestyles.
1. Are there health benefits associated with celibacy? Some studies suggest potential

correlations between celibacy and certain health benefits, but these are not conclusive and depend on various factors.

1. Is celibacy a viable option for everyone? Celibacy is a personal choice; its viability depends on individual circumstances, desires, and support systems.
1. How does involuntary celibacy differ from voluntary celibacy? Voluntary celibacy is a conscious choice, whereas involuntary celibacy refers to the inability to engage in sexual activity due to circumstances beyond one's control.
1. How is celibacy portrayed in literature and art? The portrayal of celibacy in literature and art has varied drastically throughout history, reflecting the changing cultural attitudes towards sexuality and religious practice.
1. What are the ethical considerations surrounding celibacy and relationships? Ethical considerations focus on consent, honesty, and the potential impact of celibacy on intimate relationships if not openly discussed and agreed upon.

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a history of celibacy: How We Love John Mark Falkenhain, 2019-06-24 2020 Association of Catholic Publishers second place award in general interest In this volume, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, a Benedictine monk and clinical psychologist, provides a well-researched and thorough program for celibacy formation for men and women, adaptable to both religious and seminary settings. Attending to the theological and the psycho-sexual dimensions of what it means to pursue a life of chaste celibacy, Br. John Mark identifies and expands on four major content areas, including motives for chaste celibacy, theological aspects of celibate chastity, sexual identity, and skills for celibate living. Formation goals and benchmarks for discernment are discussed for each content area, and implications and suggestions for ongoing formation are offered.

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a history of celibacy: *Freeing Celibacy* Donald B. Cozzens, 2006 Cozzens explores priestly celibacy as a source of power and burden of obligation, as spiritual calling and gift of the Spirit. He

affirms celibacy as a charism, a gift that is true for some, but only when received as a grace.

a history of celibacy: *Celibacy* A. W. Richard Sipe, 1996 *Celibacy* explores the different questions about life, love and altruism through an insightful and revealing analysis of the essential elements of sexuality as they relate to celibacy. These include gender, orientation, degree of desire, object of excitation, developmental experiences, behaviors, relationships, patterns of integration, and identity.

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a history of celibacy: *Celibacy in the Early Church* Stefan Heid, 2014-02-14 Heid presents a penetrating and wide-ranging study of the historical data from the early Church on the topics of celibacy and clerical continence. He gives a brief review of recent literature, and then begins his study with the New Testament and follows it all the way to Justinian and the Council in Trullo in 690 in the East and the fifth century popes in the West. He thoroughly examines the writings of the Bible, the early church councils, saints and theologians like Jerome, Augustine, Clement, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Cyril and Gregory Nazianzen. He has gathered formidable data with conclusive arguments regarding obligatory continence in the early Church.

a history of celibacy: *The Manly Priest* Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, 2015-12-08 *The Manly Priest* examines the clerical celibacy movement in medieval England and Normandy, which produced a new model of religious masculinity for the priesthood and resulted in social tension and conflict as traditional norms of masculine behavior were radically altered for this group of men.

a history of celibacy: *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c.1100-1700* Helen Parish, 2016-05-23 The debate over clerical celibacy and marriage had its origins in the early Christian centuries, and is still very much alive in the modern church. The content and form of controversy have remained remarkably consistent, but each era has selected and shaped the sources that underpin its narrative, and imbued an ancient issue with an immediacy and relevance. The basic question of whether, and why, continence should be demanded of those who serve at the altar has never gone away, but the implications of that question, and of the answers given, have changed with each generation. In this reassessment of the history of sacerdotal celibacy, Helen Parish examines the emergence and evolution of the celibate priesthood in the Latin church, and the challenges posed to this model of the ministry in the era of the Protestant Reformation. Celibacy was, and is, intensely personal, but also polemical, institutional, and historical. Clerical celibacy acquired theological, moral, and confessional meanings in the writings of its critics and defenders, and its place in the life of the church continues to be defined in relation to broader debates over Scripture, apostolic tradition, ecclesiastical history, and papal authority. Highlighting continuity and change in attitudes to priestly celibacy, Helen Parish reveals that the implications of celibacy and marriage for the priesthood reach deep into the history, traditions, and understanding of the church.

a history of celibacy: *Why Celibacy?: Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest* Fr. Carter Griffin, 2019-07-01 "The Church today demands a profound renewal of celibate priesthood and the fatherhood to which it is ordered." Priestly celibacy, some say, is an outdated relic from another age. Others see it as a lonely way of life. But as Fr. Carter Griffin argues in *Why Celibacy?: Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest*, the ancient practice of celibacy, when lived well, helps a priest exercise his spiritual fatherhood joyfully and fruitfully. Along the way, Griffin explores: the question of optional celibacy some pitfalls of celibate paternity the selection and formation of candidates for celibate priesthood why biological fathers are also called to spiritual fatherhood the powerful impact of celibacy on the Church and the wider culture In a critical moment for the Catholic priesthood, Fr. Griffin brings light and hope with a new perspective on the Church's perennial wisdom on celibacy.

a history of celibacy: *A History of Mistresses* Elizabeth Abbott, 2010 No Marketing Blurb

a history of celibacy: *Vow of Celibacy* Erin Judge, 2016-08 Winner of the Bisexual Book Award for Best Novel Natalie has made a promise: a vow of celibacy, signed and witnessed by her best friend. After a string of sexual conquests, she is determined to figure out why the intense romantic

connections she's spent her life chasing have left her emotionally high and dry. As Natalie sifts through her past and her present, she confronts her complicated feelings about her plus-sized figure, her bisexuality, and her thwarted career in fashion design. Piecing together toxic relationship patterns from her past, Natalie finds herself strutting down fashion runways and rekindling her passion for clothing design in the present. All the while, her best friend, Anastaze, struggles with her own secret--whether or not to reveal her true identity to the thousands of fans of her popular blog and her potential first sexual partner. Clever, sexy, and hilarious, *Vow of Celibacy* delves into the perilous terrain of love and relationships, the uncertainty of early adulthood, and the sustaining force of friendship. This is an irresistible novel about the stories we can't help but tell ourselves about others, and it captures in perfect pitch what it's like to be a young woman coming of age in America today.

a history of celibacy: Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy Christian Cochini, 2002-04 Fr Christian Cochini has made a thorough examination, based on years of extensive research, of the topic of clerical celibacy in the first seven centuries of the Church's history. [from back cover]

a history of celibacy: Singled Out Christine Colón, Bonnie Field, 2009-06-01 Authors Christine Colón and Bonnie Field thought that by a certain age they would each be married. But they watched that age come and go--and still no walks down the aisle. In *Singled Out*, they reflect on their experience--and that of an increasing number of Christians. Rejecting overly simplistic messages from the church about waiting for marriage, they explore a deeper understanding of celibacy that affirms singles' decision to be sexually pure, acknowledges their struggles, and recognizes their importance in the church community. Thoughtful and accessible, *Singled Out* is an invaluable voice of realistic encouragement for any single as well as an important tool for church leaders and others concerned with mission and ministry for singles.

a history of celibacy: A Return to Modesty Wendy Shalit, 2014-05-20 Updated with a new introduction, this fifteenth anniversary edition of *A Return to Modesty* reignites Wendy Shalit's controversial claim that we have lost our respect for an essential virtue: modesty. When *A Return to Modesty* was first published in 1999, its argument launched a worldwide discussion about the possibility of innocence and romantic idealism. Wendy Shalit was the first to systematically critique the hook-up scene and outline the harms of making sexuality so public. Today, with social media increasingly blurring the line between public and private life, and with child exploitation on the rise, the concept of modesty is more relevant than ever. Updated with a new preface that addresses the unique problems facing society now, *A Return to Modesty* shows why the lost virtue of modesty is not a hang-up that we should set out to cure, but rather a wonderful instinct to be celebrated. *A Return to Modesty* is a deeply personal account as well as a fascinating intellectual exploration into everything from seventeenth-century manners to the 1948 tune *Baby, It's Cold Outside*. Beholden neither to social conservatives nor to feminists, Shalit reminds us that modesty is not prudery, but a natural instinct—and one that may be able to save us from ourselves.

a history of celibacy: Virginité. A Positive Approach to Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom of Heaven Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap, 2018-05-29 We live in a cultural milieu in which it is no longer possible to have any confidence in external supports from society or the media to help one remain chaste - in the single state or in a life consecrated to God by vows. Today much depends on the strong personal motivations of the individual coupled with the grace of God and a heavy dose of common sense for one to live this lifestyle. Still it is not only possible to do so, but to do so with joy. This little book on celibacy and virginity for the sake of the Kingdom seeks to help create the kind of motivation necessary, drawing heavily on texts from the New Testament which address many of the problems and objections frequently leveled against the very idea of living chastely with the restraint, discipline and self-control required. Young people, for whom this book was mainly written, are shown how to live the charism of virginity and celibacy charismatically - that is as a gift, in all humility, with joy and perfect freedom.

a history of celibacy: Celibacy in the Ancient World Dale Launderville, 2010-07-01 Celibacy is a commitment to remain unmarried and to renounce sexual relations, for a limited period or for a

lifetime. Such a commitment places an individual outside human society in its usual form, and thus questions arise: What significance does such an individual, and such a choice, have for the human family and community as a whole? Is celibacy possible? Is there a socially constructive role for celibacy? These questions guide Dale Launderville, OSB, in his study of celibacy in the ancient cultures of Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece prior to Hellenism and the rise of Christianity. Launderville focuses especially on literary witnesses, because those enduring texts have helped to shape modern attitudes and can aid us in understanding the factors that may call forth the practice of celibacy in our own time. Readers will discover how celibacy fits within a context of relationships, and what kinds of relationships thus support a healthy and varied society, one aware of and oriented to its cosmic destiny. Dale Launderville, OSB, is professor of theology at Saint John's University School of Theology 'eminary, Collegeville, Minnesota. He is the author of *Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (Eerdmans, 2003) and *Spirit and Reason: The Embodied Character of Ezekiel's Symbolic Thinking* (Baylor University Press, 2007).

a history of celibacy: *Sensual Celibacy* Donna Marie Williams, 1999-03-11 ABSTINENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW STRONGER If you're single and in between relationships -- or just about to embark on a new one -- then you can't underestimate the importance of making the right choices when it comes to physical intimacy. When should it happen? If it's already a part of your relationship, is it meaningful to both of you? Is there a strong emotional foundation in place? Or did you jump right in -- and get hurt? And how can you preserve your self-respect the next time around? Donna Marie Williams wrestled with these questions for years until she discovered the empowering nature of celibacy: abstaining from sex for a self-determined time while embracing new opportunities for self-discovery, personal growth, and heightened self-esteem. Now she shares her knowledge in a simple but effective 10-step program that will help you lead a happier, healthier, and even sexier life. *Sensual Celibacy* reveals: * Why charting your relationship history can be a real eye opener * How celibacy can help you focus on what you really want out of life * Ways to stay true to your celibacy commitment, even if you're in a relationship * When to end your celibacy, with intelligence, confidence, and joy If you're ready to rethink your approach to relationships and reconnect with yourself, then let *Sensual Celibacy* guide you to a happier, healthier lifestyle.

a history of celibacy: *Priestly Celibacy* Gary Selin, 2016-03-11 Pope Francis has called mandatory priestly celibacy a gift for the Church, but added since it is not a dogma, the door is always open to change. As this Church discipline continues to be debated, it is important for Catholics to delve into the theological and not merely pragmatic reasons behind its continuation. *Priestly Celibacy: Theological Foundations*, therefore, fills a critical gap in the current theological literature on this important topic of ecclesial ministry and life, and also helps to contribute to the advancement of the rather underdeveloped theology of priestly celibacy.

a history of celibacy: *Women, Passion & Celibacy* Sally Cline, 1993 The author of *Just Desserts: Women and Food* issues a startling but compelling call for single women to embrace their freedom and redefine and celebrate a non-genital sexuality. Essential reading for any woman who has ever felt that her body is not her own.

a history of celibacy: *Celibate and Childless Men in Power* Almut Höfert, Matthew Mesley, Serena Tolino, 2017-08-15 This book explores a striking common feature of pre-modern ruling systems on a global scale: the participation of childless and celibate men as integral parts of the elites. In bringing court eunuchs and bishops together, this collection shows that the integration of men who were normatively or physically excluded from biological fatherhood offered pre-modern dynasties the potential to use different reproduction patterns. The shared focus on ruling eunuchs and bishops also reveals that these men had a specific position at the intersection of four fields: power, social dynamics, sacredness and gender/masculinities. The thirteen chapters present case studies on clerics in Medieval Europe and court eunuchs in the Middle East, Byzantium, India and China. They analyze how these men in their different frameworks acted as politicians, participated in social networks, provided religious authority, and discuss their masculinities. Taken together, this

collection sheds light on the political arena before the modern nation-state excluded these unmarried men from the circles of political power.

a history of celibacy: *From the Depths of Our Hearts* Pope Benedict XVI, Robert Sarah, 2020-03-12 The priesthood is going through a dark time, according to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Robert Cardinal Sarah. Wounded by the revelation of so many scandals, disconcerted by the constant questioning of their consecrated celibacy, many priests are tempted by the thought of giving up and abandoning everything. In this book, the pope emeritus and the prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments give their brother priests, and the whole Church, a message of hope. They honestly address the spiritual challenges faced by priests today, while pointing to deeper conversion to Jesus Christ as the key to faithful and fruitful priestly ministry and genuine reform. Benedict XVI and Cardinal Sarah fraternally offer these reflections to the people of God and, of course, in a spirit of filial obedience, to Pope Francis, who has said, I think that celibacy is a gift for the Church. . . . I don't agree with allowing optional celibacy, no. Responding to calls for refashioning the priesthood, including proposals from participants in the Amazonian Synod, two wise, spiritually astute pastors explain the importance of priestly celibacy for the good of the whole Church. Drawing on Vatican II, they present celibacy as not just a mere precept of ecclesiastical law, but as a sharing in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross and his identity as Bridegroom of the Church. of his collaboration with Benedict XVI in writing *From the Depths of Our Hearts*.

a history of celibacy: A War of Loves David Bennett, 2018-11-13 At 14, David Bennett came out to his parents. At 19, he encountered Jesus Christ. At that moment, his life changed forever. As a young gay man, David Bennett saw Christianity as an enemy to freedom for LGBTQI people, and his early experiences with prejudice and homophobia led him to become a gay activist. But when Jesus came into his life in a highly unexpected way, he was led down a path he never would have predicted or imagined. In *A War of Loves*, David recounts his dramatic story, from his early years exploring new age religions and French existentialism to his university experiences as an activist. Following supernatural encounters with God, he embarked on a journey not only of seeking to reconcile his faith and sexuality but also of discovering the higher call of Jesus Christ. *A War of Loves* investigates what the Bible teaches about sexuality and demonstrates the profligate, unqualified grace of God for all people. David describes the joy and intimacy he found in following Jesus Christ and how love has taken on a radically new and far richer meaning for him.

a history of celibacy: Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience Diarmuid Ó Murchú, 1999 The author of *Quantum Theory and Reclaiming Spirituality* offers an original work that expands the meaning--and potential for good--of the three traditional religious vows.

a history of celibacy: Against Sex Kara M. French, 2021-04-27 How much sex should a person have? With whom? What do we make of people who choose not to have sex at all? As present as these questions are today, they were subjects of intense debate in the early American republic. In this richly textured history, Kara French investigates ideas about, and practices of, sexual restraint to better understand the sexual dimensions of American identity in the antebellum United States. French considers three groups of Americans—Shakers, Catholic priests and nuns, and followers of sexual reformer Sylvester Graham—whose sexual abstinence provoked almost as much social, moral, and political concern as the idea of sexual excess. Examining private diaries and letters, visual culture and material artifacts, and a range of published works, French reveals how people practicing sexual restraint became objects of fascination, ridicule, and even violence in nineteenth-century American culture. *Against Sex* makes clear that in assessing the history of sexuality, an expansive view of sexual practice that includes abstinence and restraint can shed important new light on histories of society, culture, and politics.

a history of celibacy: Paul on Marriage and Celibacy Will Deming, 2004 Paul is traditionally seen as one of the founders of Christian sexual asceticism. As early as the second century C.E., church leaders looked to him as a model for their lives of abstinence. But is this a correct reading of Paul? What exactly did Paul teach on the subjects of marriage and celibacy? Will Deming here

answers these questions. By placing Paul's statements on marriage and celibacy against the backdrop of ancient Hellenistic society, Deming constructs a coherent picture of Paul's views. According to Deming, the conceptual world in which Paul lived and wrote had substantially vanished by 100 C.E., and terms like sin, body, sex, and holiness began to acquire moral implications quite unlike those Paul knew. Paul conceived of marriage as a social obligation that had the potential of distracting Christians from Christ. For him celibacy was the single life, free from such distraction, not a life of saintly denial. Sex, in turn, was natural and not sinful, and sex within marriage was both proper and necessary. Superbly researched and reasoned, this book corrects misinterpretations of Paul and restores him to his proper place in the history of Christian thought on marriage and sexuality.

a history of celibacy: Celibacy and Religious Traditions Carl Olson, 2008 For an educated, general readership and for use in college courses, this text introduces the role of celibacy, or a lack of it, in various religious traditions, and the contributors present the rationale for its observance (or not) within the context of each tradition.

a history of celibacy: Game of Thrones versus History Brian A. Pavlac, 2017-02-28 Since it first aired in 2011, *Game of Thrones* galloped up the ratings to become the most watched show in HBO's history. It is no secret that creator George R.R. Martin was inspired by late 15th century Europe when writing *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the sprawling saga on which the show is based. Aside from the fantastical elements, *Game of Thrones* really does mirror historic events and bloody battles of medieval times—but how closely? *Game of Thrones versus History: Written in Blood* is a collection of thought-provoking essays by medieval historians who explore how the enormously popular HBO series and fantasy literature of George R. R. Martin are both informed by and differ significantly from real historical figures, events, beliefs, and practices of the medieval world. From a variety of perspectives, the authors delve into Martin's plots, characterizations, and settings, offering insights into whether his creations are historical possibilities or pure flights of fantasy. Topics include the Wars of the Roses, barbarian colonizers, sieges and the nature of medieval warfare, women and agency, slavery, celibate societies in Westeros, myths and legends of medieval Europe, and many more. While life was certainly not a game during the Middle Ages, *Game of Thrones versus History: Written in Blood* reveals how a surprising number of otherworldly elements of George R. R. Martin's fantasy are rooted deeply in the all-too-real world of medieval Europe. Find suggested readings, recommended links, and more from editor Brian Pavlac at gameofthronesversushistory.com.

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the walls of the womb as his Resurrection body afterwards did, out of the tomb or through closed doors.

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