

The Popularization of the Beard at the Court of Francis I of France

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In 1521, Francis I and his retinue found themselves spending Twelfth Night (le fete des Rois) at Romorantin. Once the King heard that some courtier in the household of the nearby Comte de Saint-Pol had just found the large bean baked into the Twelfth Night cake, thus becoming the king of the festival, the French King decided, with the young gentlemen of his court, to challenge the authority of this ruler who had gotten his crown so easily. Saint-Pol and his group accepted the challenge, and built up a supply of ammunition to defend themselves against the seige: "a prodigious quantity of snowballs, eggs, and apples." This turned out to be an insufficient supply, for soon the attackers were pushing in the doors and the ammunition was all gone. In the excitement, someone snatched a burning chunk of wood from a fireplace upstairs and threw it out the window. Naturally, it struck the King, wounding him quite seriously. He would permit no investigations to be made to discover the identity of his assailant, saying that if he were to indulge in such tomfoolery, then he would have to take his chances on any accident. It is likely that the incident caused the King to have a permanent scar, which he covered with a beard-thus popularizing beards at court.