



IT'S TRUE!
WOMEN WERE
WARRIORS



Did you know that frogs are cannibals,
fashion can be fatal and the dinosaurs
never died? Or that redheads were
once burned at the stake as witches?
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and how maggots help solve crimes!

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CAROL JONES
PICTURES BY ELISE HURST

IT'S TRUE!

WOMEN WERE
WARRIORS


ALLEN & UNWIN

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WHY WOMEN WARRIORS?

In sixth grade, my daughter had to research and dress up as a powerful person for a school project. She wanted to find out about a woman who was powerful, dangerous and also looked amazing. As we scoured the library and the internet for ideas, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to have the stories of all these brave, dangerous and fascinating women in one book?' True, there'd have to be a lot of blood. And a lot of lying, cheating and murder. Of course there'd be the odd love affair and the occasional war. But hey, who said power was for pussycats?

Caroline





1

AMAZONS: FACT OR FICTION?

WOULD THE REAL AMAZONS PLEASE STAND UP?

They were strong. They were fierce. They were very, very scary. But did these legendary female warriors really exist?

About 500 years ago, Spanish explorers were busy discovering the New World. Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic and bumped into America.

Ferdinand Magellan voyaged around Cape Horn and nearly got blown to Antarctica. Meanwhile, crafty Hernando Cortés conquered the Aztecs to rule Mexico. Of course, none of these explorers bothered to wait for an invitation. And the native Americans weren't too happy about being conquered – as the Spanish found out the hard way!

Early in the year 1542, a group of Spanish explorers set out from what is now Ecuador. They trekked along a river through the jungle, looking for gold. What they found was a war band led by ferocious female fighters. These feisty women warriors didn't like intruders. They bashed their clubs against enemy heads with abandon. They even clubbed any of their own men who looked like running away. These jungle fighters didn't like invaders and they didn't like cowards.

So impressed were the Spaniards with these warring South American women that they named that jungle river the Amazon, after a nation of legendary female warriors. These Amazon warrior women were first described by ancient Greek writers 2000 years earlier.

TERROR OF THE GREEKS

Greeks in ancient times loved to tell bloodthirsty tales of scary warrior women. Amazons wouldn't be seen dead in skirts. They dressed like men in trousers and boots. They carried swords instead of spindles and wore red leather armour. The Amazons swooped down upon their enemies on horseback, shooting arrows and swinging axes. Look out if you got in their way!

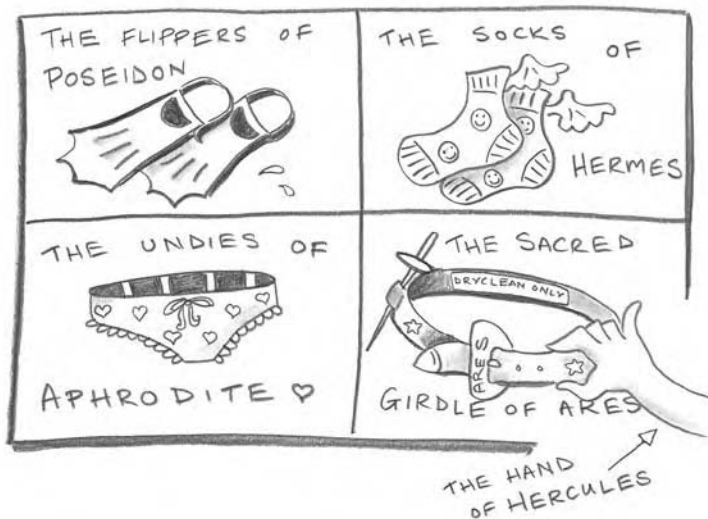


Some writers of ancient Greece said the Amazons came from the land that is now northern Turkey. Some thought they'd ridden out from the river flats of southern Russia. Others said they rode the vast flat steppes of central Asia. Some even believed they came from North Africa. But all agreed that they were nomadic tribeswomen who rode horses swift as the wind.

According to legend, the Amazons were so tough that they cut off their right breasts to draw a bow better. They lived separately from men and raised their daughters to be warriors. They sent their sons to their fathers' families . . . or killed them at birth.

Greek art and literature is full of Amazon images. Museums around the world display Greek pottery, jewellery and carvings showing these fierce warrior women in action. In Greek mythology, the hero Hercules battled the Amazon queen, Hippolyte, and stole her sacred girdle. This was a leather belt given to her by Ares the God of War – not her underwear!

According to legend, the Amazons rode to war against the Greeks in the fifth century BCE.*



Greek writers were amazed by the arrogance of these women who thought they could conquer the proud Greek warriors! The Amazon horde reached as far as Athens before they were forced to turn back. One second century Greek writer, Pausanius, even included a list of well known Amazon graves in his tour guide of Athens!

*** Note about dates**

BCE: Before the Common Era – the non-religious form of BC (before Christ)

CE: Common Era – the non-religious form of AD (anno-Domini – in the year of our Lord)



ANCIENT BESTSELLERS

How do ancient writings survive hundreds, even thousands of years? Sometimes it's because they were carved in stone. More often they were so popular they were copied and recopied over the centuries.

Ancient Greek poet Homer wrote the *Iliad* more than 2700 years ago. It described how a Greek army attacked the ancient city of Troy. The story is still popular today. The movie *Troy* was based on this epic poem. Homer mentions the Amazons in the story of Troy. The philosopher Plato, playwright Aeschylus and historian Herodotus all included tales of Amazon women in their writing.

Stories about other battle queens have also survived the centuries. For example, the Muslim historian Al-Tabari included them in his book *History of Prophets and Kings* in the tenth century.

Ancient writers also described how Amazon warriors helped the Trojans fight against the Greek army at the battle of Troy. In some stories about Troy, the Greek hero Achilles spears the Amazon queen, Penthesilea. He removes her helmet as she lays dying and is so captivated by her beauty that he falls deeply in love. When she dies he becomes mad with grief.

DIGGING UP THE LEGENDS

Were the Amazons just a legend used to scare naughty Greek children? Or were they flesh and blood?

Few historians today believe in a race of warrior women who abandoned their sons and cut off their daughters' breasts. But we now know that warrior women were common amongst the nomadic peoples of Russia and central Asia. Archaeologists have excavated many ancient burial mounds in southern Russia and nearby Kazakhstan. The dead nomads were buried with equipment to help them in the afterlife. Some of these long-dead nomad women were buried with cooking pots and spindles. But many were equipped like men,

with weapons, armour and riding gear. These women were probably the real Amazons who inspired the writers of Ancient Greece.



*Well .. she'll need one of these, one of these ..
she'd better take them all!*

ARAB BATTLE QUEENS

Perhaps ancient Greek writers were also thinking of Arab battle queens when they told stories of the legendary Amazons. Thousands of years ago, the Bedouins and other nomadic Arab people were often led to war by a battle queen. Sometimes she was more like a military cheerleader urging the army onwards.

But sometimes she was the military mind behind the attack – a female general.

In the seventh century, Mohammed, the great prophet of the Muslim people, fought one of these Arab battle queens. Her name was Hind al-Hunud. She and her people were resisting the spread of the new Muslim religion. Hind al-Hunud carried a great broadsword and was known to celebrate her victories by standing on a mound of enemy corpses. After one defeat, she was so mad at her husband for surrendering the city of Mecca to the Muslims that she demanded his death!

Arab women often joined their men in battle. One story tells how a group of women tricked the enemy by tying their veils to spears like battle pennants. The enemy thought reinforcements were coming and gave up.

The Arabs weren't the only ancient people to be inspired by battle queens. Ancient Irish tales are full of the adventures of brave and bloody warrior women. One of their goddesses, Nemain, was said to kill 100 men with her terrifying battle cry.



Many of these ancient battle queens were undoubtedly real women who inspired entire armies (even if they didn't actually kill 100 men with a single cry). Of course, looking back thousands of years it's hard to know which tales are true and which are like ancient versions of *Lara Croft Tomb Raider* or *Charlie's Angels*. Warrior women like the Amazons are found in both the pages of history books and story books.

The women found in *Women Were Warriors* certainly existed. Their lives are recorded in writing, art, on coins and in folk histories passed down through the generations. But were they really as dangerous and scary as the stories suggest?

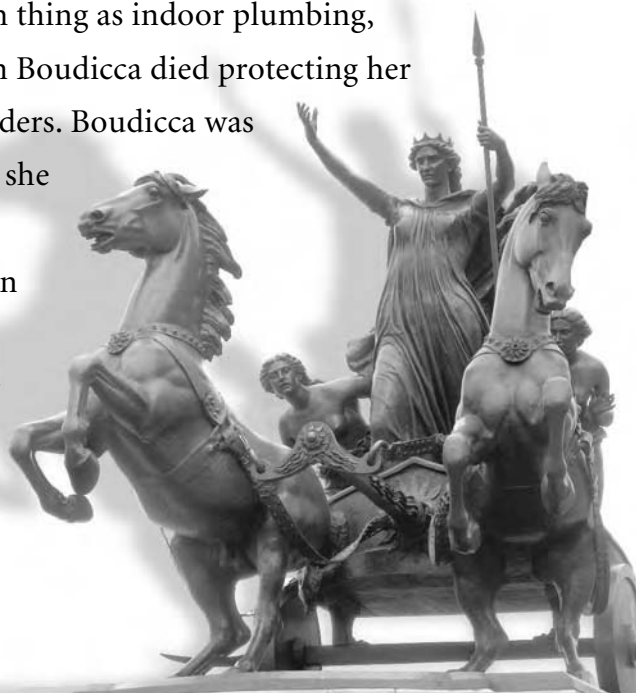
You be the judge!

2

WARRIOR QUEENS

PROTECTION

A long time ago, when men still wore skirts and there was no such thing as indoor plumbing, the British Queen Boudicca died protecting her people from invaders. Boudicca was angry. And when she got angry she got vicious. And when she got vicious she got very, very dangerous.



Queen Boudicca was just one of many warrior queens who ripped through the pages of history in blazing chariots or on galloping steeds. Some were born to lead. Others took power in times of danger. They *all* protected their people from invaders or defended their thrones from those who would steal them. These warrior queens led their people from the palace and on the battlefield as well.

BOUDICCA (also known as Boadicea)



Two thousand years ago in south-east Britain lived a powerful tribe called the Iceni. The Romans had invaded Britain in 43 CE as part of their mission to rule the world. The native Britons weren't too happy about the arrival of these bossy, Latin-speaking Romans. They kept fighting back.

Prasutagus, King of the Iceni, was a shrewd leader

but not quite shrewd enough to outwit the Romans. He was looking for a way of resisting the invasion without getting too many of his people killed. Instead of making war, Prasutagus decided to make friends with the Romans. One way of doing this was by paying them taxes and giving them presents. The thing the Romans liked almost as much as power was money. So when Prasutagus died in 59 CE, he left part of his wealth to his wife Queen Boudicca and his daughters, and part of his wealth to the Roman Emperor Nero.

But part of his estate wasn't enough for the greedy Roman rulers in Britain. They got carried away with their own power. They stormed the Iceni palace, raped Prasutagus's daughters and flogged his queen.

Boudicca wasn't a woman to take this abuse and neither were the Iceni. Already angry about the way the

Romans were taking over their land and making them into slaves, they were outraged at the treatment of the Royal princesses.

The Iceni went to war.



NOT
HAPPY
NERO!

Queen Boudicca took to her chariot, long red hair streaming behind her as she rode into battle. Other British tribes joined her until a force of 120 000 angry warriors were gathered. From her chariot, Boudicca boomed her commands to repel the Romans.

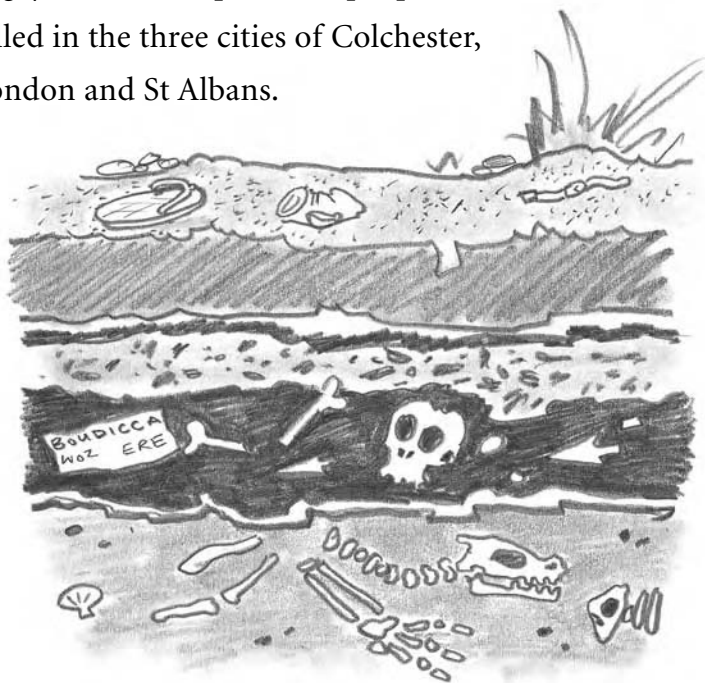
WHAT DID SHE SAY?

According to the Roman writer Tacitus, Boudicca cried, 'I am not fighting for my kingdom and wealth. I am fighting as an ordinary person for my lost freedom, my bruised body and my outraged daughters.'

First the Iceni warriors attacked the city of Colchester where many retired Roman soldiers had settled. They slaughtered everyone they found and burned the city to a cinder. Boudicca didn't stop there. She and her warriors went on to destroy the cities of London and St Albans. The main Roman force

began marching from Wales when they heard about the fighting. However their commander, General Suetonius, decided it was too difficult to defend London and abandoned the city to the Iceni.

To this day, a layer of red rubble lies four metres below the city of London. It was caused by the 60 CE fire which burned so hot that it melted brick. Those who were too old, too ill or too stupid to escape London were hung, burned or hacked to pieces by the angry Iceni. Perhaps 70 000 people were killed in the three cities of Colchester, London and St Albans.



When the Roman army finally decided to face the British in battle, it was payback time. With centuries of training and discipline behind them, the outnumbered Romans defeated the Britons. They slaughtered 80 000 British men and women warriors.

No one knows for sure what happened to Boudicca, but legend tells that she escaped to the forest and took poison rather than die at the hands of her Roman enemies.

AETHELFLAED (a.k.a. Ethelfleda)

Aethelflaed, ruler of the British kingdom of Mercia, was a queen of strategy. In the late 800s and early 900s CE, Mercia was a kingdom in the centre of Britain. Hordes of Vikings from Denmark and Norway decided they would like a piece of it and began moving in with their families, their customs and their pigs.

Aethelflaed had warfare in her blood. She was wife to the King of Mercia, daughter to King Alfred of Wessex and sister to his successor, Edward. She ruled jointly with her husband in battle against the Vikings.

She also helped her father and brother in their battles. After her husband's death in 911, she ruled Mercia alone.

Aethelflaed is best known as a military commander. Like the Romans, she realised the importance of defensive walls. She constructed the great fortress towns of Warwick and Stafford and rebuilt the old



Roman wall which defended the city of Chester. From behind her stout walls she used every trick she could think of to fend off her Viking enemies.

According to one Viking saga, she defeated the Norsemen at Chester by boiling ale and water in large cauldrons then pouring it from the walls. The scalding liquid burned the skin from the attackers' bodies. When the Norsemen protected themselves with animal hides, Aethelflaed unleashed all the bees from the beehives. The pesky bees finally drove those Viking varmints from the town.

ANCIENT BESTSELLERS

Queen Boudicca's exploits are known today from the Roman historians Tacitus and Dio Cassius. Tacitus was just out of nappies when Boudicca rebelled against the Romans. However, his father-in-law Agricola worked for the Roman Governor of Britain and was possibly an eye witness to some of these events. Tacitus could have also interviewed other survivors.

Dio Cassius was born 100 years too late to see Boudicca in action but spent ten years researching his book from other documents which no longer exist.

Queen Aethelflaed's deeds are mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicles*. These were histories written by monks in the ninth century, then recopied during the following centuries. She is also mentioned in *Ingimund's Saga*. The Viking sagas were recited aloud for generations, then written down between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.



THE TRUNG SISTERS

Nearly 2000 years ago, the Trung sisters launched their campaign to drive the Chinese invaders out of Vietnam with a publicity stunt – a very dangerous one!



In 39 CE, twenty years before Boudicca battled the Romans, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi also lived in a land ruled by foreigners – the Chinese. The Trung sisters were the daughters of a powerful lord and, along with their people, they wanted to get rid of the Chinese overlords who taxed and oppressed the Vietnamese.

Trung Trac's husband, Thi Sach, another local lord, had been executed by the Chinese governor for stirring up trouble. His grieving widow, Trung Trac, and her sister, Trung Nhi, vowed to cause even more trouble. And what better way of stirring their countrymen to action than by pulling a daring stunt?

Trung Trac's people had been haunted for years by a man-eating tiger which preyed on people and livestock. Villagers were so scared that they believed the beast had supernatural powers. Trung Nhi said that if Trung Trac could kill the rogue tiger the Vietnamese people would follow her anywhere. So Trung Trac hunted down the beast and killed it. When she revealed the tiger skin, the Vietnamese people were inspired by her bravery.

The Trung sisters gathered an army of 80 000 warriors, many of them women. The sisters trained 36 of these women as generals; one of them was their own mother. Another general strode into battle pregnant, giving birth on the battlefield.

In a year, the Trung sisters had freed 65 towns from Chinese rule and declared themselves queens. They abolished the taxes demanded by the Chinese



and ruled together for three years. Then the Chinese re-grouped and defeated them, near present-day Hanoi. Trung Trac and Trung Nhi drowned themselves rather than be captured. Although the Trung sisters were ultimately overpowered, they did pave the way for the Vietnamese to win their future independence from China. Temples were built in their honour and they are commemorated by a public holiday.

TAMARA



Today Georgia is a tiny country beside the Black Sea, squeezed between Turkey and Russia. Eight hundred years ago it was squeezed between barbarian hordes, Christian emperors and Turkish sultans, but it was a lot bigger.

Queen Tamara came to the throne peacefully enough. Her father had appointed her co-ruler six years before he died so the people had time to get used to her. When he died in 1184 she was crowned 'King' because there was no word for 'Queen' in the Georgian language.

Tamara was lucky to have such a sensible father but she wasn't very lucky with her first husband. The Russian Prince George Bogolyubski was very fond of drinking and of other women. Plus he hadn't

given her any royal babies. What was there for Tamara to be happy about? When Tamara finally kicked him out he organised a rebellion. In fact, he spent the rest of his life organising rebellions against Tamara's rule. Tamara must have got the taste for battle because she spent the rest of her life making war – protecting her throne and country, and expanding Georgian territory and influence into what is now Turkey, Iran and southern Russia. She also presided over a flourishing of art and literature at her court.

Although Tamara was a keen hunter and horsewoman, she didn't actually clash swords on the battlefield. She was the general who figured out strategy and the queen who inspired her soldiers before each battle. As the Georgians prepared to fight, Queen Tamara would march before her army barefoot. Then she would encourage her men to be brave in battle and the men would cheer loudly for their 'King Tamara'.



NZINGA (a.k.a. Jinga)



There were a lot of nasty rumours about the African queen Nzinga – *Ngola of Ndongo* (Queen of Angola). First she was said to have murdered her brother and nephew to take the throne for herself.

Then she was said to keep 50 young men as lovers. She was also said to enjoy human sacrifice.

How much was true and how much was gossip? We may never know but we do know that she was a warrior queen who was fierce in her fight to protect her people.

In 1620, the Portuguese and Dutch had taken over much of Africa. Nzinga visited the Portuguese Governor as ambassador for her people. She intended

to negotiate the independence of Ndongo. When she found the only chair in the room was taken by the Governor and everyone else was forced to stand, she ordered a servant to kneel. Then she promptly sat on him.

Not impressed by the Portuguese, she organised an army of women to harass Portuguese settlements. While this first attempt was defeated she continued to fight the Portuguese for eighteen years once she became queen. She interfered with Portuguese trading routes and upset their slave trading in an effort to halt the capture of her people as slaves. She even joined forces with the Dutch to try and defeat them.

MMM.. A VERY
FULL BODIED DROP



A Dutch captain who worked with Nzinga for several years told how she loved to train with weapons and was a fierce fighter. He also described how she cut off a man's head and drank his blood as part of a ritual sacrifice. Nzinga did not defeat the Portuguese completely and when her sister was captured by them she finally ended her resistance.

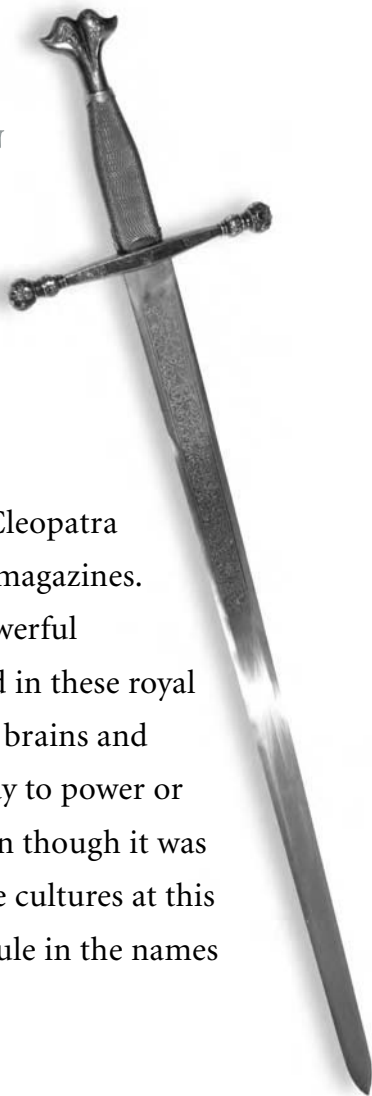
Like Boudicca, the Trưng sisters and Aethelflaed before her, Nzinga furiously defended her people and her country from invaders. These warrior queens weren't always successful but they were powerful and very frightening!

3

SCHEMING EMPRESSES

POWER

Rumours about ruthless royals like Cleopatra would have filled a thousand gossip magazines. Famous lovers, family squabbles, powerful husbands and dead rivals all featured in these royal soap operas. Famed for their beauty, brains and charm, these women clawed their way to power or hung onto it by their fingernails, even though it was rare for women to rule alone in these cultures at this time. In most cases, females had to rule in the names



of their husbands, brothers or sons. But that didn't stop these charismatic women. Murder, marriage and manipulation all became ingredients in their plots to gain or keep power. And if they had to commit murder along the way . . . well, so be it!

CLEOPATRA VII



Cleopatra's love affairs and family rivalries changed the history of the world. Seventeen-year-old Cleopatra was married off to her 10-year-old brother Ptolemy XIII in 52 BCE. When her

father, the Pharaoh of Egypt, died in 51 BCE, they were supposed to rule Egypt together, according to Egyptian law. But Cleopatra gained greater control. She began leaving her brother's name off official documents and only her portrait appeared on coins. Soon her brother's powerful supporters exiled her but Cleopatra vowed to return.

Cleopatra looked to the might of Rome for help. When Julius Caesar, the Roman general and politician, was visiting Egypt, Cleo smuggled herself into Caesar's tent, rolled up in a rug and surprised him. Charmed by her cleverness (and Egypt's wealth!) Caesar agreed to help her.



Cleo's poor brother Ptolemy was drowned during a battle with Caesar's army, dragged underwater by the weight of his armour. Cleopatra consoled herself by marrying her youngest brother, Ptolemy XIV, meanwhile having a baby with Caesar!

Cleopatra sounds like a very bad girl. In fact she was a clever and ambitious ruler who improved Egypt's wealth and tried to keep her country free from Roman rule. In 44 BCE she visited Rome to sign a treaty but the Roman people hated her influence over Caesar. They also hated the way she showed off her wealth. When Caesar was murdered by his rivals, Cleopatra fled to Egypt.

Still determined to protect Egypt from Rome's greedy intentions, Cleo set out to win the heart of another Roman general, Marc Antony. Antony was so smitten with love that he almost forgot about his military campaigns. He began a two-year honeymoon in Egypt with Cleo. Unfortunately, honeymoons have to end and Antony and Cleopatra's reign ended when their forces were defeated by the Roman leader Octavian. Now the Romans would rule Egypt.

Poor old Marc Antony killed himself by falling on his sword. But Cleopatra was to be paraded through the streets of Rome as a captive. One legend tells that she had a cobra brought to her in a basket of figs and held the snake to her breast rather than be humiliated

in this way. Cleopatra was Egypt's last pharaoh. In the end, the great Cleopatra's quest to be queen of the world ended with a snake bite.



AGRIPPINA II (a.k.a. Agrippina the Younger)

Cleopatra's lover, Julius Caesar, was Agrippina's great-great-great-great uncle. Agrippina knew all about power, intrigue and crafty Roman emperors who thought nothing of murder. She was sister to one emperor, married to another and mother to a third.

It's not surprising that she learned a thing or two about murder herself!

In 41 CE, Agrippina's brother, the emperor Caligula, was murdered. Her uncle, Claudius, became emperor. Having barely survived Caligula's rule with her head still on her shoulders, Agrippina thought Claudius would make a good third husband. Claudius wasn't very brave – when Caligula was killed, the guards found Claudius hiding behind the curtains – and some people thought he was mentally deficient. He was also 24 years older than Agrippina. But Claudius had power. And Agrippina liked power.

Once they were married, Agrippina talked Claudius into adopting her son Nero. Then she arranged for Claudius to make Nero his heir even though Claudius had a son of his own, Britannicus. Of course, once Nero was named heir, Claudius was no longer necessary.

Knowing how much Claudius loved his food, Agrippina arranged for poison to be sprinkled on a dish of mushrooms. Then, with Claudius dead of tummy ache, Agrippina set out to rule for her son Nero.

ANCIENT BESTSELLERS

Cleopatra wasn't exactly popular but she was good gossip. Plutarch, Horace and Cicero were just a few of the Romans who wrote about her. (Cicero told everyone he detested her.) Cleopatra's story continued to fascinate over the centuries. The playwright William Shakespeare wrote a play about her. Even Hollywood has immortalised her in several movies.

The Muslim historian Ibn al-Ibri was alive during the famous Shajarat al-Durr's reign. He was so impressed by her that he claimed she was 'rivalled by no woman in beauty and no man in determination'. Today, you can visit her tomb at the Mosque of Shajarat al-Durr in Cairo. On the tomb, the story of her greatness is written in stone.





Unfortunately for her, Nero had other ideas. He had learned his lessons well. Not only did he have his step-brother Britannicus poisoned, but when he finally got sick of his interfering mother, he decided to kill her too.

After dinner one night, Nero arranged for his mother's boat to capsize on the journey home. Agrippina's childhood swimming lessons came in handy and she managed to swim to shore. But she couldn't escape the soldiers Nero sent to finish her off.

Through murder and manipulation, Agrippina achieved the power she craved. But in the end, like Cleopatra, the quest for power killed her.

SHAJARAT AL-DURR (a.k.a. Shadjar al-Durr)

Shajarat al-Durr was born a Turkish slave in 1223.

Slavery didn't stop her scheming her way to the top. First she persuaded her husband, Salih Ayyub, to free her from slavery.

Once he became Sultan of Egypt he began leaning

heavily on her advice, especially after he grew sick with tuberculosis. She even went to war with him against a French king who was invading Egypt.

When the Sultan died in 1249, Shajarat kept his death a secret and ruled in his name. But eventually the Sultan's son arrived to claim his father's throne.



Shajarat thought her stepson, Turan Shah, wasn't really capable of ruling Egypt. So did most of the army, which was made up of Turkish slaves like Shajarat. These Turkish warrior slaves were known as the Mamluk. With their help Shajarat arranged Turan Shah's murder. Then she claimed the throne for herself, calling herself the Sultana of Egypt. Unfortunately, her rule lasted just three months. Egypt's overlord, the Caliph of Baghdad, decreed that a woman could not rule, and the army reluctantly agreed. The Caliph appointed a Turkish general named Aybak in her place. This was the beginning of the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt, which became the centre of a great Muslim empire.

But Shajarat al-Durr wasn't about to let a little thing like a Caliph stop her. As a Muslim, Aybak could take several wives, so she married him and they ruled Egypt together. He concentrated on war while she ran the country. All went well until Aybak decided to take yet another wife. Instead of getting a divorce, Shajarat had her second husband murdered. A few days later, Shajarat al-Durr herself was dead. Aybak's first wife,

angry at his murder, urged the women of the harem to beat Shajarat to death with their wooden shoes.

Then the army flung her body over a cliff.

Shajarat al-Durr was a clever ruler. She was also a murderer who let no one get in the way of her quest for power. But perhaps if she hadn't been so brutal in protecting her power, she might have ended up dead a lot sooner!

EMPRESS WU (a.k.a. Wu Chao, Wu Zhao)

Anyone who ever crossed Wu Zetian was eventually exiled, executed or ruined. Who would have thought that a 13-year-old girl from the countryside would one day have all of China quaking in its slippers?

Beautiful Wu Zetian was an educated girl, born into a rural family of the minor nobility. She was just 13 when she was sent to the Imperial Palace as one of Emperor Taizong's 122 wives. Far from home and only a lowly junior wife, Wu Zetian began scheming for power. Hovering about the emperor's sick-bed she met his son and heir, Gaozong. Gaozong was impressed

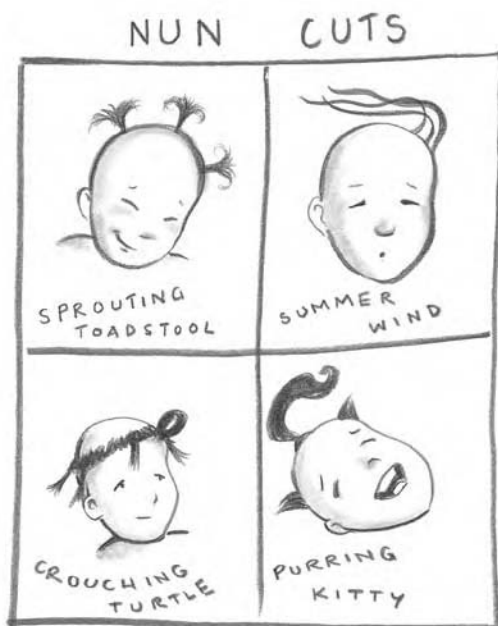
with Wu Zetian's beauty and charm. Some Chinese histories suggest that they became lovers at this time.

The emperor finally died in 649 CE. It was the custom for a dead emperor's wives to shave their heads and become nuns. At 24, poor Wu Zetian faced

a lifetime shut up in a nunnery. Luckily, the new emperor Gaozong ordered Wu Zetian to return from the nunnery to become one of his wives. This was like setting a cat amongst the pigeons. Wu Zetian immediately began causing trouble

between Gaozong's number-one wife, the empress, and his other wives.

When Wu's second child was born the empress paid her a visit. After she left, Wu's baby daughter



was found dead in her crib. Some Chinese histories say that Wu Zetian deliberately smothered her own baby and blamed the empress. Even so, it took a lot more scheming to get rid of someone as important as an empress. Eventually, Wu accused the empress and another of the emperor's favourite wives of plotting to poison him. They were imprisoned in the palace for life and Wu Zetian became Empress Wu – number-one wife to the emperor.

Imprisonment wasn't enough for Wu Zetian. She wanted her rivals dead. She sent executioners to cut off the women's feet and hands, tie them up and throw them into a brewing vat to die slowly.

WHAT DID SHE SAY?

After leaving two of her fellow wives bloodied and beaten in a vat for brewing alcohol, Wu Zetian supposedly said, 'Now these two witches can get drunk to their bones'.



Wu Zetian's spite didn't end there. Over the following years, she got rid of all her enemies – all the important men who had opposed her rise to power. Some were exiled. Some were ruined. Some were executed. People loyal to Wu Zetian

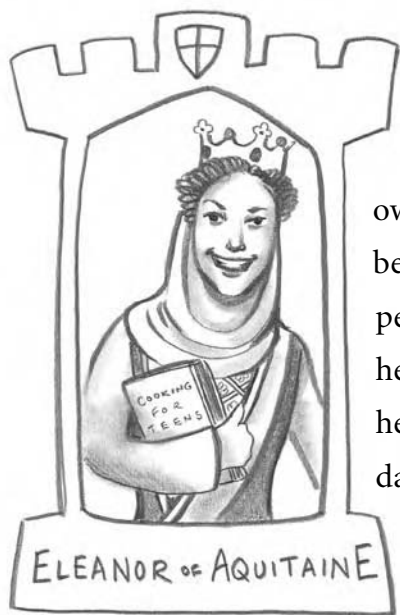
took their places. The emperor's eldest son by another wife was so scared of Wu's henchmen that he took to disguising himself as a woman to hide from them. But this strange behaviour led to him being exiled too. Wu's eldest son took his place as crown prince.

When Gaozong got sick and weak, he relied more and more on Wu's advice. For the last 23 years of his life she was really running the country for him. When he died in 683 CE, one of Wu's sons should have ruled. In reality, Wu ruled *for* her sons. In 690, Wu grew tired of being the power *behind* the throne and took the title of Emperor for herself.

Empress Wu was one of the most ruthless female rulers of all time but she also contributed to China's growth. She took power away from the old noble families and gave it to those she selected. She set up an examination system so that scholars, not hereditary nobles, would run the country. She lowered taxes, helped farmers, improved public works and built Buddhist temples. For 15 years she ruled alone until finally handing over power to her son at the age of 80. By this time China was more peaceful, prosperous and powerful than ever. But a lot of people were still very, very scared.

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

Eleanor of Aquitaine was heiress to more land and castles than the king of France. So when her father died in 1137, King Louis of France snapped her up as a bride for his son. Eleanor and Louis junior hadn't even finished their wedding tour when news arrived that the king had died of diarrhoea. At 15, Eleanor was Queen of France and Duchess of one of the richest regions in Europe.



Unlike other scheming empresses, Eleanor never used murder to get her own way. Instead, she used her beauty and intelligence to charm people. Some historians say that her husband, Louis VII, divorced her because she only gave him daughters. Others suggest that Eleanor met someone better and wanted to rid herself of Louis.

Perhaps it was just coincidence, but two months after her divorce from Louis, Eleanor married Henry. Henry was one of the heirs to the English throne. He was just 19 and Eleanor was a woman of 30. Eleanor got a young, energetic man who desperately wanted to be a king. Henry got a fertile beauty who was the richest woman in Europe. Two years later, Henry became King of England. Between them they controlled all of England and the western part of France.

But their marriage was a stormy one. In the early years, they must have been on pretty good terms because they had eight children together. But the children grew older and began plotting against Henry for their shares of his power and territory. King Henry locked Eleanor up for siding with them.

Henry died in 1189, before his wife. After his death, Eleanor regained her power – first as the mother of King Richard I, and when Richard died, as mother of King John. She even governed his territories while Richard was a captive in Austria.

Eleanor married two kings and gave birth to two kings. She also married her daughters and granddaughters off to kings as well. At 77, she travelled halfway across Europe on horseback to select her granddaughter, Blanche, as a bride for the king of France. Through marriage she gained influence over many of the kingdoms of Europe. Still beautiful and influential, Eleanor lived to the grand age of 82.

4

CUNNING CONQUERORS

AMBITION

You may have heard of great empire builders like Alexander the Great, Ghengis Khan and Napoleon. Conquering queens like Sammuramat and Zenobia were just as ambitious and ruthless. Not content with ruling their own roosts, these women had enough ambition to rule the world.



Through war, marriage and diplomacy, they added countries to their empires like charms to a bracelet. They had the will to rule an empire and the toughness to get it any way they could.

SAMMURAMAT (a.k.a. Semiramis)

The ancient Greeks were so impressed with Sammuramat that they said she was descended from the gods. But the Greeks liked to exaggerate so it's hard to know how much of her story was true and how much was fantasy.

We do know that Sammuramat was a queen of Assyria (modern day Iraq) in the ninth century BCE. When her husband the king died, she ruled for many years in the name of her son.

According to the ancient histories, Sammuramat was a very ambitious woman. Her army pushed its way through to the sea so that she could trade with the world by ship. She had 300 000 foot soldiers, horse- and camel-mounted cavalry and chariots. With them she conquered Egypt, Ethiopia and parts of central Asia.

She even defeated a great army from India.

As well as a conqueror, Sannuramat was a builder. She rebuilt much of the ancient city of Babylon. She dammed rivers and irrigated the desert. She may have created the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Although these gardens no longer exist they were described in many old writings, including the *Bible*. Like a series of giant roof gardens in the desert, they were irrigated with water from the Euphrates River.

WHAT DID SHE SAY?

Sannuramat was a bit of a show-off. She erected statues and monuments to herself all over the place. One of them stated:

'I have built dams and fertilised the barren land with my rivers. I have built impregnable walls and roads to far places and with iron, cut passages through mountains where previously even wild animals could not pass.'

Conqueror, builder and legendary lover,
Sammuramat was said to take a different lover
whenever she desired. Then she put the man to death
the following day so that he couldn't kiss and tell!

ZENOBIA (a.k.a. Bat Zabbai)

Zenobia, queen of Palmyra,
wasn't born into royalty.
She married a king, then set
out to build an empire.

Zenobia always wanted
to be a great warrior queen.
Sammuramat was one of
her heroines and Zenobia
liked to dress up as her for
palace parties. Zenobia was
an Arab as well, so she knew

all about those ancient Arab battle queens who led
their soldiers to war. She herself often rode out with
her cavalry or jumped from her horse to walk with
the infantry. She claimed she was descended from the



famous Egyptian queen Cleopatra and even had a golden chariot made which she hoped to ride through the streets of Rome. Zenobia had a lot to live up to.

Today, the city of Palmyra is a sand-blown ruin in the deserts of Syria. In the third century CE, it was a sprawling, cultured city at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. Merchant caravans travelling the Silk Road to China stopped at this oasis to rest their camels. It became a great trading city and was scooped up by the Romans as part of their empire.

King Odenathus, Zenobia's husband, ruled Palmyra in Rome's name. With Zenobia's help he even conquered his neighbours, the Persians, for the Roman Empire. But when Odenathus was killed (some said at his wife's orders), Zenobia set out to carve an empire for *herself*. Ruling in her young son's name, first she struck at Egypt, pushing her army in a wide arc south from Palmyra. Then she turned north, conquering much of what is now Turkey. Finally, she declared herself independent of Rome – an empress in her own right.

While Sammuramat had been a builder, Zenobia was a thinker. She invited all the great writers and

thinkers of the time to her court. People of many religions were welcomed to her city. She wanted to create a rich empire, but also a brilliant one. When she minted coins with her face on them, the Roman emperor, Aurelian, decided Zenobia was getting too big for her boots. Aurelian and his army took back Egypt. Then they set out to capture Palmyra itself.

After many battles, Zenobia's army was finally defeated by Rome. Zenobia tried to escape by camel but was captured by the Romans at the River Euphrates. Most of her army was slaughtered but Zenobia talked her way out of being executed. Unlike Cleopatra, Boudicca and other warrior queens, Zenobia didn't kill herself rather than be taken captive.

Once she had dreamed of riding her golden chariot through the streets of Rome as its empress. Instead, she was paraded through the streets, chained by her own jewels. She ended up marrying a Roman senator and retiring to the Italian countryside. There she liked to host parties and talk about the good old days – the days when she had ruled an empire.

ANCIENT BESTSELLERS

Sammuramat's story has been popular with writers for more than 2500 years. Ancient Greek writers like Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus liked to add the fantastic touch of gods and goddesses to her exploits. The great French writer Voltaire wrote a play about her in the mid 1700s. Rossini created an opera about her a century later.

If Sammuramat was the darling of the Greeks, Zenobia was the pin-up girl of the Romans. She was included in a biography of Roman emperors written in the fourth century. The writers called her 'the most beautiful'. They praised her powerful black eyes and pearly white teeth.

Her story grew more myth-like through the centuries. By the 1300s, Italian writer Boccaccio added that she hid her beauty under armour and always wore a helmet covering her face.



MARGARET OF DENMARK

Margaret of Denmark must have been a great talker because she talked her way into becoming queen of three countries – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – despite the fact that traditionally men ruled in these Scandinavian lands.



Margaret was only six when her father the king of Denmark betrothed her to Haakon, king of Norway in 1359. They were married four years later when she was just ten. Margaret grew up playing politics instead of dolls.

When her father died in 1375, she persuaded the Danish people to accept her son Olaf as king, ahead of her brother-in-law and nephew. Obviously, she would

have to rule for him as he was only five! Five years later, her husband died, leaving her to rule Norway for her son too. When her son Olaf died in 1387, she adopted her nephew Erik and continued to rule over Denmark and Norway. Using a combination of skilful negotiation and military force, she crushed opposition amongst powerful nobles.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, the people had grown tired of their own king. Margaret stepped in to help them. She eventually defeated King Albrecht in battle and added the crown of Sweden to her trophy cabinet. Although her nephew was king in name, Margaret remained the power behind the throne. She used taxation to amass money for the crown, set up a strong system of sheriffs to maintain order and appointed bishops loyal to her. The three countries remained united for more than 100 years after Margaret's death in 1412. Sweden and Norway stayed together for 400 years.

AMINA

In a place in Africa known as Nigeria today, a young girl named Amina grew up wanting to be a warrior. Her mother Bakwa was leader of the Zazzau, a West African people. Amina didn't want to get married.



She wanted to go to war with her younger brother Karama. Her brother succeeded her mother as ruler and when he died, in 1576, Amina took the throne.

For 30 years, Amina kept busy conquering her neighbours, extending her rule to the north, south and west. She took control of caravan routes, making them safe for traders. She opened new trade routes for her land's kola nuts, horses, leather, cloth and salt. She took tribute from other tribes and forced their rulers to become her vassals, her subjects. Amina was the leading warrior of the Zazzau cavalry and as she travelled she

built earthen walls around the cities she conquered. To this day the ruined walls of this region are known as ‘Amina’s walls’.

CATHERINE THE GREAT



Catherine the Great was married to a man who liked to play with toys in bed. Little wonder that she ended up taking his place as tsar, or emperor, of Russia.

Catherine was a 16-year-old German princess when she was married off

to Peter, heir to the Russian throne in 1744. It was a terrible marriage and Peter became a hopeless tsar. Six months after he was crowned in 1762, Catherine dressed as a soldier, mounted a warhorse and took over. The army, which was angered by Tsar Peter’s policies towards Germany, supported her. Whereas, Peter, the Russian Tsar loved all things German; Catherine, the

German princess, acted like a true Russian. Eight days after the coup, her husband was murdered by her supporters. Instead of becoming regent for her son, Catherine was proclaimed empress in her own right.

But Catherine wasn't content with ruling Russia. During her reign, Russia took over much of Poland and defeated Turkey in two wars. Her territory spread west and south to the Black Sea. Russian settlers from Siberia even crossed the Bering Strait to America and settled along the coast of Alaska. Catherine controlled it all. She liked to patrol her forts in uniform, armed with pistol and sword. Her ladies-in-waiting followed her dressed the same.

Despite her conquering nature, Catherine was not a war monger. War was expensive; she preferred peace. During her 25-year reign only six years were spent at war. And although she began her rule by trying to reform the government and free the peasants, the reality of ruling such a large and backward country meant that she ended up being even more repressive than earlier rulers. The peasants of Ukraine had been free, but Catherine tied them to the land and their

lords. However, she greatly encouraged trade, mining, industry, immigration and education. She was also famous for her many love affairs.

By Catherine's death in 1796, Russia had grown so much that the population nearly doubled in size. Russia was a power strong enough to frighten all of Europe. And Catherine frightened everyone! Like the other cunning conquerors in this chapter, she had enough ambition to rule the world. She just ran out of time to achieve it.

I'm not enslaving
you, silly. I'm
FREEING you from
confusing choicer



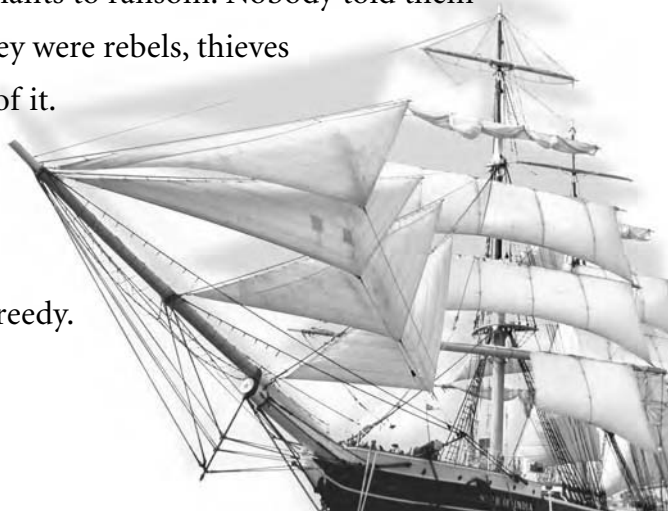
5

PIRATE MISTRESSES

GREED

Peg-leg Petes and Captain Hooks weren't the only ones to fly the skull and crossbones. Pirate mistresses also took to the high seas. Bandit queens prowled the high roads. They terrorised travellers, annoyed governments and held merchants to ransom. Nobody told them what to do. They were rebels, thieves . . . and proud of it.

These
female pirates
were daring,
cunning and greedy.



Being outlawed didn't stop them from becoming mistress of all they surveyed.

ALWILDA OF GOTLAND (a.k.a Alvilda, Alfild)

About 1500 years ago, Alwilda of Gotland (Sweden) became a pirate rather than get married. Her father, King Siward, wanted her to marry Prince Alf of

Denmark. But Alwilda was a wild girl and she wasn't having any of it.

He asked me to marry him - but I wanted to develop my career first..

She took to the high seas with a crew of like-minded girls. They

must have been strong too, because the ships of the day relied more on oar-power than sail.

After capturing another ship, Alwilda's pirates terrorised shipping on the Baltic Sea. Prince Alf soon set sail to rid the



region of this pirate menace. After a battle at sea, he captured the pirate ship. Imagine his surprise when he discovered the identity of the captain! It was the girl who had rejected him. According to one account, Alf and Alwilda did end up marrying. Alwilda hung up her sword and retired from her life of piracy. (Or maybe she just went part-time?)

GRACE O'MALLEY (a.k.a. Grainne Ni Mhaille)

The family of Howth Castle in Dublin have been setting an extra place at dinner for over 400 years – just in case a guest like Grace O'Malley drops in.

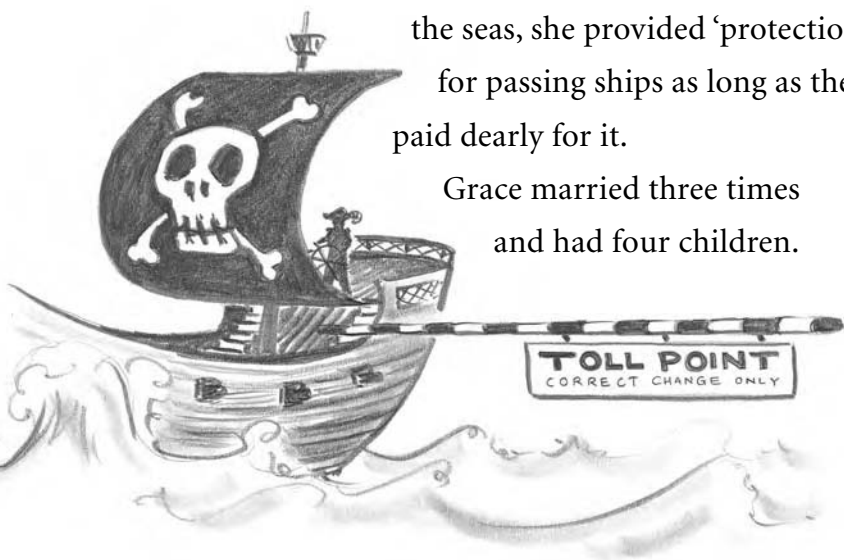
In the late 1500s, the pirate Grace O'Malley turned up at Howth Castle hoping for some hospitality. She was turned away. Grace wasn't very happy about this. So when she ran into one of the Howth sons on the way back to her ship, she kidnapped him and put to sea. The ransom? Grace would return the son if the family promised never to shut the gates on a hungry traveller again.

This is just one of the wild tales told of Grace O'Malley, pirate mistress of Ireland's north-west coast. Born into the family of a local pirate and warlord around 1530, Grace was never going to be content sitting at her embroidery. At 15 she married another local warlord and began to build her own little empire.

She took over her husband's fleet and expanded their wealth and lands through trade and piracy. One of her favourite tricks was to lie in wait off the coast and ambush slow merchant ships. The captains had to pay her a (very large) toll or have their ships plundered.

After her first husband's death, Grace made Clare Island in Clew Bay her headquarters. Like a gangster of the seas, she provided 'protection' for passing ships as long as they paid dearly for it.

Grace married three times and had four children.



She was arrested twice by the English for harassing their ships but managed to escape. She even sailed up the Thames River to talk politics with the English queen. Grace was greedy, ambitious and loved adventure. Not even childbirth kept her quiet. The day after she gave birth to her youngest son, her ship was attacked by Turkish pirates. Grace got out of bed, grabbed a gun and started firing!

WHAT DID SHE SAY?

In a letter to Queen Elizabeth I of England, Grace asked for permission to continue with her life of piracy! She asked for the freedom to '... invade with sword and fire all your highness' enemies, wheresoever they are or shall be, without any interruption of any person or persons whatsoever'.



ANCIENT BESTSELLERS

The historian Saxo Grammaticus wrote about Alwilda of Gotland in his work, *The History of the Danes*, published early in the thirteenth century.

Saxo studied ancient manuscripts, legends and songs in his research on the history of the region.

However, his writing is probably part fact and part fiction. According to Saxo, Alwilda protected herself from unwanted boyfriends with snakes!

Grace O'Malley is the heroine of many folktales.

Castles all down the west coast of Ireland are supposedly connected with her. However, written records of the day also record her deeds.

The poet Sir Philip Sidney was the son of the English governor of Ireland. He liked to talk with Grace and wrote about her adventures in a series of letters home to England. Some of these letters have survived.

Bandit queen Mary Frith was a seventeenth century celebrity. Her life was celebrated in a play called *Moll Cutpurse* written in 1611. She also wrote her autobiography which was published three years after her death.



MADAM CHING

(a.k.a. Ching Hsi Kai, Qing Er Sou)

Madam Ching was one tough cookie. One story tells that she charmed her husband into marriage by trying to gouge out his eyes. When her husband died in 1807 she took over his pirate empire.



Come in my dear. Now we can do this the easy way or the hard way...

To convince his captains she was up for the job she dressed up in his gold-embroidered pirate uniform and waved his swords threateningly.

Like Grace O'Malley, Madam Ching was a gangster of the high seas. She controlled the oceans south of China. Her captains demanded protection money from passing ships and captured those who refused to pay. Her ships also raided the coastal lands of wealthy lords.

Piracy was rife in China at this time as European and Asian traders grew wealthy while the Chinese people starved.

Ching controlled a floating pirate nation of 50 000 people and 2000 ships. She kept order by beheading thieves and troublemakers. The Chinese government tried for several years to stop Ching's pirate fleet. During one attempt, Ching captured 30 government war junks. Eventually, the only way the government could stop her was by starving her out. It prevented any ships from entering the seas controlled by the pirate fleet.

With no ships left to prey on, Ching accepted a pardon from the government. She retired from pirate life on a pension generous enough to set her up as a smuggler!

ANNE BONNY AND MARY READ

Born in Ireland around 1700, Mary Read lived most of her life dressed as a man. As a child her mother dressed her in boys' clothes and brought her up as a son. Some accounts say her mother wanted to fool

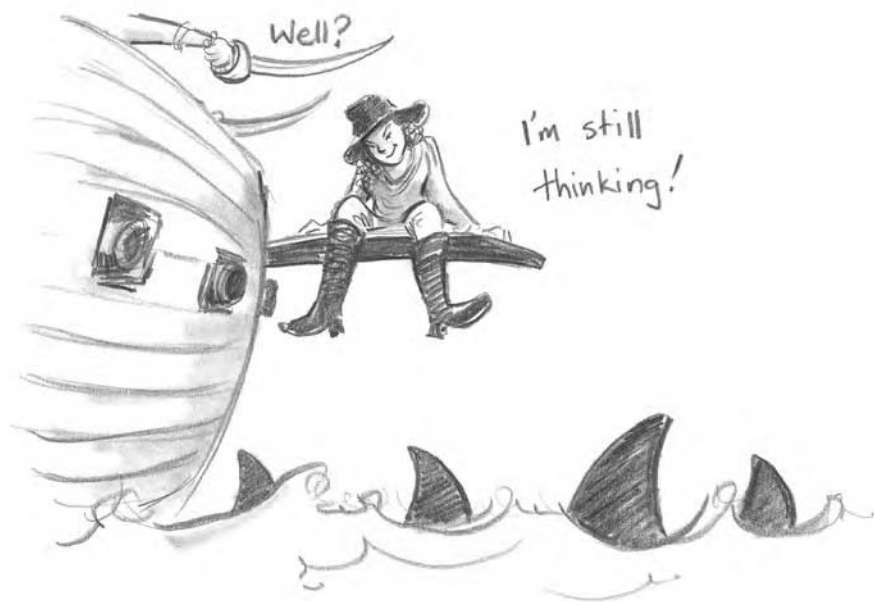


MARY READ & ANNE BONNY

her sailor husband into thinking that Mary was his dead son. (She was actually the result of her mother's affair with another man while her husband was at sea.) Other accounts say Mary's mother thought she'd do better in life as a man.

While still a 'boy', Mary joined the English navy and later became a soldier in the army. She fell in love with a fellow soldier, revealed her identity as a woman and married. But after he died she returned to her life as a man, becoming a sailor. She met Anne Bonny when Anne's pirate crew captured the ship Mary worked on. Forced to choose between 'walking the plank' or becoming a pirate, Mary joined the pirates aboard

‘Calico’ Jack Rackam and Anne Bonny’s ship. It is said that she even fought a duel over a young pirate lad she fancied!



Anne Bonny had a respectable childhood in America, apart from being rather fierce of temper. She married sailor James Bonny but grew bored waiting for him to return from the sea and took to a life of piracy as the girlfriend of ‘Calico’ Jack Rackam. Sailors of the time believed it was bad luck to have a

WHAT DID SHE SAY?

When the British attacked Anne Bonny and Mary Read's pirate ship, the rest of the crew were hiding below decks. Mary shouted, 'Come up and fight like men!' before she fired into the hold at her own men.

woman in the crew so Anne dressed as a man. She and Calico Jack raided Spanish ships near Cuba and the West Indies. Anne fought as fiercely as any other pirate and more bravely than many.

When their ship was captured by the British navy in 1720, Mary and Anne fought back to back. Some stories say that the rest of the crew was lying below decks drunk! The British succeeded in capturing the pirates and took them to Jamaica in the West Indies to be hanged.

Mary and Anne escaped the fate of the men by pleading pregnancy. Mary later died of pneumonia in prison. Anne was granted a pardon on condition that she leave the West Indies, never to return.

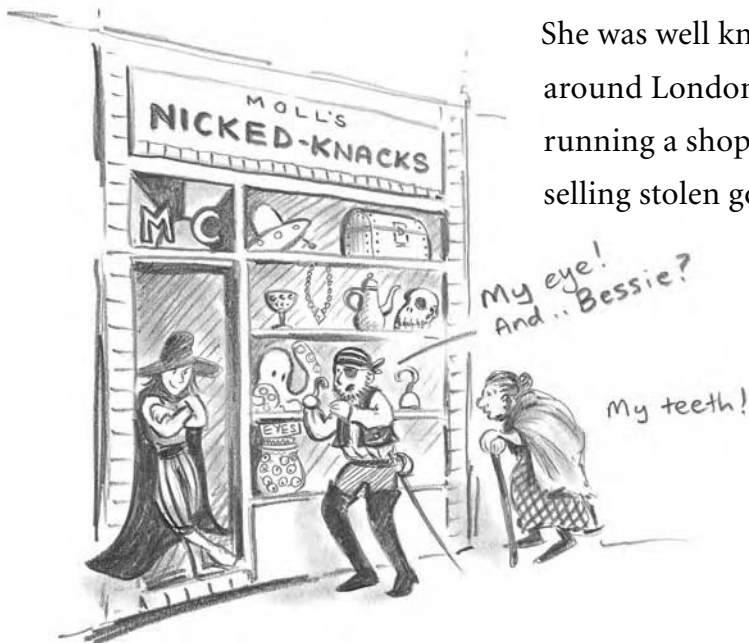
MARY FRITH (a.k.a. Moll Cutpurse)

Mary Frith began life as a shoemaker's daughter in 1584 but decided a life of crime was much more interesting. She ran off from her job as a servant to take up the sword. Dressed as a man, she began her life of petty crime.

Mary became the leader of a gang of thieves and highway robbers. She was eventually arrested when she robbed and wounded a general. She was sent to prison but escaped by paying a hefty bribe.

Mary wasn't shy about her criminal dealings.

She was well known
around London,
running a shop
selling stolen goods.



Criminals sold her items they'd stolen which she sold back to the owners! Mary's life of crime didn't affect her health – she lived to the impressive age of 75.

PHOOLAN DEVI

Poor Phoolan Devi was sold into marriage for the price of a cow and a bicycle. She was just 11 years old. Even in the 1960s and 70s, parts of India were very poor and life was hard. People were condemned to poverty and prejudice because of their birth. Phoolan ran away

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from her violent husband and was later kidnapped by a local gang. Although she was abused badly by this gang she decided gang life was a lot better than marriage.

Hiding out in the ravines of central India, which had been home to bandits for 800 years, they ambushed

travellers and raided villages. After each raid, Phoolan Devi visited a temple to pray to the Goddess Durga. She was responsible for more than 50 murders during her gangland days, including one raid in which 22 men were killed in revenge for abusing her and killing her lover. Despite her violent life, Phoolan became a heroine to other poor Indians. They admired the way she escaped from her life of poverty and hardship and fought oppression. They read about her in the newspapers, heard about her in songs and saw her on the screen.

Phoolan Devi gave herself up to the police in 1983, cheered on by 10 000 fans. She spent 11 years in prison. After her release she was elected to the Indian Parliament in 1996 where she fought for the rights of women and the poor and oppressed. Phoolan Devi was gunned down in front of her own house in July 2001. She was only 37 years old.

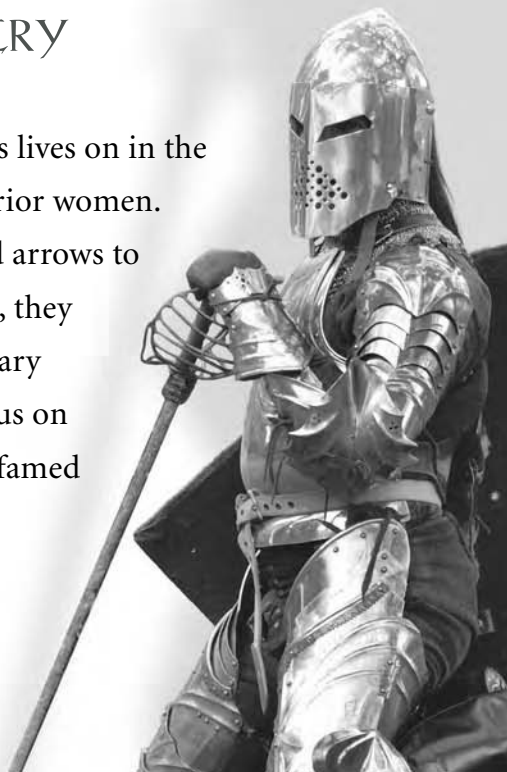
6

MIGHTY WARRIORS

BRAVERY

The legend of the Amazons lives on in the deeds of these mighty warrior women.

From the days of bows and arrows to the era of the fighter plane, they were commanding at military headquarters and dangerous on the battlefield. Some were famed for their ability as generals who planned the attack.



Others were known for their bravery in battle. But whether they were giving the orders or receiving them, you'd definitely want to be on their side.

TOMYRIS

No one is as dangerous as a woman wronged.
And if that woman is also a warrior woman like
Tomyris – beware!

It was 529 BCE. Cyrus the Great, King of Persia (Iran), was busy building an empire. At first he thought he might grab the territory of the eastern nomad tribes by marrying their queen, Tomyris. But when Tomyris said no, he decided to conquer them by force instead. What he didn't count on was a woman as dangerous as Tomyris.

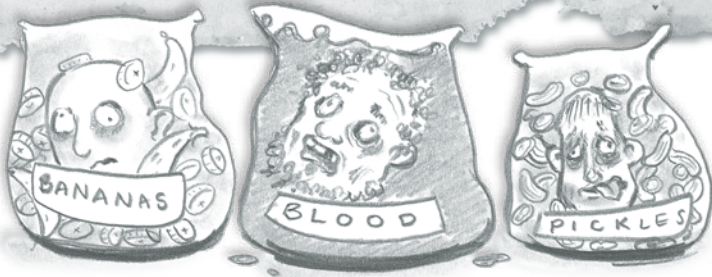
Cyrus wasn't a man to be trusted. During peace talks, Cyrus's men killed Tomyris' ambassadors and captured her son. Tomyris was furious. She became even more angry when her son died while in the hands of her enemies.

Tomyris vowed to get revenge. She threw her entire

army against the Persians, slaughtering every soldier she could find. That was the end of Cyrus, the greatest emperor the Persians had every known.

WHAT DID SHE SAY?

When Cyrus captured her son, Tomyris supposedly swore to 'give you more blood than you can drink, for all your gluttony'. After the battle she had Cyrus's head chopped from his body and dunked in a bag of human blood. 'See now – I fulfil my threat: you have your fill of blood!'



ARTEMESIA

In the late 400s BCE, Artemesia was queen of Halicarnassus. Halicarnassus was a city on the west

coast of Turkey. Artemesia liked a good fight and she was also a great general. One of her first jobs as queen was to defeat her country's arch enemy, the island of Rhodes.

Later, when the Persian king, Xerxes, announced he was going to war against the Greeks, Artemesia decided it would be a great adventure to join him. She took five shiploads of troops with her. Artemesia liked to fight but she liked winning even more. She knew the Greeks were a great naval power so she advised King Xerxes to fight them on land not at sea. Xerxes didn't take her advice.

Xerxes and his allies attacked the Greek ships and were badly beaten. Artemesia wasn't about to lose her ships to the Greeks or let them claim the 10 000-drachma reward offered for her capture. She retreated with the Greek general Ameninias in pursuit. Then, using all her cunning, she rammed one of her own allies' ships. This tricked the Greeks into thinking she was on their side. Artemesia was the only one of Xerxes' generals to escape the battle.

Xerxes rewarded her with a suit of Greek armour for her efforts saying, ‘My men have turned into women, my women into men.’



HUA MULAN (a.k.a. Fa Mulan)

Disney introduced millions of children around the world to the story of Mulan. But Chinese children had known about her for 1500 years. Mulan probably lived in the fifth or sixth century CE. At that time, the Chinese emperor demanded that each family send

soldiers to hold back the Huns who were attacking China's borders. Mulan's father had an old war wound and her brother was only five. She decided to take her father's armour, horse and place on the battlefield.

For twelve years she fought in a savage war against the nomadic Huns. For twelve years she disguised herself as a man known for his courage and cleverness. No one discovered she was a woman. When the war ended, the emperor called his bravest officers to his palace to reward them. He offered Mulan an important position in his government but, after so long, all she wanted was a fast horse to get her home. Mulan means 'magnolia' in Chinese but there was nothing flower-like about this fierce warrior woman.

TOMOE GOZEN

Tomoe Gozen was a samurai. She grew up with the martial arts. It was quite common for Japanese girls born to military samurai families in the twelfth century to be trained in weapons to defend their homes but Tomoe actually rode to war. She was one of the most

ANCIENT BESTSELLERS

Mulan's name isn't recorded in any ancient histories or letters, or on any tombs. Her face doesn't appear on any old coins or carvings. We don't know for *certain* that she existed.

But her story is so popular that it has been told and re-told for 1500

years. She is first mentioned in a poem written

by a woman named Tzu-yeh in the fifth century.

This poem still appears in picture books today. She was the heroine of a Chinese novel written in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries and is celebrated in Chinese opera. Her story has been filmed in many Chinese movies and TV series.

Now she is even a Disney star!



HUA MULAN

famous female warriors of Japan, practised in riding, archery and swordsmanship.

Tomoe was the wife or mistress of a powerful lord of the Minamoto clan called Yoshinaka. She was also one of his senior captains. According to legend, she was known for killing several enemies in hand-to-hand combat. She also single-handedly held a bridge against many enemy attackers. When Yoshinaka went to war to claim leadership of the Minamoto clan, Tomoe fought at his side until there were but a few warriors left standing. Some stories say that she died at his side.



Others tell that he ordered her to leave and she fled the battle carrying a bloody head under her arm – perhaps that of an enemy samurai or perhaps the head of her lord. She flung herself into the ocean with the head, according to some versions of the tale. Others say that she retired to a nunnery.

CATERINA SFORZA

The Duke of Milan and his mistress had a daughter, Caterina. Once she was old enough, she was married off to the pope's nephew. When soldiers from Venice arrived to attack their lands, she threw on her armour and went out to fight them herself.



Fifteenth-century Italy was like one big boxing match. Local dukes fought bishops, bishops fought popes and everyone was fighting the French. Luckily, Caterina grew up riding, hunting and fighting, so she was rough,

tough and prepared for anything. Once she rode to battle seven-months pregnant. And when her children were taken hostage, Caterina replied that she could always have more! Caterina was ruthless, completely destroying the rival Orsi family and their palace in revenge for the murder of her husband. The French were so impressed with Caterina that they named one of their cannon after her!

LOZEN

Lozen was an Apache warrior in the wild, wild west of America. In the 1870s, the US government was forcing Indians from their land and settling them on reservations. Lozen's Warm Springs Apache were not willing to give up their homeland. They decided they would rather fight than live on a reservation. As they fled from the US military, Lozen encouraged her people to cross the wild waters of the Rio Grande River by plunging her horse into the torrent.

Although most of Lozen's fellow warriors were men, Lozen was an expert horse thief and warrior. She also

had an uncanny knack for knowing where to find the enemy and how to hurt them most. Some said that she was a shaman with clairvoyant ability. One story tells that she would offer a prayer to the Apache god asking where the enemy was.

She and her fellow fighters joined the famous Apache leader Geronimo and fought the US and Mexican armies for many years. They were finally forced to surrender in 1886. Lozen died of tuberculosis after 1887 – a captive of the US government.





LYDIA LITVAK

The women of southern Russia have never run away from a fight. Perhaps some of their ancestors were those nomadic Amazon warrior women. During World War II, many Russian women joined the fight against the

German invaders. They fought on land and in the air. Twenty-one-year-old Lydia Litvak was a fighter pilot. During her short one-year career, she shot down twelve German planes and helped down many others. The last time her fellow pilots saw her, she was being chased by eight German fighters. Her plane has never been found.

NOT THE END

The women in this book weren't always good. Many of them were mad, bad and murderous. But they were all brave and very dangerous. Courageous women

like Lydia Litvak, Lozen and Mulan continue to fight for their families, their people and their countries. They don't always fight with swords or guns. Sometimes they fight with words and cunning. Today's warrior woman probably isn't a queen and she probably doesn't fight with a sword. She is more likely to fight her battles in politics or the media. And if she does bear arms they will be tanks and rifles, not swords and spears. But the modern warrior woman is certainly *still* dangerous and definitely very scary.

So watch out. Tomorrow's warrior woman may be sitting next to you!



CAROL JONES would like to think she is queen in her own home but her children tell her differently. As well as being queen of the kitchen sink, she has been a teacher and magazine editor before taking up writing full time. She has written more than 40 books for children, both fiction and non-fiction. When not writing, she loves taking her dog for walks because he is the only one who does what he's told!

ELISE HURST didn't take notes at school, she drew pictures instead. One day in a history lecture, while she was practising drawing, a fellow student gave Elise her first illustration job. Soon she had illustrated three books – one about Vikings, one about kings, and one about a mythological world.

She has now illustrated more than 40 books and written some of her own. From her studio Elise can hear the monkeys at the Melbourne Zoo, and in the evening the bats stream over the nearby Melbourne cemetery.



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istockphoto.com and photographers: Amanda Rohde (torn paper used throughout text), duckycards (stone tablet used throughout text), page 54, 69, 82 Rune Schou Larsen (picture frame), page 6 Wojciech Krusinski (memorial of woman with sword and shield), page 11 Vladimir Korostyshevskiy (statue of Queen Boudicca in London), page 27 Teemu Lankila (sword), page 33 Paul Cowan (traditional Arab Khanjar daggers), page 44 Photographer Olympus (statue of Athena in Athens), page 57 Stephanie Asher (*The Star of India* historic pirate ship), page 62 Emrah Turudu (old book), page 71 picmax (lady knight in armour).

The photograph on page 69 of Phoolan Devi, 1993, at New Delhi's Tihar jail is from AFP/Getty images.

The photographs on pages vii (Tomoe Gozen), 54 (Catherine the Great) and 82 (Lydia Litvak) are in the public domain.

TIMELINE

800s BCE

Sammuramat builds an empire in Assyria.

500s BCE

Tomyris kills Persian king to revenge her son's death.

400s BCE

Artemesia tricks Greek navy.

52 BCE

Cleopatra VII begins her reign in Egypt.

40 CE

Trung sisters fight to chase Chinese out of Vietnam.

54 CE

Agrippina II murders her husband Claudius, to make her son Nero emperor.

60 CE

Boudicca attacks Roman invaders of Britain.

200s CE

Zenobia makes Palmyra the centre of a Syrian empire.

400s CE

Mulan becomes a Chinese war hero.

500s CE

Alwilda sets sail as a pirate in the Baltic Sea.

600s CE

Wu Zetian claws her way to power in China.

late 800s and early 900s CE

Aethelflaed chases the Vikings out of Mercia.

1100s CE

Eleanor of Aquitaine becomes Queen of France and England.
Tomoe Gozen becomes famous as a samurai warrior in Japan.

1200s CE

Shajarat al-Durr schemes her way to power in Egypt.
Tamara protects and extends Georgia.

1300s CE

Margaret of Denmark unites Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

1400s CE

Caterina Sforza defends her lands in Italy.

1500s CE

Grace O'Malley terrorises shipping off the coast of Ireland.
Amina creates an empire in West Africa.

1600s CE

Nzinga fights to protect the Angolan people from the Portuguese.
Mary Frith leads a gang of thieves in London.

1700s CE

Catherine the Great steals the throne of Russia from her husband.
Mary Read and Anne Bonny join a pirate crew in the Caribbean.

1800s CE

Madam Ching rules a pirate nation in China.
Lozen joins Apache leader Geronimo in fighting the US army.

1940s CE

Lydia Litvak flies a fighter plane for the Russian air force in WWII.

1960s and 1970s CE

Phoolan Devi runs a gang of outlaws in India.

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