

A Naughty Northern Nun of the Ninth Century

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Persona Pentathlon, KASF 2010

On the perfectly honest side of things, four of the five entries were conceived with my own persona in mind, and I skew to seventh century Anglo-Saxon. However, only the veil and fillet can hope to be reasonably documented to that time. There were finds of gaming pieces in graves of that era - but we don't know what kinds of games. We believe that they composed songs - but we don't have any records of them. And although I didn't find any sources referencing sex in the seventh century, as there was eventually an eighth century, it seems clear that people had it.

So the entries are glossed as "conversion era," which generally covers the 7th - 9th centuries in England. There is evidence for tafl games from the 9th century, and it's closer to the age of the manuscripts that preserve Anglo-Saxon poetry in Old English and in Latin. It may be that veil styles were trending towards the cowl-like look we see in tenth century illuminations, and this veil can actually be wrapped and worn in that way.

Why a nun? The evidence for the veil directly references nuns, as does some of the evidence for the item in the box. We also have references to nuns singing or even composing hymns; while it seems likely that other women also sang, we can state definitively that these women did. And it certainly helps contextualize the Thing in the Box. The tafl game does not fit precisely into the convent context, but it doesn't seem unreasonable that the noble and educated young ladies of the convent might pass the time with such a diversion.

Sister Eldreda, our notional noble nun, retired to the convent after her husband died and his brothers began to vie for his lands. She doesn't feel a particular vocation and, luckily for her, the abbess is not strict. Eldreda likes to wear brilliant colors, as she did in days past, not drab grey habits. The psalms are nice to sing, but when she and her dear friend Leofe sit to play a board game, they like to amuse each other with love songs. Some of these are of tragic and painful longing and others are earthier; some are in Latin and some are in English. Sometimes, a few too many love songs puts Sister Eldreda in mind of her late husband. She has an item in her chest to help with that, if she thinks Leofe would be receptive to the idea.