



Activity 4 - The Earls of Warwick

Sir Guy of Warwick is the hero of a popular Middle English romance. The Earls of Warwick believed – or at least wanted others to believe – that he was a real historical figure (as opposed to a character of fictional romance) and that they were descended directly from him. The extract below comes from the *Rous Roll*, which gives short biographies of all the ancestors of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick at the end of the fifteenth century. Consider the passage and then respond to the questions that follow.

Sir Gy of Warrwyk flour and honour of knyghthode son to sir Seyward baron of Walyngford and hys lady and wyfe dame Sabyn [...] Thys wursupfull knyght sir Gy in his actis of warre euyr consydrid what part was wrongyd and ther to wold he draw. By wyche doying hys loos [fame] spred so far that he was callyd the verthiest knyght lyuyng in hys dayes. Then his most special and cheffe lady that he had set hys hert most on dam Felys applied to hys wyl and was weddyd to hym. Thys noble warreur sir Gy aftyr hys mariage consideryng what he hade don for a woman sake thowt to be set the oder parte of hys lyfe for goddis sake departyd from hys lady in pilgrime wede [cloth] as here showis wyche rayment [clothing] he kept to hys lyves ende and did many gret batels of the wyche the last was the victory of Colbrond at Winchestre.

– The Rous Roll, by John Rous for Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, c. 1483-4

*John Rous, *The Rous Roll*, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester, 1980).

Questions

Consider the questions below in relation to the extract above:

1. How does the biography of Guy of Warwick understand the chief virtues of chivalric nobility? How does the image contribute to your reading of the passage?
2. Why do you think Richard Beauchamp would be interested in commissioning a history of the Earls of Warwick? Why is fame ('loos') important in this context?