

Was King Richard III a control freak?

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(Phys.org) —University of Leicester psychologists believe Richard III was not a psychopath – but he may have had control freak tendencies

University of Leicester psychologists have made an analysis of Richard III's character – aiming to get to the man behind the bones.

Professor Mark Lansdale, Head of the University's School of Psychology, and forensic psychologist Dr Julian Boon have put together a psychological analysis of Richard III based on the consensus among historians relating to Richard's experiences and actions.

They found that, while there was no evidence for Shakespeare's depiction of [Richard III](#) as a [psychopath](#), he may have had "intolerance to uncertainty syndrome" – which may have manifested in control freak tendencies.

The academics presented their findings on Saturday, March 2 at the University of Leicester.

Their analysis aims to humanise Richard – to flesh out the bones and get to the character of the man who became one of the most controversial kings in English history.

Firstly, they examined one of the most persistent and critical depictions of Richard's personality – the suggestion that he was a murdering psychopath. This reputation – portrayed most famously in Shakespeare's play – does not seem to have any basis in the facts we have about his life.

He showed little signs of the traits [psychologists](#) would use to identify psychopaths today – including narcissism, deviousness, callousness, recklessness and lack of empathy in [close relationships](#).

However, the academics speculate that Richard may have exhibited a common psychological syndrome known as an intolerance to uncertainty.

Professor Mark Lansdale said: "This syndrome is associated with a need to seek security following an insecure childhood, as Richard had. In varying degrees, it is associated with a number of positive aspects of personality including a strong sense of right and wrong, piety, loyalty to trusted colleagues, and a belief in legal processes - all exhibited by Richard.

"On the negative side it is also associated with fatalism, a tendency to disproportionate responses when loyalty is betrayed and a general sense of 'control freakery' that can, in extreme cases, emerge as very authoritarian or possibly priggish. We believe this is an interesting perspective on Richard's character."

In addition, the pair examined how his disability – evident in the curvature of the spine of the King's remains – may have had an impact on his character - and specifically on the way he interacted with people who he did not know well.

In medieval times, deformation was often taken as a visible indication of a twisted soul. As a result, it is possible that this would have made him cautious in all his interactions with others.

Professor Lansdale added: "Overall, we recognise the difficulty of drawing conclusions about people who lived 500 years ago and about whom relatively little is reliably recorded; especially when psychology is a science that is so reliant upon observation.

"However, noting that this is the problem historians work with as a matter of routine, we argue that a psychological approach provides a distinct and novel perspective: one which offers a different way of thinking about the human being behind the bones."

Provided by University of Leicester

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