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**“FORGETTING THE WEAKNESS OF HER SEX AND A  
WOMAN’S SOFTNESS”:  
HISTORIANS OF THE ANGLO-NORMAN WORLD AND  
THEIR FEMALE SUBJECTS**

**BY**

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B. A. University of Colorado, 1994  
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**DISSERTATION**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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**ABSTRACT**

The number of historians who wrote during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries creates the unusual problem of too many sources. The sheer number of interesting and powerful women does the same. In order to narrow the topic of the presentation of women in texts from this period, I have chosen nine historians and six women to focus on. The period from 950 to 1150 is a crucial period for the development of the scholastic method and therefore it gives us the most interesting, if not most confusing, period to work from. Additionally, this project focuses geographically on the Anglo-Norman world: England, Normandy, Blois, and the surrounding counties of influence. This work is further restricted to eight major historians, one historical compilation, and six women from this place and time. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* will form the basis for a study of monastic methods of the early period. Eadmer, Hugh of Fleury, and William of Jumièges will round out the monastic historians. William of Malmesbury, Orderic



Vitalis, the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, and Robert of Torigny comprise the category of liminal historians. William of Poitiers, Henry of Huntingdon, and John of Salisbury will represent the scholastic historians. The Mercian lady Æthelflæd, the Norman Adela of Blois, the four Anglo-Norman queens, Matilda of Flanders, Matilda of Scotland, the Empress Matilda, and Matilda of Boulogne, will form the basis of the historical study.

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## *Preface*

Hunched over a long wooden table at the national library in Paris, I scanned across a small folio, heavy with cramped writing. My eyes caught sight of a “z.” I paused, and read the word “amazonum.” Amazons are not unseen in medieval histories, particularly ones that make use of classical precedents so the “z” was not completely unusual. The manuscript was Hugh of Fleury’s *Ecclesiastical History*, a work that began with the Roman Empire and ended with Charlemagne. Not the usual suspect for a history with Amazons in it. I decided to delve a bit further. The manuscript before me was a twelfth-century copy of an earlier work, so I set out to find the earliest version of the manuscript in the library. I found ten manuscripts of Hugh’s history in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Three I could date to the twelfth century, six to the thirteenth, and one to the fourteenth. All three of the twelfth-century manuscripts included the description of the Amazons. Amazons did not appear in three of the thirteenth-century manuscripts and not at all in the fourteenth-century work. On closer inspection, I discovered another alteration. Only three of ten manuscripts had Hugh’s dedication and those three also had descriptions of the Amazons; two were twelfth century and the third was thirteenth century. A fascinating coincidence; Hugh had dedicated his work to Adela, countess of Blois.

Within the manuscript tradition, first Adela’s dedication was ignored, and then the Amazons disappeared. By the fourteenth century, both Adela and the Amazons were omitted from Hugh’s history. Why? Perhaps the copyist needed the space. Perhaps copyists frequently ignored dedications. Perhaps the copyist had no need of a dedication to a woman, nor of women within the history. Intriguing, but difficult to ascertain, so I

ignored the thought. I found it intriguing that someone, copyists, one copyist, chose to disregard these sections, perhaps realizing that the presentation of women in the earlier manuscript was out of step with developing intellectual trends.

Back in the States, I began to look for the relationship of these histories to the intellectual explosion of the twelfth century. My Parisian thought, however, was persistent. While looking for philosophical notions, I could not help but notice the shifting position of women within the chronicles. And, it seemed, the more scholastic thought shaped a text, the fewer the number of women who appeared in it. Women stride powerfully, albeit infrequently, through eleventh-century texts and then are virtually absent from thirteenth-century texts. Interested in the philosophy of the early twelfth century, I felt that there must be some connection. And there is. Scholastically trained men either reduce the role of women within the texts or remove them altogether from their histories. Monks do not—Hugh, for example, dedicates his texts to powerful female lords and writes about historically strong leaders like the Amazons. Nevertheless, this is not a story of women, nor is it a story of men. Instead, it is a story about the interconnectedness of women's and men's lives and how large changes in intellectual trends changed both their stories.

## *Introduction*

After Hugh of Fleury's dedication to Adela, he begins his work with remarks on the positive nature of women's rule. He suggests women can lead as well as men and that history shows both genders as equally noteworthy:

But the Scythians' origins were no less illustrious than their empire, nor were they celebrated more for the excellent qualities of their men than for those of their women. The men, indeed, founded the Parthian and Bactrian [nations], which we are discussing, while the women founded the kingdoms of the Amazons. Thus it is unclear to anyone pondering the past deeds of men and women which gender among them is the more illustrious.<sup>1</sup>

Even knowing that Hugh dedicated this work to Adela, a powerful lord and ruler in Blois, the presentation of women as illustrious leaders is still curious. Few medieval authors write of such political egalitarianism between the genders and this paragraph itself disappears with later redactions of Hugh's text. If we compare these words to an early scholastic writer like Peter Abelard, who is often known for his egalitarian ideas on women's spirituality, we see a distinct difference in the way women are presented. Abelard warns that the devil can "easily seduce a woman when her desire is for authority" and he warns against making a local noblewoman into an abbess, for her authority could easily lead to pride and presumptuousness.<sup>2</sup>

This brief introduction shows us that the choices medieval historians made about what to exclude and what to allow into their narratives can be highly informative. By examining men and their stories about women, we can observe how thought shaped by

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<sup>1</sup> "Sed Scythae non minus illustria principia quam imperia habuerunt, nec virorum magis quam feminarum virtutibus claruere; quippe cum viri hos de quibus agimus Parthos Bactrianosque, feminae vero eorum Amazonum regna condiderint. Itaque res gestas virorum mulierumque considerantibus incertum est, uter apud eos illustrior sexus fuerit." Hugh of Fleury, "Historia Ecclesiastica," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hannover: Hahn, 1815), cols 349-351.

<sup>22</sup> Betty Radice, ed., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (London: Penguin, 1974), 202-207.

rigorous scholastic training changed the perception of gender. Simply using the traditional clerical treatises against the descendants of Eve does not give us a full picture of gender attitudes or roles during this period. How, then, did intellectuals envision the concept of gender and the roles of women and how did this perspective affect the historical narratives scholars wrote?

The notions of masculinity and femininity, along with the position of women and men, shifted from the tenth through the twelfth centuries. All these beliefs affected the interpretation of history and the production of historical texts. In several cases, we can see this interplay between written historical texts and the theoretical notions of gender. By studying the changing concepts of women and the shifting attitudes towards women within these intellectual communities we can trace the evolution, or devolution, of the idea of women in several popular histories. Examining male writers and their relationships to changing intellectual trends shows that scholastic thought directly affected how they wrote about, and thus how we perceive, medieval women. And, as the medieval debate on universals illustrates, perception itself creates much of the definition.<sup>3</sup> Perception helps to define reality—by changing how something is perceived, the thing itself is also changed.

Examining the intellectual leanings of historians who wrote about women helps us to define a historical trend that occurred within the first years of the twelfth century. This trend saw the diminishing power and authority of women within the pages of medieval parchments. The ideas expressed through history and historical writing are symptomatic of the relations between text and reality. The changes in the relative

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<sup>3</sup> David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1962; reprint, 1988), 99-100.



prominence of historical women within the narratives likely correspond to the general status of real women in society; however, this connection is difficult to ascertain. Medieval historians often portrayed archetypes, either as ideals of femininity or symbolic images (like the Virgin, the Mother), as well as actual women within their texts. Significant to this study is how writers presented the visions and notions of gender within the historical narratives, and how these histories with their ideas of gender both informed and were informed by the cultural changes of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

### *Definitions and Context*

In a work with more than a passing interest in scholastic thought and methods, it behooves us to set some definitions to terms. The words *university*, *scholastic*, and *monastic* will be used frequently in this work. In particular, the period of 1050 to 1150 saw a great rise in the number of monastic and non-monastic men engaged in formal intellectual pursuits. R. W. Southern claims that, “[T]he period of scholastic history from about 1090 to 1200 changed the whole future of Europe.”<sup>4</sup> While the advent of the universities proper cannot be securely dated before 1200, the ideas and methods for these guilds of schoolmasters were coming into existence by the late eleventh century. It is this advent of new thought that becomes linked to the universities that is of particular interest to us. For ease of usage, I shall label this new speculative thought and the men who employed it with the adjective *scholastic*. Scholastic thought, methods, and instruction were important in the formation of histories, especially those in

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<sup>4</sup> R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, vol. 1: Foundations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 5.

Northern Europe, near the centers of scholastic training.<sup>5</sup> The development of scholastic thought, in particular at the cathedral schools of Laon and Paris, the school of Saint-Victor, and in the Norman monasteries, notably Bec, was the seed from which universities emerged.<sup>6</sup> In this way, we can see university thought as the outgrowth of this early twelfth-century scholastic thought.

Scholastic thinking was also related to the various phenomena described as the discovery of the individual, the twelfth-century renaissance, and medieval humanism, all of which characterized European culture from about 1080 to 1150.<sup>7</sup> A hallmark was the use of reason to reconcile theology with classical philosophy based on the resurgence in the study of grammar and logic.<sup>8</sup> This combination of philosophical thought led to the “emergence of semantic theories that were to take medieval philosophy in creative post-classical directions.”<sup>9</sup> Within scholastic writing, there is evidence for rediscovery of the classical and patristic authors.<sup>10</sup> And scholastic authors used patristic and classical sources in addition to scripture as their authorities.<sup>11</sup> Yet, instead of appealing directly to these authorities, the scholastic philosopher used disputation and logic in his analysis of texts. If we take Colin Morris’s description of individualism as the development of self-awareness and self-expression that does not pay excessive attention to the dictates of authority, we may see why authority was often

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<sup>5</sup> Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Sally N. Vaughn and Jay Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning in Northern Europe, 1000-1200* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 6-9.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 165.

<sup>9</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 165.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*, 159.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Abelard, *Ethical Writings: His Ethics Or “Know Yourself” & His Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995), xxv.

given last place in disputation.<sup>12</sup> Anselm is a good example of this style. He was well grounded in the works of the Church Fathers, Augustine, and Boethius, but he did not belabor them, writing no commentaries nor quoting them to excess in his own writings.<sup>13</sup> Southern writes that even as a schoolmaster, Anselm was original, focusing on the dialectic and logic that would become his hallmark and the impetus for later scholastic ideas.<sup>14</sup>

Because of their libraries and tradition of (limited) education, monasteries were the leading centers of artistic, intellectual, and religious life and the majority of early eleventh-century scholars came out of the monastic system.<sup>15</sup> In the period prior to 1050, monasteries were places of contemplation, where monks used learning to enhance the work of reflection. The monastic school had limited purposes. The schoolmaster was to keep literacy alive so monks could read the Bible. Patristic works were important in the elucidation of biblical texts, as were some aspects of the ancient liberal arts, but only as an aid to the study of scripture.<sup>16</sup>

For those monks who chose the more scholarly path, the work of the mind was only one activity among many. Those ideals of humility, obedience, and modesty played a major part in the monk's life. Erudition was not an end in itself, as it would later be for the scholastic thinker. Philosophy, writing, and study—these were to be

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<sup>12</sup> Abelard, *Ethical Writings: His Ethics Or "Know Yourself" & His Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, 96-99.

<sup>13</sup> See Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works*, trans. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 160.

<sup>16</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 21.

directed to God. Monastic students often responded to conflict and intellectual challenge by asserting and defending the authority of their masters.<sup>17</sup> And, in truth, philosophy and study were fleeting and secondary aspects of their primary function as a monk: prayer.

Nevertheless, by the time of Lanfranc and Anselm in the mid-eleventh century, monasteries were beginning to break through some of the more traditional boundaries. The Norman abbey of Bec seems to be a curiously liminal institution in this regard, where Lanfranc and Anselm created “one of the foremost schools in Europe” where “scholars came running” to study under the acclaimed masters.<sup>18</sup> And it was not just the monk or scholar who flocked to Bec, the sons of dukes also came to study here as Lanfranc opened his school to local laymen educated in secular schools.<sup>19</sup> From 1050 to 1125, in Normandy at least, logical speculation combined with contemplation in several monasteries.<sup>20</sup> Although Anselm’s thought remained directed towards the contemplative, he was employing the tools of the schoolroom: logic, grammar, and dialectic.<sup>21</sup>

At the turn of the century, the education of the clergy became a primary point of eleventh-century reforms, and as a result schools formed in the vicinities of cathedrals and monasteries where more secular students attended in increasing numbers. Stephen

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<sup>17</sup> Abelard discusses this in relation to Anselm’s students who complain about his insolence to their master. Betty Radice, ed., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (London: Penguin, 1974), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Sally N. Vaughn and Jay Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning in Northern Europe, 1000-1200*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Vaughn and Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning*, 7-10.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1957, 1993), 5, R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). Sally N. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Jaeger argues that the primary goal of early eleventh-century schools (prior to the reintroduction of the dialectic method) was teaching a proper pattern of conduct.<sup>22</sup>

Relying on the Bible as their key text, the masters of these schools sought to re-form their pupils into model monks. Students in the cathedral schools did not study for study's sake, as learning "had no legitimate role."<sup>23</sup>

The master himself was often more important than the lesson: "His personal charisma is a course of studies, and his mere presence is the textbook."<sup>24</sup> He was the interpreter of texts, and the mediator of cultural values, all of which was rooted in the supernatural.<sup>25</sup> The master relied on love and fear and he enforced it all by authority. The true job of teaching was to compose the inner man towards a life for God.<sup>26</sup> The student learnt humility, obedience, modesty, and measure.<sup>27</sup> This adoption of practices of monastic schoolmasters by secular schoolmasters is an important step in the growth of scholastic thought.<sup>28</sup> Secular education had its place in the cathedral school, as the conduit for virtue and "composed manners."<sup>29</sup> Ethics became the secular subject of choice and it opened up new avenues of study: philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, and poetry.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the century, the cathedral schools were prominent and the "locus of speculative creativity shifted decisively from monastic to cathedral schools."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>28</sup> R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, vol. 1: Foundations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 46.

<sup>29</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 118.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-170.

<sup>31</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 266.

By the early twelfth century, “the appeal of rational reflection as an adjunct to monastic meditation” had ceased and had moved to the emerging secular and urban schools.<sup>32</sup> The cathedral school education became a prerequisite for service at court, either secular or episcopal.<sup>33</sup> A gulf opened between the monastic school, reserved for future monks, and the urban schools, whose students would often remain laymen and become intellectual professionals.<sup>34</sup> The monk’s primary concern was prayer and sacrifice; the intellectual’s was study and income.

It is not surprising scholastic thought emerged during the early twelfth century and did so through the interactions of schools and monasteries in northern Europe. The curriculum in these schools included all the subjects of the trivium and quadrivium with less and less focus on biblical and patristic studies. These new schools introduced the methods of dialectic to every subject and used the texts of ancient Greece and Rome. The advent of scholastic thought helped to bring about what Southern calls a time of complete “reshaping of knowledge and government.”<sup>35</sup> The modern and complex world of the twelfth century intrigued the schoolman and led the philosophically inclined to attempt an understanding of this ever-changing world.

Jacques Le Goff places the emergence of the schools alongside the urban revolution—the cities were the locus of scholastic men.<sup>36</sup> At cathedral schools, bishops and chancellors licensed masters, but the unlicensed independent master was also a

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<sup>32</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 265.

<sup>33</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, xv.

<sup>35</sup> Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

model in the early twelfth century.<sup>37</sup> These independent men taught near the cathedral schools where students could be found. The cathedral schools of Notre Dame, Laon, Soissons, and Melun, the abbeys of Ste Geneviève and St Victor, and even bridges over the Seine housed various intellectuals plying their trades.<sup>38</sup> This heady time of discovery lasted until the later twelfth century, when these various masters formed into guilds that created the early universities. While the word *intellectual* was not used in the Middle Ages, we can see the scholastic philosopher as an intellectual. Le Goff uses the word *intellectual* to describe the milieu of the schoolmasters, particularly those in the non-monastic, urban schools.<sup>39</sup> “It denotes those whose profession it was to think and to share their thoughts.”<sup>40</sup> M. T. Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri suggests the intellectual man was one who traveled from one school to another by the grace of his Latin, who was celibate, and who made a name for himself as an authority by virtue of his work in imperative texts, like the bible.<sup>41</sup>

The medieval period used words like *magister*, *doctor*, *philosophus*, and *litteratus* to describe the men who studied for the sake of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> The scholastic thinkers of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries roamed far in their intellectual inquiry, seeking to understand their world and their place within that world.<sup>43</sup> Peter Abelard tells us scholastic thinkers were “entirely taken up with the investigation of

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<sup>37</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 266.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>39</sup> Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> M. T. Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri, “L’intellettuale” in Franco Cardini and Jacques Le Goff, *L’homme médiéval* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, 147.

truth.”<sup>44</sup> Probing, searching investigations and doubt aimed at truth, these were the activities of the twelfth-century scholar.<sup>45</sup>

And the writers in this early period of scholastic philosophy and writing were quite prolific. Men like Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter of Blois and others debated, often vociferously, theology and philosophy. As noted above, scholastic thinkers preferred logical and rational modes of understanding to the mystical modes sought by many monastic thinkers. From 1125, monasteries began reacting against the new styles of learning. Despite this disparity between scholastics and mystics, even advocates of mysticism like Bernard of Clairvaux and the Victorines were using scholastic methods in their arguments. And, as Marcia Colish suggests, scholastic thinkers quickly outpaced monastic thinkers in the realm of speculative thought.<sup>46</sup> These men also had the strong feeling they were doing something new, that they themselves *were* something new.<sup>47</sup> The excitement would not last. Some scholars, like Colin Morris, believe that, “by 1150, some of the creative forces were losing their impetus,” and that by the formal declaration of the university system, most of the scholars had retreated to safer, more traditional, ground.<sup>48</sup> The early twelfth century then is a fertile period for the detection of shifting philosophies, both intellectual and historical.

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<sup>44</sup> Abelard, *Ethical Writings: His Ethics Or “Know Yourself” & His Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, 105.

<sup>45</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 126.

<sup>46</sup> Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, 266.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1957, 1993), 9.

<sup>48</sup> Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*, 165.



The early twelfth century is also a challenging period to define. As the examples of both monastery at Bec and its most famous scholar, Anselm, show us, the boundaries were fluid. There is no simple distinction between monastic and scholastic—they both have a “multiplicity of meanings and metaphorical uses.”<sup>49</sup> My use of the terms monastic and scholastic will therefore be at times imprecise, indicating occasionally the strongest tendencies within a particular writer’s works rather than attempting to create an absolute, fixed category for that thinker. Through the careful application of labels and using the historical narratives to guide us, we should nonetheless be able to trace the growth of scholastic thought, its divergence from earlier monastic intellectual methods, and how these changes affected the written perceptions and attitudes towards gender.

### *Historiography*

In order to understand how medieval historians, trained in the scholastic method, devalued women within their texts, we must mix together a variety of topics: historiography, scholastic and intellectual trends, and the actual status of medieval women. While all of these topics are well treated within the secondary literature, no modern authors fully illustrate the connections among them.

Beginning with historiography, modern analysis of medieval chronicles tends to exclude gender. While gender is beginning to find a place in our scholarship, it is usually in the context of one particular historian, such as Orderic Vitalis.<sup>50</sup> Otherwise,

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<sup>49</sup> John Cotts, “Monks and Clerks in Search of the Beata Schola,” in Vaughn and Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning*, 277.

<sup>50</sup> Orderic, for example, is detailed in the following: Marjorie Chibnall, “Women in Orderic Vitalis,” *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (2003): 105-121, and in Jean Blacker, “Women, Power, and Violence in

modern authors have focused on the political events within the chronicles, with some discussion of the individual historians and their places in society. The primary interest is in important political events. The political rituals of important kings like Charlemagne or important dynasties like the Normans, for example, form the basis of works anchored in medieval histories. Gerd Althoff and Patrick Geary's work *Medieval Concepts of the Past* focuses on medieval politics, with articles on the recollection of politicized ritual action.<sup>51</sup> Amy Remensnyder's appealing book *Remembering Kings Past* concentrates on how monasteries conceived of, and used, their past in political and social interactions.<sup>52</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel in *The Past as Text* and *Romancing the Past* demonstrates how medieval histories can be read both as repositories of facts and also as artifacts themselves.<sup>53</sup> Using the "linguistic turn" as part of her theoretical model, she studied how both the language and the actual text could be structuring agents of the past. She wrote of the "ideological manipulations of the past" she found within medieval chronicles. She insisted we, as readers, should be skeptical of the facts seemingly inherent in the texts and that we should also read for the political, social, and literary constructions within the narratives.<sup>54</sup> All of these authors give accounts of the

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Orderic Vitalis's Ecclesiastical History" in Anna Klosowska, *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1998), 44-55, another example is Sally Vaughn and her work on St Anselm, in Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm's Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary, *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Amy G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*, xx.

historians who wrote about political action, but their studies of historical politics almost always consider gender ancillary to their main purpose.

Like Spiegel, historians who work on memory and literacy believe history can be both text and artifact. Mary Carruthers's *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* shows us how memory and history are related in the most basic and complicated of senses.<sup>55</sup> Medieval culture, she writes, was "fundamentally memorial," and she focuses on how education was based on memory, even after the rise of a more literate culture.<sup>56</sup> Chronicles figure heavily in Carruthers's book, but women are only mentioned when an image of a woman is used to stimulate memory.<sup>57</sup> M. T. Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record* is another important monograph on memory and history. He centered his work on the making of records, both for historical and political purposes. For our purposes, he does discuss women's literacy and their patronage of literate works. He also tells of women who commissioned liturgies, books of hours, apocalypses, and Psalters, which he writes, were small so they "could be easily used without effort by a lady."<sup>58</sup> He does not discuss women who commissioned histories, women like Matilda of Scotland or the Empress Matilda, nor does his work tackle the subject of women and historical production. He does discuss the histories they patronized, such as the *Life of St Margaret* and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*.

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<sup>55</sup> Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 9-10.

<sup>57</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 137.

<sup>58</sup> Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 125.

The one major work to address gender and history is Elisabeth M. C. van Houts's work, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe*. Examining the period 900 to 1200, van Houts argued women shaped collective memory through oral transmission, and she incorporates orality, memory, and gender into her study of "remembrance of things past."<sup>59</sup> Van Houts contended women helped male authors as informants and encouraged the production of history by becoming patrons. She began her work by explaining the role of memory in shaping cultural identity, a topic that has recently received much attention from historians in many fields.<sup>60</sup> She argued that women acted as oral transmitters. Women used oral, written, and material cultures to ensure future remembrance of important events and were particularly involved in the shifting perceptions of the Norman Conquest in England.<sup>61</sup> Van Houts's work opens the door for further study since she re-establishes memory and oral culture within historical narratives.

The current historiography on medieval historical narratives and their relationship to women leaves room for further study. Existing works focus on specific events and therefore cannot reveal in its fullness the use of gender and how it might relate to a living reality. Moreover, there is a relationship between scholastic thought

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<sup>59</sup> Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 150. She here echoes Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, perhaps equating women's shaping of collective memory is similar to Proust's idea of involuntary memory — men did not recognize how it came to be in their memories, but it was.

<sup>60</sup> See for example, Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Frances Amelia Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>61</sup> Van Houts has also translated and published on the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. For studies on the reception and formulation of the Norman Conquest during the 100 years following it, see also R. H. C. Davis, *The Normans and Their Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), Emily Albu, *The Normans in Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2001).

and historical writing that needs to be more fully developed. Medieval historical narratives were the products of the new intellectual culture growing around the major cities in Europe. Gender was one of many shaping factors in the growth of the educated cleric. We cannot, and should not, dismiss the connection between these trends, which are in fact inseparable.

We find many of the same issues in the study of medieval intellectual history that we see in more general works. Few scholars broaden their approaches enough to study the causes and effects of philosophy on the outside world. Often, philosophy is studied as a closed system, without placing either the men or the thought in a larger context. We can understand this position because modern students of the philosophy of the Middle Ages have had to defend medieval thought as a significant link in western reasoning. Modern scholars have effectively moved medieval philosophy out of the contemptuous box Renaissance men had placed it in.<sup>62</sup> They have shown us the creative energy that produced some of Europe's most powerful and long-lasting ideas. These writers focus on the challenging trends produced within the schools or on the quiet reflections of the great minds. Nevertheless, there has been little effort to integrate philosophy, history, and gender into one whole, as if the men producing the texts lived wholly within those texts and not also in their worlds and in their bodies. Men like Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas are often presented as specimens of philosophical talent, not as men who struggled to understand and exist within their worlds. Unless the

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<sup>62</sup> A few brief examples: Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400*, Ernst Breisach, *Classical Rhetoric & Medieval Historiography* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1985), Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Historiography in the Middle Ages* (Boston: Brill, 2003), Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. Alfred Howard Campbell Downes (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936).

philosopher is one whose sexuality and/or political aspirations cannot be ignored, like Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux, there is little effort to understand the philosophers as men with lives outside the text. Women themselves almost never figure into studies of medieval intellectual trends, unless like Hildegard, they produced theological works. Nonetheless, it is important for us to be aware of medieval philosophy, for understanding the intellectual trends can help us as historians of gender to realize how it changed and was changed by outside influences.

### *Intellectual History*

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as we have seen, the modes of thought that permeated the monasteries and some of the schools evolved into the new universities. The new ideas within the schools were a product of societal shifts and of the growing needs of rulers and of communities. Scholars have long been interested in these changes and they have produced a large body of work on intellectual history. Concentrating on scholastic thought, we find three major modern theories, which may be labeled as: Conception, Renaissance, and Persistence. The first focuses on the philosophic modes of thought produced by the schools and universities. Few scholars in this category broaden their scope outside the philosophic arguments to include the effects of these thoughts on the wider world. Writers in the second category concentrate on the Twelfth-Century Renaissance, which was a period of intense creativity that also saw the growth of the university system. The last category is a by-product of the second. In contrast to the renaissance school of thought, the authors of the theory of “persistence” argue the twelfth-century revival was not such an explosive event. Those

who follow the “continuity” category believe the intellectual awakening argued by the renaissance authors devalues the intense philosophic thought that occurred before and during twelfth century. I shall briefly examine each of these approaches in turn.

### Conception

Early in the twentieth century, scholars began paying attention to the philosophy of the Middle Ages. When medieval philosophy had long been derided as theological and derivative, or scholastic and nitpicking, these pioneers of scholarship sought to place it within the grand narrative of European thought. Etienne Gilson’s *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* was such a work.<sup>63</sup> Gilson sought to understand medieval philosophy as a whole and to situate the major medieval thinkers along a path from Socrates to the present. Echoing Gilson’s early work, David Knowles deftly explained the ideas and masters of medieval philosophy in *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*. While not the first to do so, his section on the eleventh and twelfth centuries described the revival of schools and the awakening of Europe as a renaissance.<sup>64</sup> Another tome of philosophical exposition, already cited here several times, is Marcia Colish’s *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*. Colish placed medieval philosophy as a concrete stage in the development of modern philosophical thought and declared that for too long modern thinkers have derided medieval intellectuals.<sup>65</sup> Her work firmly plants medieval ideas as both heir to classical and as the forerunner of modern

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<sup>63</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1936).

<sup>64</sup> Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*.

<sup>65</sup> Marcia Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

thought. Nevertheless, Knowles, like Gilson and other overarching texts, focused on the philosophy without fully describing the world in which ideas moved. John Marenbon attempted to move past the overviews through an exploration of one particular thinker, Peter Abelard. Like Colish, Marenbon's introductory texts to medieval philosophy are important for pointing out the strands of classical and of Christian thought in the creation of new and exciting philosophical trends.<sup>66</sup> His works concisely explain twelfth-century scholastic thought through Abelard's writings.<sup>67</sup> Despite his deft portrayal of Abelard's philosophy, Abelard himself is a two-dimensional character whose personality is limited to the philosophical word.

All these important works allow us to understand medieval philosophy as a genuine and vital part of the Western philosophical arts. As their focus is to explain and expand on philosophy, they do not incorporate these abstract thoughts into wider social, political, and cultural spheres. It was to fall to other historians to integrate the intellectual with the rest of the medieval world.

## Renaissance

R. W. Southern was such a scholar. His three books on scholastic humanism and the twelfth century are the backbone of this next category of renaissance and creation. Twelfth-century Paris, he argued, saw the reshaping of knowledge and government, and the period from 1090 to 1200 "changed the whole future of Europe."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> John Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1988) and *Later Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>67</sup> John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism*, volume 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 5. From early on, Southern believed in the momentous twelfth century. His 1953 book, *Making the Middle Ages* devotes



He called this period the greatest age of humanism in the history of Europe, a time when the dignity of human nature and of nature became supreme in intellectual study.<sup>69</sup> The universe was seen as an intelligible orderly system, one man could understand, if he would but try. Southern argued that “humanism” did not occur any earlier than 1050 because, before then, all order and dignity in the world was associated with a supernatural power that human knowledge was too narrow and frail to understand.<sup>70</sup> By the late eleventh century, however, new secular schools emerged with a goal of studying the world in a systematic fashion.<sup>71</sup>

Southern’s analysis of the twelfth century echoes earlier works, particularly an early twentieth-century medievalist, Charles Homer Haskins’s *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* in 1927.<sup>72</sup> Haskins’s look at the twelfth century as one of intense and positive change led scholars like Southern to take an interest in defining and debating the events of that century. Despite the varied nature of modern works, the majority of writers on medieval scholastic and rational thought found themselves agreeing the twelfth century was a foundational period in western philosophy.<sup>73</sup>

Christopher Brooke sought to update and refine C. H. Haskins in his book *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. Brooke’s arguments follow both Haskins and Southern in viewing the era as one of the great movements of the human spirit through education,

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one full section to medieval intellectual thought and the ideals of medieval humanism are seen throughout the book. In 1970, he published *Medieval Humanism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); in 1979, he published *Platonism, Scholastic Method and the School of Chartres* (Reading: University of Reading, 1979).

<sup>69</sup> R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970), 31.

<sup>70</sup> Southern, *Medieval Humanism*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> Southern, *Medieval Humanism*, 37.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

<sup>73</sup> Marcia Colish, while focusing on philosophy, does argue that modern philosophy takes as its foundation the period of the twelfth century. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*.

culture, thought, and art.<sup>74</sup> Other scholars have followed his lead. Georges Duby saw “phalanxes of scholars” in the twelfth century intent on study and finding work in the new political administrations.<sup>75</sup> Colin Morris wrote in *The Discovery of the Individual* that the twelfth century was a brilliant age, where the “development of self awareness and self-expression on the freedom of man” saw a rapid rise.<sup>76</sup> The combined traits of classical humanism, Christian humanism, and an increasingly complex world led to the creation of a new individualism.<sup>77</sup> These individuals who had a renewed sense of self and their own importance moved within the spheres of the burgeoning school system. The nascent university in Paris was one such important locus for scholars and historians. Steven Ferruolo, in *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215*, outlined why Paris became the center for this renaissance of learning.<sup>78</sup>

The idea of “positive progression” runs as an undercurrent in most of their works. Their works show us the creative energy of the twelfth century and the idea of the renaissance has led many scholars to study and debate this period, which in turn has brought new sources to light. Conversely, there are few historians willing to look at the negative consequences to this new energy, how it affected those men and women who did not or could not belong to the new system.

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<sup>74</sup> Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance*, [1st American ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1970).13. He references C. H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*.

<sup>75</sup> Georges Duby, *The Three Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 237.

<sup>76</sup> Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, 160.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

## Persistence

Disagreeing with the idea of an innovative twelfth century, Stephen Jaeger argued the humanist tendencies of the twelfth century had roots in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>79</sup> He does not dispute the quality of prominent and vocal scholars of the twelfth century, but he disputes the notion of their voices being ones of positive progress.<sup>80</sup>

We have already noted Jaeger's belief in an earlier charismatic culture, one in which the teacher became the text and taught through example and deed.<sup>81</sup> It is only a lack of sources, he wrote, and not a lack of ideas that led these earlier times to seem dark and ambiguous.<sup>82</sup> He wrote against scholars who tend to discount the earlier centuries and highlight the twelfth as one of immense improvement and who create "progressive, evolutionary models, suggesting a rise from more to less primitive in social and cognitive change."<sup>83</sup> On the contrary, Jaeger believed the renaissance of the twelfth century was a result of the struggle between some scholars wanting to retain the older culture and others forging ahead with the new. His study shows that the majority of writers in the twelfth century wrote of their age as period of decline, as one of stagnation and senility.<sup>84</sup> "Alongside all that is new in the twelfth century an older

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<sup>79</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, "Pessimism in the Twelfth-Century 'Renaissance'," *Speculum* 78, no. 4 (2003): 1151-1183.

<sup>81</sup> Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 39.

<sup>82</sup> Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 377, footnote 8.

<sup>84</sup> Jaeger, "Pessimism in the Twelfth-Century 'Renaissance'," 1154.

culture was in a state of decline and collapse.”<sup>85</sup> With that idea, he discussed the antagonistic and reciprocal relationships between the traditional charismatic monk and the “modern” intellectual professor.<sup>86</sup> For him, the twelfth century did not invent teaching and learning, it merely changed their form. He examines medieval education and philosophy as a continuum. Constant Mews argues similarly for the persistence and continuation of education in the early twelfth century. For Mews, the scholarly output of tracts like letters show the perseverance of stylistic choices over several decades.<sup>87</sup> Learning, like theories on the Eucharist and kingship, was “a shift from real presence to symbolic, from performance to representation.”<sup>88</sup>

Scholastic methods, Jaeger argued, constrained learning and teaching. Scholastic ideas, with all the explosion of information, actually restricted how, when, and who learned and it produced men who thought and acted differently from earlier scholars. His is an important point – scholastic methods did not always produce positive change. Jaeger calls for a reexamination of the twelfth century based on its own terms, where intense creativity and acute decay shared the same page. Jaeger, in fact, argues persuasively against the steady progress narrative that affects so many works about the twelfth century. His notion that scholastic ideas were limiting as much as expanding is one that figures largely in this study of philosophy, history, and gender, and it will be examined more closely in later chapters.

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<sup>85</sup> Jaeger, “Pessimism in the Twelfth-Century ‘Renaissance’,” 1181.

<sup>86</sup> Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 218.

<sup>87</sup> C. J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France* (St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 7.

No matter which school of thought one ascribes to, most agree the twelfth century was a century of expanding scholastic education, with powerful antecedents in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Nevertheless, few modern authors have attempted to integrate the philosophies, the histories, and gender to form one whole image. From 1050 to 1180, boundaries were more fluid than before and people attempted to find and define the limitations their world placed upon them. We must study the men who produced texts as both writers and as men. We must take philosophy out of the ivory tower and move it into the streets, where it was debated. We must figure women into the equation and find how their actions, patronage, and existence affected and was affected by the changes taking place. The twelfth century was a positive, creative time where people felt they had more possibilities than before. This creative energy gives us some of medieval Europe's most powerful philosophy, history, and fictional works. Reading the chronicles and histories from this period shows us this intricate world. By reading these histories with an eye to the philosophical changes and concentrating on how the narratives of women changed over time, we can construct a picture of twelfth-century Europe that is more inclusive of the complex and confusing changes that were wrought on and by medieval people.

### *Women's History*

The second major point of inquiry for this study is gender history. Beginning around the 1890s, women of the Middle Ages became a specific field of historical inquiry. In the early years of feminist scholarship, historians focused on patriarchy and victimhood. In the second stage, scholars emphasized women's agency, empowerment,

and opportunity, and they decided women had more power during the medieval period in Europe than they had in subsequent years.<sup>89</sup> Current research is informed by GBLT and masculinity studies and we continue our inquiry into and illumination of the history of medieval women.

### Gender Theory

Gender is a category of analysis that has grown increasingly more important as a tool for discussing historical change. As an analytical tool, it allows us to view the medieval landscape for both women and men in a more nuanced light. Employing ideas about sexuality, gender, and gender categories we can examine how a writer's gender influenced his or her works, how ideas about gender changed over time, and how those changing ideas were reflected in the written works of the time.

Two of the more important authors on gender are Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. While both use history as part of their work, neither one is considered primarily a historian; rather it is their philosophy that stands out in modern thought. Michel Foucault's influential study *The History of Sexuality* has been hugely influential on gender studies. This work focused on his idea of a cultural shift that occurred in the middle class family of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and he intended it as a critique of Sigmund Freud's misogynistic propensities. Foucault argued an all-seeing State maintained control of its citizens by discursive practices that created an internalized ideology. This ideology, he wrote, was followed by both the empowered

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<sup>89</sup> Pauline Stafford, review of Lisa Bitel's *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, *Speculum* 79 (2004), 1037.

and disempowered.<sup>90</sup> Gender, he contended, was part of this discursive practice and as such was a cultural construct. Today, most scholars accept that the concepts of gender--the traits that constitute masculinity and femininity--are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs, partly because of Foucault's work.<sup>91</sup> People in the medieval world did not use the word "gender"; our modern definition of gender first occurred in 1963, when the Oxford English Dictionary defined it as "intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological, distinctions of the sexes."<sup>92</sup> Finding how people in the past viewed the concepts of "man" and "woman," "femininity" and "masculinity," and exploring how these understandings played out in people's lives, helps integrate historical texts with scholarly thought. Consequently, we cannot ignore Foucault's categories of analysis.

Recently, gender theory has received a jolt from writers like Judith Butler, who transformed the traditional Foucaultian model of the broad-scope theoretical framework into smaller, more intimate models. Instead of looking at the large-scale notions of society, Butler worked on the personal level, critiquing the binary feminist theory of gender as masculine for men and feminine for women. Gender, she argued, is performative, which is to say a person's identity is based on the performance of cultural norms of a particular gender rather than on an identity of a gender given to them at birth, and that each individual's gender can work on a sliding scale of masculine and feminine. The idea of performance is an interesting way to view many aspects of

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<sup>90</sup> Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 176.

<sup>91</sup> Emily Allen and Dino Felluga, General Introduction to Theories of Gender & Sex. *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory>, October 2004.

<sup>92</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary online lists gender as "grammatical kind" for 1380, as "kind, sort or class" for 1398.

medieval history, as authors on political and religious ritual have already discovered.<sup>93</sup>

And Butler continues to focus on how cultural norms affect and are affected by the individual.<sup>94</sup>

Both Butler and Foucault have given scholars new terminology and concepts, particularly those of gender flexibility and performance, which can assist us in our study of how medieval men viewed the concept we call “gender.”<sup>95</sup> Surveying modern scholarship on medieval women, we can categorize the publications into five basic groups: Women’s Oppression, Great Women, Women’s Lives, Woman as Trope, and Women’s Agency.<sup>96</sup> All of these modern works employ the philosophical idea of gender as a foundation on which their scholarship rests.

### Women’s Oppression

Early gender studies led many authors to focus on women’s oppressed status, which may seem an undisputed point, but they have taken the call to find out the when, how, and why women were deemed less important in medieval society. These works often point out how the classical, patristic, and early Christian ideologies helped shape medieval worldviews. Gerda Lerner was influential in bringing feminist criticism to

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<sup>93</sup> Janet L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon, 1986), Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). These two examples show how scholarship on politics and religion has benefited from the idea of performance.

<sup>94</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>95</sup> In addition to the categories listed below, medieval historiography is increasingly seeing works on gender and masculinity. See Sharon A. Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>96</sup> My categories are an expansion of those of Paul Halsall and his categories in the introduction to “The Internet Women’s History Sourcebook.” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/women/womensbook.html>



historical scholarship in her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*.<sup>97</sup> Recognizing the inconsistency between women's active role in creating societies and their marginality within those societies, she sought to explain the creation of this contradiction.<sup>98</sup> Despite her attempt at a nuanced view, the work is disheartening; this is a feeling shared by many books in this category. Her companion book, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* sought to find women who had opposed the patriarchal views of their society. Notwithstanding this assertion, Lerner was only able to find thirty nuns prior to 1400 who could be called "learned," and only 300 women of any social type with the appellation prior to 1700.<sup>99</sup> Depressing indeed. The title of the second volume in *A History of Women* conveys the sentiment many still feel about medieval women: "Silences of the Middle Ages."<sup>100</sup> Contemporary works have changed little. *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin* is an edited volume whose essays traced the "replication of patriarchy in the quintessentially patriarchal language of medieval high culture."<sup>101</sup> Lisa Bitel's book *Women in Early Medieval Europe* also belongs in this category. She writes "Historians of women have spent a good deal of time arguing over whether women of the past were authors or objects, victims or agents," and her aim is to tell the history of the unimportant woman and to

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<sup>97</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>98</sup> Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29.

<sup>100</sup> Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *A History of Women in the West*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>101</sup> Several chapters looked at the oppression of women within the writing of Abelard and Heloise, pointing out the rhetorical violence and polemic associated with their letters. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor, *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 3.

look at medieval history from a woman-focused perspective.<sup>102</sup> Her text, however, is laden with the subjugation and oppression of women during the early medieval period. She argues women's history lacks any real change, that women have in general been the victims of history, and that men continuously condemned and vilified women in the Middle Ages.<sup>103</sup> While women's oppression was a reality in all stages of history, focusing only on subjugation disallows women any agency within their own lives.

### Great Women

Analyzing women's oppression continues to be a vital part of historical inquiry, but readers on the whole prefer more positive outcomes, hence the works about Great Women. This category is as limiting as history that focuses only on Great Men. Although interesting, concentrating on women who occupy the upper echelons of society by definition does not reveal cultural norms. Beginning with Frances Gies and Joseph Gies's book *Women in the Middle Ages*, we see these works focus on those women whom we know the most about, women who produced written work. Abbesses and queens, ladies and merchants, wherever the historical record is strongest, these women will stand out. Hild and Hildegard, Blanche of Castile, Margaret Paston: they are all women who are easy to find and easy to identify with.<sup>104</sup> In volume two of a three-volume work, Georges Duby's *Women of the Twelfth Century*, for example describes the lives of six women, at least two of whom, and possibly three, existed only

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<sup>102</sup> Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>103</sup> Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100*, 94.

<sup>104</sup> Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: Crowell, 1978).

in fictional works.<sup>105</sup> Works like Peter Dronke's *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* have made women like Perpetua and Marguerite Porete accessible and popular, which can lead new scholars towards study on medieval women.<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth Petroff's *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* focuses on the great mystics of the Middle Ages, bringing their lives, visions, and cultures together to create biographies of important women like Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, the usefulness of such works is inevitably limited by their focus on only a small portion of medieval women.

### Women's Lives

Other authors have given us more complete versions of women's lives in the medieval world. These works examine less powerful and important women and give a larger context than earlier work on either oppression or great women. Eileen Power's *Medieval Women* is a staple of this type of women's historiography. Her five chapters enumerate the categories that continue to be assigned to medieval women and the books about them: ideas on women, women's education, and the lady, the workingwoman, and the nun.<sup>108</sup> Helen Jewell's two works, *Women in Medieval England* and *Women in Dark Age and Early Medieval Europe* are a more recent rendition Power's work, with

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<sup>105</sup> Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>106</sup> Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Katharina M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984). It came out the same year as Dronke's work and repeats some of his writers, but ends far later than Dronke's and as such has women like Margery Kempe and Christine de Pizan.

<sup>107</sup> Elisabeth Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>108</sup> Eileen Edna Power, *Medieval Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

additional insights garnered from an added thirty years of scholarship.<sup>109</sup> Better situated than these is Jennifer Ward's *Women in Medieval Europe*. She seeks to place women's subordination within the larger context of women's work and personal lives. Although longer and more carefully researched, her work follows Power's ideas of historical reasoning of misogyny and women's standing within society. Like Ward, Marty Newman Williams and Anne Echols expanded Power's categories and investigated less powerful women in their book *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages*.<sup>110</sup> Prostitutes, doctors, students, guildswomen, and beguines all lived and worked during the medieval period. Christine Fell's work *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* is an outstanding work looking at women in England directly before and after the Norman Conquest and how the event could have changed women's lives. She does look at both written and visual evidence to determine how the Normans affected Anglo-Saxon women.<sup>111</sup> While this type of history is important for showing how less political women lived, these authors could benefit from a consideration of how these women's lives were penned, at how the male authors shaped women's stories.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Helen M. Jewell, *Women in Dark Age and Early Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2007). Helen M. Jewell, *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>110</sup> Marty Williams and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994).

<sup>111</sup> Christine E. Fell and Elizabeth Williams Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (London: British Museum Publications, 1984).

<sup>112</sup> One caveat here are books that attempt to uncover how male confessors may have shaped female mystics' visions. Most of these authors admit to how difficult it is to tell who wrote what, but at least they are beginning to examine the relationship between the authors. Catherine M. Mooney, *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

## Women as Trope

There are many authors, however, who do focus solely on men's creation of women within medieval texts. It leads us to the category of woman as literary device, generally as a metaphor for sin or decadence. Readers recognize this idea, and scholars spend much time discussing how women are not actually women in literary and historical works. This is easy to spot in a character like the Wife of Bath, written by a man, but is more difficult to tell in less literary pieces. This category allows us to look at the texts as texts, to understand they are our only reality, but they are not reality itself. They demonstrate that women in texts do not necessarily corroborate or conform to women's involvement in medieval society. As Helen Solterer wrote, feminist analysis of textual women shows us that images of women in texts do not necessarily confirm women's participation in literate culture.<sup>113</sup> Lisa Bitel agreed with this estimation when she declared, "Documents held more female characters and types than authentic female voices."<sup>114</sup> And the authors of *Minding the Body: Women and Literature in the Middle Ages*, taking the idea to its furthest conclusion, stated "female characters in medieval texts on the whole do not as much reflect historical women as an idea of the feminine. They depict behaviors or represent values the Middle Ages considered female."<sup>115</sup> While we may never know if the women in historical texts are fictions or fictionalized realities, denying that the textual woman had any relation to an actual woman seems to

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<sup>113</sup> Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>114</sup> Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100*, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Monica Potkay and Evitt Regula Meyer Brzezinski, *Minding the Body: Women and Literature in the Middle Ages, 800-1500* (London: Prentice Hall International, 1997), 7.

deny historical women any existence at all. As Duby tells us, “The living reality is inevitably distorted.”<sup>116</sup> Everything we read is a reflection of a reality, and the texts themselves were official, created for an audience, and in most cases, created by men.<sup>117</sup> Yet there still must be something real in that distortion, something that reflects a living reality. If there is no relation to reality, readers often cease reading and search for texts that speak to their realities.

### Women’s Agency

A more nuanced approach is to analyze medieval women’s agency, how they directed their own lives and the lives of those around them. We can investigate agency by reading women as more than biographies or simple tropes. The modern foundation to this discussion was Joan Kelly, in her famous article “Did Women Have A Renaissance?” She suggested women in Italy enjoyed more rights and privileges prior to the Renaissance than they had during and after the “re-birth.” She argued the medieval feudal society gave women more authority than the early modern state and its emphasis on bureaucratic power. The feudal state, she maintained, with its basis in aristocratic authority and kinship, held more opportunities for women and as the state overrode aristocratic powers, women’s authority vanished.<sup>118</sup> Kelly began the modern argument over whether women had more or less power during the medieval period and it is not yet settled.

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<sup>116</sup> Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century*, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century*, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Joan Kelly, *Women, History & Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19-50.

The idea that medieval women were not necessarily entirely oppressed has struck a chord with many authors. Another view of Kelly's thesis can be found in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, where various authors provide detailed accounts of how women's agency functioned in the medieval period. They simultaneously look at opportunities gained and lost. In *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, Barbara Newman looks at women's ways of being Christian in the Middle Ages. Instead of writing on medieval misogyny, a constant underlying rhythm, Newman preferred to focus on the attempted solutions medieval women used to avert their "fate of inferiority."<sup>119</sup> The books *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* and *The Age of Abbesses and Queens* analyze women's political agency and the difference between their images and their realities.<sup>120</sup> These works are an important step towards seeing women and gender as essential aspects of men's historical writing and they give examples of women's lives and their ability to direct those lives within the medieval world.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, a ten-year study led Joan Ferrante to determine the idea of patronage allowed women to collaborate on and control texts. She concluded women had greater command over medieval works than has previously been thought.<sup>122</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal's anthology of sources on women also seeks to recover women's agency by focusing on

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<sup>119</sup> Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>120</sup> Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 1998). Anne Duggan, *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002).

<sup>121</sup> See "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" and "Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes" in Kelly, *Women, History & Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*.

<sup>122</sup> Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

medieval sources and looking for how women act, interact, and are acted upon in those sources.<sup>123</sup> Rosenthal reminds us we all have to understand the religious and cultural biases of medieval men so that we may find how women act as partners, as individuals, as leaders.<sup>124</sup> Despite these problems and the impossible situation we are placed in as modern readers and scholars, we must use the texts written both by men and women in our attempts to examine and explain the medieval past. Using the idea of a woman as a literary device is only one step in fully clarifying women's lives and voices.

By looking at women's agency during the medieval period, we allow women back into the historical narrative as players and not merely as ornaments. Nevertheless, agency is determined by what we read and we must examine how that agency was portrayed and what changes men wrought upon that agency to understand how it might relate to actual women's experiences.

By uniting what we know about medieval philosophy, medieval historians, and medieval women, we can see that the intellectual ferment of the early twelfth century cast a shadow over women's portrayal within historical texts. Only by understanding how this ferment changed historical texts can we hope to know how it changed the men and women who lived within that turmoil. The twelfth century is an important locus for the "discovery" of the individual, and the "re-evaluation of the individual's role within the institutions of society," all of which affected the ideas about the roles of women and men both within society and within the folios of historical narratives.<sup>125</sup> Like Joan

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<sup>123</sup> Joel Thomas Rosenthal, *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

<sup>124</sup> Rosenthal, *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, x.

<sup>125</sup> For a general overview, see R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050 — 1200* (London: S. P.



Kelly, gender theory leads me to believe that an intellectual trend historically seen as positive, like the sixteenth-century Renaissance, is not always so.<sup>126</sup> My goal is not to denigrate the idea of renaissance or those twelfth-century individuals whose lives were changed for the better, but to view the renaissance in a larger context. Unlike Kelly, I am not asking *if* twelfth-century women had a renaissance, but rather, *what effect* this educational renaissance had on women's histories and on the men who wrote of them. From 1050 to 1150, various reforming movements and the new intellectual communities (both within the cathedral schools and monasteries) presented re-evaluations of basic social and cultural institutions, including revisions on the notion of gender.<sup>127</sup> The school and its scholars had a definite effect on the ideas and ideals outside their classrooms. Taking this thought into account enables us to see the complexity with which medieval thinkers approached their world. In addition, the reforming religious movements also influenced and were influenced by ideas from the new schools.<sup>128</sup> Many medieval historians were products of the reforms, the schools, or both. We must understand these movements in order to place the historical texts firmly within their own historical sphere.

Scholastic men sought to define themselves as men, to define their increasingly complex worlds, and to define their place within these worlds. Peter Abelard was one

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C. K. for the Church Historical Society, 1972), R. N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), and Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*, 20.

<sup>126</sup> Despite the differences between the creation and continuity trends in modern historiography of the twelfth century, all the authors agree that the century was one of prolific creativity and intellectual output.

<sup>127</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, R. Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), U. Blumenthal, *Investiture Controversy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), and H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Gregory VII* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998).

such man. The *Historia Calamitatum* is as much a rationalization of his past actions as it is a justification of his continued manhood. Despite his castration, his exile from Paris, and his burnt books, Abelard argued for his place as a man and a philosopher. One way to remasculinize himself was to assign women to positions narrower and more constricted than earlier beliefs. Heloise's agency is reduced to one of submission—he coerced her into having sex, pushed her into marriage, and forced her to wear the veil.<sup>129</sup> Abelard's written actions toward Heloise mirror those of other scholastic writers. When they wrote about women within their histories, whether copying older texts or writing about contemporaries, they obliged women to conform to their new stricter definitions of womanhood. We see these changing definitions by comparing monkish and clerical versions of the same woman or same event and by viewing the change over time and over intellectual space. Before we can do so, we must look at the monk, the scholar, and their worlds, and then we can move on to the detailed evaluation of scholastic histories of women.

### *Chapter Summaries*

The number of historians who wrote during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries creates the unusual problem of too many sources. The sheer number of interesting and powerful women does the same. In order to narrow the topic of the presentation of women in texts from this period, I have chosen nine historians and six women to focus on. The period from 950 to 1150 is a crucial period for the development of the scholastic method and therefore it gives us the most interesting, if

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<sup>129</sup> The "*Historia Calamitatum*" in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, translated by Betty Radice, 57-106.

not most confusing, period to work from. Additionally, I have chosen to focus geographically on the Anglo-Norman world: defined as England, Normandy, Blois, and the surrounding counties of influence for this world. History writing proliferated here, possibly because of the violent and substantial changes that happened in these areas. I have restricted this study to eight major historians, one historical compilation, and six women from this place and time. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* will form the basis for a study of monastic methods of the early period. Eadmer, Hugh of Fleury, and William of Jumièges will round out the monastic historians. William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, and Robert of Torigny comprise the category of liminal historians. William of Poitiers, Henry of Huntingdon, and John of Salisbury will represent the scholastic historians. The Mercian lady Æthelflæd, the Norman Adela of Blois, the four Anglo-Norman queens, Matilda of Flanders, Matilda of Scotland, the Empress Matilda, and Matilda of Boulogne, will form the basis of the historical study.

Chapter one is a discussion of monks and schoolmen and their methods of historical production. Looking at both monastic and scholastic approaches to history, I argue that the scholastic thinkers, armed with humanist and reforming ideas about society, created a new type of gendered writing. The difference in occupations between the monk and cleric was often enough to change their production of texts. The monk, with his emphasis on prayer and redemption, could easily write to please a patron, whether female or male, if that patron was assisting the monk (or monastery) in his endeavors towards salvation. Women created fewer professional opportunities for the scholastic writer, living with an uncertain future in an increasingly bureaucratic world. Coupled with the hardening definitions of male and female, as created by the debate

over universals, the world of the early twelfth century created a culture where there were fewer reasons to write positively about women.

Chapter two is a case study of one Anglo-Saxon woman and her history.

Æthelflæd, the Lady of the Mercians, lived in the tenth century and had an illustrious career as a warrior and politician. Her story, a set of short annals recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* shows us the ways in which men of differing intellectual climates changed women's stories and accomplishments. Comparing the original annals from the Mercian Register (as inserted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) with William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and other writers of the Anglo-Norman period allows us to examine the multiple manners in which a woman's life could be changed.

Chapter three extends the case study to an Anglo-Norman woman, Adela of Blois. A strong ruler and powerful ally, several Anglo-Norman historians wrote about Adela's life. Monastic writers like Eadmer saw a more powerful woman than liminal authors like Orderic Vitalis and a much more important woman than scholastic writers like John of Salisbury. Viewing Adela's life through their lenses shows us the intricate ways scholastic thought affected her history. Although some of the writers were her contemporaries, by Adela's lifetime, the intellectual methods of the schools had altered how men viewed women and their power.

Chapter four details the lives of Matilda of Flanders and Matilda of Scotland, the first two queens in the Anglo-Norman dynasty. Matilda of Flanders successfully ruled Normandy during her husband's invasion of England, which she had assisted in financing. Matilda of Scotland brought legitimacy to her husband, Henry I's, tenuous rule. As their lives intersperse with both monastically trained and scholastically trained

men, these first two queens present us with a perfect opportunity to examine the mutability of history.

Chapter five continues this theme with a discussion of the English Civil War. With the Empress Matilda standing against Stephen of Blois and his wife Matilda of Boulogne, we are again faced with two powerful and politically active women. Their actions differ little from those of Æthelflæd's, but the presentations of the women and their lives are significantly changed in scope. Her contemporaries do not mention Æthelflæd's gender. The Empress Matilda and Matilda of Boulogne are both referred to by their historians as *viragos* – or as man-like women. The construction of their lives is determined by the new cultural ideals surrounding gender, ideas formed by scholastic methods.

An examination of influential and powerful women of the Anglo-Norman world allows us to study the impact of scholastic methodology and ideas on gender and the production of historical texts. While not confined to the Anglo-Norman world, it is a perfect time and place for this study, replete as it was with compelling contemporary history and talented historical writers. We have reached an impasse where the historiography is missing a crucial element: the recognition of how medieval ideas about gender inform both medieval thought and medieval histories. My objective is to use medieval histories to help evaluate and define the changes and continuities in the ideas about women during a watershed period of cultural adjustments in the Middle Ages, specifically in the period 950 to 1150, a crucial and transformative time in medieval Europe.

## *Chapter 1*

### *Monks and Schoolmen: Writers and Their Philosophies*

#### *Literate Monk*

Life in the monastery could be difficult. Up early and often for work and prayers, monks and nuns spent much of their lives either in contemplation of earthly woes and heavenly retributions or in hard labor. Yet while the life of the average monk included a daily regimen of prayers, labor, and ascetic practices, there were opportunities for the more intellectually gifted of the community.

Christianity is said to be a religion of the book, a religion whose tenets are found in letters and words. Coming as it did into the highly literate world of the Roman Empire, Christianity also had to prove itself the intellectual equivalent of the Greek and Roman philosophers.<sup>130</sup> Augustine's woes in studying Greek as a child and his contempt for the simplistic style of the New Testament show us how entrenched the written word was.<sup>131</sup> And as Augustine found, the New Testament itself was literature and philosophy. *Tolle lege*, says the voice – pick up and read. Augustine is not told to listen, feel, or think, but to read.

This emphasis on the written word would play an important role in the coming centuries. Echoing Augustine's vision, the medieval cleric might pick up and read – and do it in a foreign language. Reading became a primary function for clerics and

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<sup>130</sup> R. A. Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World* (New York: Scribner, 1974), Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>131</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

monks. Since St Jerome's translation of the bible in the fifth century, Latin became the ecclesiastical language of Western Christianity. Both an emphasis on reading and on Latin demanded a consistent, if scattered, need for education and literacy. This need for literacy was taken up most particularly by monastic houses, which for much of the medieval era housed the majority of those who were literate. Although many monks remained illiterate, monasticism itself was organized around the written word. Even the illiterate monk was familiar with the written liturgy, parts of the Bible, and the rule.<sup>132</sup>

Christianity and monasticism emerged from the lively culture of the later Roman Empire.<sup>133</sup> In the fourth century as Rome became increasingly Christian, some Christians fretted that the church itself had become too Roman.<sup>134</sup> Many sought to return to a simpler Christianity, one cleansed of secular taint. These early ascetics shunned the goods and prestige of the world as enslavement<sup>135</sup> and sought escape from secular tribulations to the desert, following Christ's injunction to "sell what you have and follow me." Despite their wish to remain detached from outside society, the world often called at the ascetic's cave. Small communities grew up around hermits and the need to manage these groups forced the creation of rules and regulations.

From the earliest days of monastic communities, these rules demanded a literate populace, even if the minority. Considered the father of cenobitic monasticism, the fourth century monk Pachomius inspired an early rule for monastic communities. He

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<sup>132</sup> Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 91.

<sup>133</sup> See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 3-15, Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World*.

<sup>134</sup> Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 3-5.

<sup>135</sup> C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1984), 5-6.

suggested that hermits band together to share the basic necessities of food and shelter within a walled enclosure. Many of these hermits fled from the educated cities in Italy and Egypt where literacy and books were so ingrained as to be interwoven into the recluse's very being. Literacy is mentioned frequently within his rule, but Pachomius does make concessions for the illiterate. He states that each monk must be able to read or at least memorize a section from the New Testament and Psalter. His rule in turn influenced St Basil, who added to Pachomius's simple daily rituals the injunction to, among other things, read the entire bible.<sup>136</sup> Most important for Western European monasticism was St Benedict, who read and used Basil's regulations when formulating his own written Rule. The Benedictine Rule stipulated texts to be read aloud at specific times, and it allowed for silent reading individually by monks.<sup>137</sup> This silent reading was an essential element to living a spiritual life; the art of *lectio divina* emerged from Benedict's injunction and became a manner of reading spiritual texts in medieval monasteries.<sup>138</sup> *Lectio divina* was a way to approach the scriptures that allowed for supernatural ambiguity; every word could be read according to four separate levels. The literal, or historical, level was the most primitive and the one most often understood by seculars. The allegorical, tropological, and anagogical levels were more difficult to understand and required years of training to master. Careful readers of the scriptures sought to help others through the knots by providing commentaries that elucidated their

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<sup>136</sup>Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, xxviii.

<sup>137</sup> Hans-Werner Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Steven Rowan, American ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 99, Chapter 38 of the rule requires a monk to read during the evening meal, and chapter 42 allows for an edifying book to be read after the meal. Saint Benedict of Nursia. "The Holy Rule of St. Benedict." ed Osb Rev. Boniface Verheyen. (Place Published: St. Benedict's Abbey, 2005), <http://www.holyrule.com/>.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori: Triumph Books, 1996), 3.



thoughts. In this way, Benedict's directive on reading created a space for readers to become writers. From the very beginning of monasticism, literacy, and therefore education, was an important component of the monastic life.<sup>139</sup>

The education of the early Christian monk most often happened in a Latin or Roman setting. Augustine, Benedict and Cassiodorus, among others, were educated in the Roman style. A contemporary of Benedict, Cassiodorus retired by founding a monastery laden with manuscripts. His legacy, while often overstated, gives us another important facet of medieval monasticism. An old statesman, he approved two specific activities for monks: the scriptorial and the medical.<sup>140</sup> While he was not the rescuer of Roman intellectual culture as has often been thought, his impact, while less dramatic, was equally as important: his work as a "purveyor of textbooks" allowed for these texts to remain a part of European literature.<sup>141</sup>

Pachomius, Basil, Benedict, and Cassiodorus. All four of these educated monks left a legacy for the medieval monastery: literacy and education, books and libraries, teachers and students. Monks were always readers of and listeners to the written word, if not always writers. As such, texts and learning were important to medieval Christianity, and the monastery was one of the places where texts and learning could be found.

Despite the reclusive nature of monasticism, the monk held an important place within the medieval societal structure. Upon entering the monastery, the novice

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<sup>139</sup>Henri de Lubac and Mark Sebanc, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 28.

<sup>140</sup>James J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, vol. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/texts/cassbook/toc.html> (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

<sup>141</sup>O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*.

renounced the secular world. He vowed to surrender his private property, to obey the abbot, and to stay within the monastery until he died.<sup>142</sup> The monk was, by definition, immobile. Once he entered the monastery's walls, he was not to leave them again. His aim became perfection through renunciation of his earthly life, blending with his community, and a yearning for union with God.<sup>143</sup> His first goal was withdrawal and prayer. Ostensibly withdrawn from the world, the monk could practice asceticism or not, he could write or not.

In spite of this flight from the world and the supposed isolation, monastic life could benefit those outside the monastic walls. Recluses could, through their prayers and intercessions, bring salvation to the entire Church.<sup>144</sup> "Monks were not considered social outsiders; rather, they constituted a normal necessary institution fully integrated into society."<sup>145</sup> For seculars, the best available means of assuring eternal salvation was to have the monks intercede for the living and commemorate the dead.<sup>146</sup>

To complete their spiritual task for secular society, medieval monastic houses were often centered on daily prayers and biblical readings. Thus, the fundamental activity of the monk remained rooted in literature.<sup>147</sup> The monastic life, particularly during the Middle Ages, centered on the knowledge of letters and the search for God.<sup>148</sup> Once he entered the monastery, the novice had to be schooled for a life of

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<sup>142</sup> R. H. C. Davis, *A History of Medieval Europe, from Constantine to Saint Louis* (London: Longmans, 1957), 285.

<sup>143</sup> Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State, and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1940), 42.

<sup>144</sup> Tellenbach, *Church, State, and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, 79.

<sup>145</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 56.

<sup>146</sup> Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 67.

<sup>147</sup> Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 26.

<sup>148</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 22.

contemplation and liturgical intercession.<sup>149</sup> The plan of the monastery at St Gall, from the ninth century, shows us both an internal school for future monks and an external school, most probably for sons of the local elite.<sup>150</sup> Showing this growing concern for education, the office of librarian, who often acted as teacher as well as scholar, was added to many monasteries during the ninth century.<sup>151</sup> The monasteries had books, people to read them, to write and copy them, and teachers to teach the monks how to do all these things.<sup>152</sup> Often a monk or nun would expand past copying to include comments or, occasionally, to work on entirely new texts. As a result, they produced a medley of interesting works.

### Patrons and Monks

This world gives to us long-lasting historical records that speak of both past and contemporary events from the eyes of the withdrawn lone writer. Yet, we must ask ourselves, how withdrawn and how alone was the monastic writer? The monastery was supposed to be a retreat from the world, a place where the soul could contemplate its existence and its relationship to God. Monks often viewed themselves, and were viewed by others, as being a little above the regular world, a step removed from the everyday cares and concerns of the populace. When reading the theological and philosophical texts of medieval monks, we see how detached a writer could be. Fully comprehending Anselm of Canterbury's argument on faith seeking understanding can be daunting to the most assiduous of minds and it shows us the intellectual heights a

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<sup>149</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, 174.

<sup>150</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 82.

<sup>151</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 91.

<sup>152</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 22.

monastically trained male could achieve. Anselm himself is the perfect monkish anomaly. He desperately wanted to remove himself from the world and study theology, yet he was continually drawn into secular concerns.<sup>153</sup>

At the center of cenobitic monasticism is the ideal of community – a group of like-minded individuals who gather to live and pray together outside of secular society. Medieval monks and nuns came from the world; they were often born into families of wealth and prestige who did not seek to lose a child to the monastery but to make good use of a tie to the heavenly spheres through the proper placement of a child. Men like Anselm, who were placed into positions of power and prestige, could no more hope to remove themselves from the secular world than they could hope to fly.

The histories that monks wrote address these connections, as their works are rife with familial power, the rights of heirs, and the glories of families past. Looking at the monastery in economic and political terms, we can also see this connection to material world. We see that for the Early and Central Middle Ages, the concept of gift giving was equally important for abbots as well as kings. “Gift giving in medieval society now appears as the main form of expression between peers based on mutual trust.”<sup>154</sup> Kings and nobles bestowed aid and the giving of gifts created and maintained bonds that required reciprocity and upkeep. Charity, land exchange, masses, and almsgiving have all been linked to the idea of gift giving. The monasteries fell under this sway, as monastic leaders were often brothers to kings. Monasteries were often set up and

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<sup>153</sup> Dr Vaughn makes a compelling argument that Anselm was not as removed from society as Eadmer had previously painted him to be. Sally N. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), See also R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>154</sup> Florin Curta, “Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving,” *Speculum* 81 (2006): 675.

endowed by wealthy nobles within the neighborhood. In fact, we see an “aristocratization of monasticism” beginning in the late ninth century.<sup>155</sup> Monasteries themselves became a symbol of the unity of Church and nobility.<sup>156</sup> The nobleman was “advocate and hence secular protector of the monastery” who gained religiously without relinquishing his own aristocratic calling.<sup>157</sup> For example, the dukes of Normandy were characteristically active in fostering the growth of monastic houses, which numbered twenty-five by 1066.<sup>158</sup> Nobles and kings expected return on their gifts, often in the form of prayer. A monastic community could sing masses for the dead, helping either the living noble’s father or his future spiritual self in the afterworld. Gifts could also include written works, where a monk might write a history for the noble and his family, legitimating their rule by linking it with God’s plan for salvation. The monastery would receive wealth, often in the form of land, from the nobleman and his family in return for its spiritual connection with God.<sup>159</sup> The monastic leadership was elected from the nobles within the monastery’s walls and family lines can often easily be traced through several generations of abbots. The monastery was not the separated world monks wanted it to be. They were indeed part and parcel of the world from which they fled.<sup>160</sup>

Monks would write for these patrons as a form of thanks for past gifts or as requests for future ones. Rarely do we find a text written in the medieval period that shows no ties, links or dedications. Most people just did not write for themselves.

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<sup>155</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 61.

<sup>156</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 74.

<sup>157</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 60.

<sup>158</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, 63.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050-1150* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>160</sup> White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050-1150*, 1.

Much work was directed towards potential patrons with the hope of recompense. The monastic writer was no exception. Most authors accepted that they wrote for patrons; whether or not the patron accepted the work is another question entirely.

Women were important patrons of medieval monasteries, supporting them with their monies and their children. A noblewoman who founded a nunnery could expect to retire there in her advanced years and be sure that her needs would be well taken care of after her demise. Noblewomen also used monastic writers as their spokespersons or as purveyors of their public image. They compensated for works extolling their familial lines and their own lives, either in advance or after the work was written. Monks wrote favorably of the noblewomen in their areas who could, or did, fund their monasteries. Monastic men, both pre- and post-scholastic, placed women in positions of political, social, and cultural power. And royal and noble women, from the early Middle Ages onward, continued to patronize, through social, political, and economic means, monasteries and their inhabitants. Twelfth-century historians who followed the monastic tradition also continued, as we shall see, to present powerful women in positions of political authority.

### Monastic Approaches to History

It has been said that historiography largely originated in monastic communities.<sup>161</sup> While the study and writing of history is as old as the written word, medieval monastic writers focused on history as an attempt at clarifying God's grand plan. The Old Testament itself created a Christian history and early Christian fathers

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<sup>161</sup> Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, 71.

like Augustine expanded on this to encompass their own days within a Christian timeline.<sup>162</sup>

Using the ideas of divine revelation in history meant that even small events could be imbued with importance and therefore could gain relevance within a text. Authors could write of their own corner of the world with confidence, because even the change of an abbot could have larger significance. The annalistic history of monks and monasteries combined king lists, weather reports, and arguments within the ecclesiastical world. Thus, in even the most geographically defined texts, we gain insight into the wider medieval world.

When writing a history, the author generally followed in Augustine's footsteps, using the *City of God* as their template. They sought to understand biblical allegory and oftentimes they struggled to place themselves within Augustine's confusing and convoluted "linear" concept of history.<sup>163</sup> Using the Bible to guide them, many monastic histories begin with creation or with early stories from the Old Testament. Despite the drive towards Judgment that many of these histories contain, they also follow Augustine in attempting to place their own times and peoples within God's history. They move through the Old Testament histories and often merge these stories with tales from their own worlds, in order to bring their generalized national family closer to the biblical stories. The Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People* is a prime example of this type of monastic history.<sup>164</sup> This

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<sup>162</sup> R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), xxii.

<sup>163</sup> Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World*.

<sup>164</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin, 1969).

does not necessarily mean the historical sources present the information straightforwardly. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, for example, can be a maddening piece of work. The authors rarely give us the information we desire; in fact, they often just whet our appetites for knowledge. As we will see in the next chapter with Lady Æthelflæd, if we unpack their curt entries, we can get a fuller sense of period and place than at first glance.

The monastic historians important for this work include those writers of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, whose lives were intricately tied to the monasteries; Eadmer, the biographer and historian of Anselm of Canterbury; and Hugh of Fleury, a monk and writer who dedicated the majority of his works to powerful women in the Anglo-Norman world.

### *Liminal Monks*

“Liminal historians” is the term I use to describe writers who lived during the birth of the scholastic method. They used systems of knowledge from both the traditional monastic schools and from the cathedral schools. They might live either within or outside of monastic walls, and their lives demonstrate that those walls were permeable. They wrote less for Judgment Day than for this day, considering their own times to be worthwhile for study. They might be monks who worked for monarchs, or those who used more scholastic methodologies. In addition to biblical history, these authors often quoted classical authors and stories. By using non-biblical works, we can see that the liminal author was not working strictly to show the path to Judgment Day, but to create a history that moved from the earliest times and incorporated their people



within the history of the world, a history that they all assumed would end with the Second Coming.

William of Malmesbury, who wrote two major histories for Henry I's children; Orderic Vitalis, who lived as a monk but could not escape the scholastic program; and Robert of Torigny, prior and abbot who had lived and studied at Bec. These men are liminal historians because their lives and written works cross the lines between the monastic and the scholastic methods of study. All three men lived in monasteries and, as far as we know, none of them studied at the cathedral schools. Yet all of them used (although perhaps not knowingly) the systems being taught in the cathedral schools.

### *Scholastic Thinkers*

Defining the schoolman in the later twelfth century is fairly easy. He is a young man about town, engaging in dialectic during the day and often carousing at night in one of the larger cities in Europe. The Goliards tell us that these young men drink away their allowances, write home for money, and generally complain about their education and job prospects, much like young students of this century.<sup>165</sup> Defining the schoolman during the latter eleventh century and early twelfth century is a much more difficult prospect. The nascent university system formed mostly in Laon and Paris, with groups of men surrounding powerful lecturers.<sup>166</sup> The schoolman was peripatetic, traveling to where the good teachers taught. He used the systems of knowledge we now call scholastic, those systems which brought the human back into the world of study, which

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<sup>165</sup> Charles Jones, ed., *Medieval Literature in Translation* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2001), 910.

<sup>166</sup> Ferruolo, *Origins of the University*, 6.

applied dialectic to God's universe in order to better understand it, which sought learning and education for its own sake. He looked to the classical past and infused his work with allusions to Greek and Roman authors, while not denying and employing biblical and patristic sources. He was still religious, and felt his livelihood and his written works could be turned towards a sacerdotal use – he could help convert the world through his thought.

The schoolman wanted a bureaucratic livelihood and often ended up working for bureaucracies, either governmental or religious. He lived in and about the city; perhaps he could even be called a man about the world. Many of the early schoolmen were noblemen, eager to seek their lives and fortunes in new arenas. Some were younger sons but others were not, as Abelard shows us when he writes that he gave up the company of Mars (and his inheritance as elder son) for Minerva with his father's blessing.<sup>167</sup> They were men comfortable with wealth and its trappings. Still others were monks who, as scholars, were drawn to the new styles of teaching and writing. In all, the schoolman was a man drawn to and involved in the bustling world, an active man for whom the withdrawn life of the cloister was not enticing. For them, the monastery was hide-bound and a place of repose and rest, not the enticing life of the city and the new system of thinking. And the city was the most important place for the young schoolman. Paris in particular was the site of the new learning, where scholars left the monastic walls for the bustling city scene. Using Abelard as our guide, we see that the schoolman had a distinct awareness of himself as an individual – an attribute that many see as part and parcel of the twelfth century itself.

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<sup>167</sup> Radice, ed., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 3.

## Writing for a Bureaucratic World

As the eleventh century drew to a close, the exchange economy that had characterized Europe for the last several centuries was being outpaced by a new moneyed economy. There are many reasons why money became more important than gifts – one reason was that kings were gaining more power over their constituents and over their land and as they did so, they began to mint new coinage to show off their powers and fill their coffers. Money was also easier to exchange than gifts, especially over long distances. And in the twelfth century, men began moving and trading over longer and longer distances, particularly once the routes between Europe and Jerusalem opened due to the crusades. It was much easier to trade money for goods than goods for goods. Money was, and is, easier for the majority of economic transactions than an individual and a government would encounter.<sup>168</sup> This money economy brought many changes to Europe, not the least of which was mental. Despite the ease, money carried with it a “moral uncertainty” – it could be looked upon a bit negatively, as a conduit for evil and disruption.<sup>169</sup> Money could easily corrupt – the problem of simony is one symbol of this corruption. Regardless of the fear, the new economy was one drawn on coinage and the older gift economy all but faded from view.<sup>170</sup> With it, the idea of patrons and patronage may have changed as well. Both monks and schoolmen may have written a piece in order to curry favor with a prominent local lord, but the schoolman hoped for more than land or gifts – he wanted a job.

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<sup>168</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, 35.

<sup>170</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, 39-41.

This created a problem for the female patron used to the exchange system – rarely could she offer paid professional employment. Another significant difference between a monk and a schoolman was vocation. The monk's life was spent enclosed and dedicated towards God and heaven. The schoolman's life was spent in the city and dedicated towards his superiors. He worked towards a job within the princely or religious bureaucracy. His writing displays the links to the administrative world. The writers are interested in the rules of conduct in politics, in legislation for the secular world.

In fact, there was a growing recognition that history itself could be useful and important to study on its own and ideas on and rules of conduct in politics abound in the scholastic texts. Instead of attempting to get as many people as possible closer to God for the ultimate judgment, the scholastic historian sought to place people in this world and to show the individual (often a member of royalty) how to live within the secular world. As such, the law is very important in scholastic histories. The scholastic historian trained alongside the scholastic lawyer and often the historian wrote of his colleague's work, particularly that work which found itself in the heart of the Gregorian Reform movements. Legislation and inheritance are two important concepts often found in scholastic histories. As for both the monastic and the scholastic writer, familial power remained important with the rights of heirs become increasingly documented within scholastic texts.

## Scholastic Approaches to History

The schoolman promoted and used dialectic as his weapon of choice. Well-sharpened logic was his short blade and argumentation his saber. He enjoyed textual conflict, like that of Peter Abelard's *Sic et Non*. The schoolmen were interested in defining their world through logic and debate. Extrasensory experience was not to be trusted and many schoolmen looked down at monks and mystics who sought enlightenment the old-fashioned way, with a flash of brilliance from God. Like the monk, the schoolman believed men were drawn to God by love and that God's world was worthy of study. Unlike the monk who sought God on a personal and mystical level, schoolmen believed God could be reached through human will and determination.

Scholastic philosophers sought to catalogue all of human knowledge. They hoped to gain understanding of God's creation and of God himself through careful study of all knowledge. To catalogue effectively, these scholars sought to define and quantify their world. Definitions of the natural and supernatural world abound in scholastic texts. At least, this is what scholastic thinkers wanted – to understand it all. Because of these methods of study, we have texts as disparate as Anselm's *Proslogion*, Gratian's *Decretum*, and the Morgan Worksop Bestiary.<sup>171</sup> Stephen Jaeger has called this prolific time the Age of Texts.<sup>172</sup>

As scholastic instructors and students strove for a total comprehension of the world, the ability for the educated man to understand his own corner of this world was

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<sup>171</sup> Morgan Library, ms.81. The Morgan Library documents this manuscript as being completed prior to 1187 in either Lincoln or York. The Pierpont Morgan Library, "Manuscript Descriptions," <http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0081.htm>.

<sup>172</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 190.

paramount. Scholastic history represents part of this searching for complete knowledge. Augustine's linear version of history was as important to the schoolman as to the monk, but the scholastic historian did not necessarily have Judgment Day as his endpoint. Often, his history ended with injunctions to present kings or nobles to be mindful of current situations, to employ bright men to guide them, and to rule with a firm and Christian hand. Biblical history is often condensed in scholastic texts, as if the author expected his audience to know this history so he could focus on contemporary events.

Additionally, little is mentioned of the afterworld. The schoolman was more interested in the past for its ability to help explain the present. And the present was seen as important in its own right. This type of history expounds the validity in studying current events in and of themselves where the past was used to illuminate the present and the present used to show God's plan in society. Many scholastic histories, like William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, begin *in medias res*, with the author charging headlong into the vital history of his own world. He might pause in his recitation to explain how his world evolved into the current situation, but contemporary history often happened so quickly that texts feel sketched in, with details filled in later redactions.

The scholastic historians whose writings we will focus on include: William of Poitiers, soldier and chaplain for William the Conqueror; Henry of Huntingdon, secular clerk during Henry I and Stephen's reigns; and John of Salisbury, secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury, scholar, and writer. Scholastic historians felt justified in their focus on contemporary events, both because understanding the present could

expand on God's plan for humanity, and because they deemed current events as significant.

### Humanism and Reform

The eleventh- and twelfth-century monk inherited the Carolingian monastic ideal: a mixture of the Benedictine rule, the Cassiodoran view of the monastery as a bastion of erudition, and Germanic notions of authority in which princely and spiritual powers were closely linked.<sup>173</sup> This ideal was altered by ecclesiastical reforms in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, which focused on strengthening the place of spiritual leaders over secular ones. Both despite and because of these reforms, the monastery remained a place of erudition.

Probably the most obvious reform to affect men trained in the schools was the issue of clerical marriage. Since the late ancient period, the catholic hierarchy has been gently, and not so gently, requesting that their clerics remain celibate. It was difficult for men to give up their wives and especially difficult for men to remain celibate when they lived in the secular world. We can look at Peter Abelard's life for an example of medieval clerical celibacy and marriage.

Never planning on joining a monastery, Abelard came to Paris to study with the great intellectuals of his day. Abelard sought out Heloise and her wealthy uncle, Canon Fulbert. Fulbert gave his niece's instruction over to Abelard and he quickly tells us that their looks strayed more often to each other than to the books on their laps.<sup>174</sup> Soon

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<sup>173</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, 61.

<sup>174</sup> Radice, ed., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* 11.

their relationship entered the physical realm, and Abelard's songs to Heloise became well known in the boroughs of Paris.<sup>175</sup> Their sexual affair did not seem to hinder Abelard's studies, nor his job prospects: at least not until Heloise became pregnant. Once Fulbert discovered the pregnancy, he forced Heloise and Abelard to marry. Heloise's objections to this state are recorded in Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*.<sup>176</sup> Using her words, we can see the schoolman's reasons for celibacy. These are not the older monastic reasons – not the fear of corruption from women, not the desire to get closer to God and further from the temporal world. No, these are philosophical reasons; indeed, most are drawn from Greek and Roman sources. Marriage, she tells Abelard, would only slow him down. He would not be able to study effectively with screaming children, nursemaids, and laundry. His occupation would suffer, as he would be turned down for positions based on his dual loyalties of profession and family. Despite her wishes, Heloise and Abelard marry. The tragic consequences of this act are widely known: Abelard's castration, Heloise's entrance into a nunnery, and Abelard's self-contradictory peripatetic monastic life. These two ill-fated lovers lived during the reform movement designed to remove women from clerical lives.<sup>177</sup> Had they lived even twenty years earlier the affair may not have mattered as much, twenty years later and this affair might never have happened at all. The early twelfth century was a time of great upheaval and change, including in the most personal of spaces.

By 1150, clerical celibacy was more entrenched. The average schoolman may have been trained in a monastic setting – that is, in one that excluded women and

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<sup>175</sup> Radice, ed., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* 11.

<sup>176</sup> Radice, ed., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* 13-14.

<sup>177</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).



avoided contacts with the outside world. Nevertheless, his professional goal was work within the secular society, a place where women would be encountered on a daily basis. This made it more difficult than for a monk to avoid the contact with women. The schoolman needed another layer of protection against the damage by women, as the monastic walls no longer shielded the scholastic cleric. As we will see in chapter three, the schoolman turned to universals and definitions to provide protection against the dangers women engendered.

### *The Opacity of Gender and the Rise of the Binary: Medieval Ideas about Women*

Given these limited perspectives and apparent biases, it is surprising how often monks wrote about women and how often they presented women as powerful and wise. Despite the cases of strong women, the dominant theme in discussions of medieval gender is one of misogyny.

Before discussing what this misogyny consisted of, we must “recognize the very real disenfranchisement of women” in the medieval period.<sup>178</sup> Nonetheless, this disenfranchisement took different forms at different times; as Joan Kelly taught us early on, women’s periodization frequently differs from men’s timelines. Aristocratic women fight, politic, and convert their way through the histories, especially during the early medieval period.<sup>179</sup> The Kentish queen Bertha helped to convert her husband, and England, to Roman Christianity. The Merovingian queen Brunhild fought to protect her children’s legacy and her own retirement. Literate and cunning, Brunhild corresponded

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<sup>178</sup> R. Howard Bloch and Frances Ferguson, *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>179</sup> Characterized as 500 – 1050.

with popes and bishops, and was accused of participating in the killing of ten kings. Fredegund rose to queenship from concubinage, successfully protecting her husband and his lands and placing her son on the throne.<sup>180</sup> Dhuoda, countess of Gascony, wrote a manual for her sons on how to behave as nobles, both within the secular and religious worlds. Her ethical and moral advice was to counter the worldly influences that her sons would see at the imperial court.<sup>181</sup> Later queens seem to lose some of this familial power. Jo Ann McNamara suggests the growth of primogeniture and monogamy reduced the power of medieval queens, while consolidating and bestowing power on their husbands.<sup>182</sup> It can be surprising to read the histories of men like Gregory, Fredegar, and Bede and find how they describe the spirit and aptitude of these early women. Both Gregory and Fredegar write more about the negative consequences of female power, while Bede is more accepting of women's agency. And looking at later histories, like Otto of Freising's or William of Malmesbury's, we connect the disappearance of strong women to the changing social and political culture in Europe. While the political and social culture of the twelfth century does lend itself to the disenfranchisement of women, we can also look to the historians themselves for reasons for the dwindling accounts of powerful women.

In order to get the clearest picture possible, we need to understand the biases and views that these men brought to their parchments. Monks were generally confident of their places within the social and cultural hierarchy and of their importance within those

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<sup>180</sup> See, for example, Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* (London: Penguin, 1974), and Fredegar, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with Its Continuations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1960).

<sup>181</sup> Katharina M. Wilson, *An Encyclopedia of Continental Woman Writers*, vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1991), 313.

<sup>182</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

hierarchies. Both biblical and classical authors influenced their views of women and gender. However, their thoughts on gender were not limited to the classical binary structures, and there is more variation in their thoughts than we would at first believe. Pre-scholastic medieval intellectuals were not as devoted to binaries as we like to believe they were. Eve was not simply the evil and corrupting opposite of Adam. While they recognized two distinct genders, they also recognized the infinite genus within the species. Monks in particular had a more nuanced view of gender, something more akin to the modern ideas put forth by gender scholars.<sup>183</sup> The simple post-Enlightenment binary opposition is inadequate for describing medieval categories. Their world-view was more complex than a simple opposition and even binary terms are more complicated than they at first seem. Dialectical pairs are at once opposed and united; there exists in them a complementarity that cannot be denied.<sup>184</sup> Gerard Caspary posited that even in their complementary state, “The polarity is non-directional in the sense that neither pole is necessarily thought of as better than or superior to the other” but that through time and space, these poles can be “assigned positive or negative charges.”<sup>185</sup> As Cohen and Wheeler state, “Male and female are not simple binaries, but multiplicities that are simultaneously relational and oppositional.”<sup>186</sup> We see then that

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<sup>183</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>184</sup> See Gerard E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>185</sup> Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis*, 111.

<sup>186</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1997), xix.

medieval people was not necessarily concerned with a strict binary interpretation of their world.<sup>187</sup>

During the twelfth century, the debate over universals was in itself a debate about the nature of the binary opposite – for example, William of Champeaux’s argument with Peter Abelard regarding the existence of universals.<sup>188</sup> Both monasteries (William founded the Augustinian canons of Saint-Victor de Paris) and cathedral schools (Abelard taught in Paris) housed many intellectuals who struggled with these multiple definitions inherent in their worlds, attuned to think of the multiple meanings embedded in the architecture, artwork, manuscripts, and sermons that colored their everyday lives. Just reading a section of scripture required careful attention to the fourfold layers (historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical). The medieval laity was probably also attuned to the possibility of multiple meanings available to them, for even reciting the Creed meant accepting the Trinity and acknowledging three persons in one entity. As such, we simply cannot accept easy divisions and definitions as endemic to a particular society. Since the medieval worldview accepted and promoted the oppositional idea created by binary relationships along with the important numerical ideas of three, four, and seven, and since both the intellectual elite and the laity understood and accepted these variant notions as conventional and comprehensible, reexamining the medieval idea of gender is essential to this work.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, “Without Change, There’s No Story,” *Perspectives* (1999): 3.

<sup>188</sup> This debate over universals concerned the nature of definitions. Notions that form binary pairs were debated and defined under the discussion of universals.

<sup>189</sup> Robert Surles, *Medieval Numerology: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1993), 1-3. Most of the aforementioned modern authors rely on the simple (and post-Cartesian) binary oppositions of feminine and masculine, although they recognize the multivalent definitions for gender and all agree that it is a socially constructed concept that has changed over time.

Defining words and ideas was paramount, as can be seen in the debate over universals that took center stage for the better part of fifty years. The universals debate focused on the definitions of words and how these definitions related to the actual reality of the lived world. Abelard stood in the middle of the debate; as a philosopher, he believed the names of each item in the world held important levels of detail about that item, that the name held universal significance, if not a universal reality. Words were more than names (the nominalist approach) and less than universal ideals (the universalist approach). This debate held importance for the lives of women as well. In debating the definition of “man” (a definition Abelard held a great stake in), these philosophers also helped to define the genders in more concrete forms. The medieval schoolman placed great store in the classical writers—particularly in Aristotle. Aristotle’s one-seed model of human regeneration became the predominant model of sexuality in scholastic philosophy. Aristotle believed the man contributed all the “seed” needed to create a new life and that the woman’s womb was merely the incubator for the man’s seed. Contrasted to the earlier model of “two seeds” in which both the man and woman supplied important matter for the development of the child, this new “one-seed” model devalued the woman and her contributions. In a small way, devaluing a woman’s reproductive abilities had the effect of also devaluing her in other arenas as well.

All these ideas held importance for medieval women. In the classical binary sense, most medieval women were both defined and confined by their bodies; however in a monastic setting, a woman could overcome this binary sense of her femaleness and embrace the multiplicities available to her. Simply being a nun restrained her gender, as

she was sexually unavailable and therefore available for opportunities outside her gender, for example scribe or scholar. Gender, for women in monasteries, was less a wall and more a permeable membrane. This was particularly true for Matilda of Scotland, who put on the veil before wearing the diadem with Henry I. Her apparent lack of gender allowed her to escape the clutches of several grooms before she agreed to wed the prince of England, but not without serious controversy about her marriageable status.<sup>190</sup>

One of the things we will see in this work is how, or if, the monastic gender-flexibility survives once the more rigid methods of the schoolmen are introduced into Europe. Men living within the monastic system, perhaps used to the fluid nature of the cosmos, allowed for more elasticity in their thought than their scholastically and bureaucratically trained brothers.

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<sup>190</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, trans. Geoffrey Bosanquet (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1965), 127.

## Chapter 2

### *The Lady Æthelflæd: A Germanic Warrior and Her Chroniclers*

In order to understand the changing perceptions and attitudes towards gender in historical texts produced between 950 and 1150, we shall begin with how monastic authors treated women within their histories. To do this, we will turn to tenth- and eleventh-century texts where monks accepted and wrote of strong and powerful women without the detractions apparent in later works. To keep a narrow and consistent field, we will look at how monastic authors present a powerful Anglo-Saxon woman whose authority did not seem to have been curtailed by her gender: Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians (r. 911-918).

As these women figure heavily in English history, one of the most important sources we can examine is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, an important and complicated text compiled from seven manuscripts and two fragments, and a unique source of information about England from the ninth to twelfth centuries.<sup>191</sup> Written exclusively in a monastic setting, this source is perfectly placed to show how monks viewed the role of women in their world. The *Chronicle* is an annalistic history. A monk jotted important notes about a specific year within the text. Occasionally, years would be written in advance, and a monk would have to fit details into a small space. Other years would be less busy, with only a death or a comet for mention. There is very little of the narrative style that we gives us so much detail. The *Chronicle* may read like a mere listing of

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<sup>191</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), xi.

achievements, but it is far more than that – each entry has significance and meaning. We should read the stories concerned primarily with women with this in mind – that the chronicler chose to craft each entry with forethought and energy. As monks, the chroniclers had a calling far more important than that of author. Their lives were dedicated to God, not to history. Yet the brief reports are accounts of significant activities surrounding the monastic environment. These were events noteworthy enough to rouse the monk from prayers and into the scriptorium. While the chronicle may lack attempts at characterization or narrative, the fact of an event’s inclusion shows us that the monk felt it a thing worthy of memory. After the Norman Conquest, narrative history became more important in England and even the Chronicle’s writers began using more description in their entries. Examining Æthelflæd we see how monastic authors registered the bald fact of women’s authority. With this awareness, let us turn to the first of our powerful women: Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians.

### *The Mercian Register*

The story of Æthelflæd appears mainly in the Mercian Register, inserted subsequently into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. There are other chronicles that mention Æthelflæd in passing: Asser’s *Life of Alfred the Great*, Æthelweard’s *Chronicle*, the *Annales Cambriae*, and the Irish chronicle *The Three Fragments* contain information important for the study of Æthelflæd.<sup>192</sup> The oldest manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon*

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<sup>192</sup> Aethelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1962), *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (New York: Penguin, 1983), *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments*, trans. Duaid Mac Firbis and John O’donovan (Dublin: Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, University Press, 1860), *Annales Cambriae*, trans. John Williams Ab Ithel (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860).



*Chronicle*, cited as A, does not use the Mercian Register.<sup>193</sup> The Register was, however, added to manuscripts B and C “without any attempt to dovetail its annals into those of the *Chronicle*.”<sup>194</sup> The register forms then a discreet part of the *Chronicle*. As B and C have no entries for the years 915 to 934, the Mercian Register fills a gap within those manuscripts.<sup>195</sup> The D and E forms of the *Chronicle* also use the Mercian Register, but here the register is inserted into the regular annals.<sup>196</sup> The D version will be of interest to us again later, as this version is especially useful for the interpretation of the life of Margaret of Scotland.<sup>197</sup> The E version is closely tied to the D form and has interpolations of the Mercian Register. The other recensions of the *Chronicle* are not relevant here, but like the D version, will prove of interest later on.<sup>198</sup>

Æthelflæd was the first child of King Alfred the Great of Wessex and his Mercian wife, Ealhswith. Asser leads us to believe that, because she and her sister Æthelgifu were born before her father’s educational program was complete, neither of them benefited from his interest in education. He tells us that Alfred’s two sons, Edward and Æthelweard, and his youngest daughter Ælfthryth were brought up with tutors and that they were “devoted and intelligent students of the liberal arts.”<sup>199</sup> Perhaps Æthelflæd was too old to profit from Alfred’s new program. In any event, as

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<sup>193</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xi. Whitelock has a good introduction to the *Chronicle* which outlines each version and its peculiarities.

<sup>194</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xiv.

<sup>195</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xiv.

<sup>196</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xiv.

<sup>197</sup> It followed the affairs of her children, one of whom (Matilda) would become queen of England; Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xvi.

<sup>198</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xviii.

<sup>199</sup> Asser, *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (New York: Penguin Classics, 1983), 90.

the eldest daughter of Alfred, she was important to her father and in 882/3 he married her off in a politically expedient move.<sup>200</sup>

Specifically, to secure power over the neighboring kingdom of Mercia, Alfred married his daughter to a powerful local ealdorman, Æthelred, at the previous Mercian king's death.<sup>201</sup> Alfred then acknowledged Æthelred and Æthelflæd as Lord and Lady of Mercia. Her marriage sealed the relationship between Mercia and Wessex, one that Alfred well understood, as he was the son-in-law of one Mercian ealdorman, the brother-in-law of a second, and through the marriage of his daughter, father-in-law of a third.<sup>202</sup> This tie between Wessex and Mercia would remain strong throughout Alfred and Æthelflæd's lives. Æthelflæd's husband received a woman with strong ties to Wessex, as the daughter of one king and sister to another, and to Mercia, through her mother and aunt, one a royal lady and the other a queen. He sought "not merely a West Saxon alliance but also a strengthening of his Mercian claims through female Mercian royal blood."<sup>203</sup> Alfred also granted to Æthelred a sword at his death, a gift that Simon Keynes marks as a "sign of his special position as effective ruler of Mercia."<sup>204</sup>

#### *Charter and Non-Anglo-Saxon Sources*

We can gauge Æthelflæd's importance by first looking at another type of historical source: the Anglo-Saxon charter. For she does not appear in the written

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<sup>200</sup> Richard Philip Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Longman, 1998), 183, n. 132.

<sup>201</sup> Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, 169.

<sup>202</sup> Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, 272.

<sup>203</sup> Pauline Stafford, "Political Women in Mercia, Eighth to Early Tenth Centuries," in Michelle Brown and Carol Ann Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 45.

<sup>204</sup> Asser, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, 323, n. 391.

records until she attests to her first charter, S 221, in 901.<sup>205</sup> In it, she and Æthelred appear as “rulers of Mercia” and they exchange land with a church and grant a gold chalice to an abbess. She appears with Æthelred in one other charter (S 223) and on her own in two charters (S 224 and S 225). Interestingly, the reliability of all five charters in which Æthelred appears alone has been questioned.<sup>206</sup> Only one of Æthelflæd’s charters has received such a charge.<sup>207</sup> In total, Æthelflæd appears in four of nine charters for the period between Ceolwulf II and Edward the Elder (874-924). This is more frequent than any previous Mercian queen, most of whom only appear once. Prior to Æthelflæd, Mercian queens appear in three of forty-nine charters. Of 604 charters of the West Saxons and Wessex, only one queen, Frithugyth, Æthelheard’s wife, appears as a co-benefactor (S 253). Out of the total 1163 Anglo-Saxon charters, queens appear as co-sponsors only twelve times. This gives Æthelflæd one-third, and Mercian women over half, of all the representations in 400 years.

Neither the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* nor Asser officially titles Æthelflæd queen of Mercia; rather her title has come down to us as Lady and Ruler of the Mercians. While not seen as a queen by the Wessex and Mercian writers, those who felt her military power viewed Æthelflæd as a queen. The *Three Fragments* embellished with legends throughout the later period, has a lengthy description of Æthelflæd and her

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<sup>205</sup> P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks 8 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968). Hereafter, charters from this work will be referred to by their Sawyer number only.

<sup>206</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, S 217, S 218, S 219, S 220, S 222.

<sup>207</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, S 225 is called “spurious” in 1899 and 1914, but “authentic” in 1998.

battles against the Danes, and she is always presented as “Queen of the Saxons.”<sup>208</sup> The Annals of Ulster describe her as “that most famous of Saxon queens.”<sup>209</sup> And the *Annales Cambriae* simply call her “Queen.”<sup>210</sup> Possibly because of this status, Pauline Stafford suggests that Æthelflæd and Æthelred granted charters with the permission, witness, or presence of kings Alfred and Edward.<sup>211</sup> My reading of the Sawyer charters, however, only shows four such instances: S 218, where Æthelred grants privileges “with the consent of King Alfred and the whole Mercian witan”; and S 367, S 367a, and S 371, charters of Wessex, where Edward acts “with Æthelred and Æthelflæd of Mercia.” Edward’s charters all concern requests made by a duke Æthelfrith – the land in question existed in border areas between Mercia and Wessex. Edward may have been acting in concert with the Mercian rulers to stave off any accusations of impropriety in oft-disputed territory. Stafford may be assuming Alfred’s and Edward’s tacit permission in the remaining charters, as Æthelred and Æthelflæd ruled subordinate to their kingships, but we have only the one formal tie in the Mercian charters showing Wessex involvement. Sponsorship aside, the charters represent Æthelflæd’s actions: she works in concert with her husband before his death and she acts alone in her widowhood. Much of the belief in Æthelred’s and Æthelflæd’s submission to Alfred and Edward comes from their lack of royal titles and coinage. While there is a lack of royal title, both the kings of Wessex treated Æthelred and Æthelflæd as allies. Mercia was the

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<sup>208</sup> *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments*, Joan Newlon Radner, “Writing History: Early Irish Historiography and the Significance of Form,” *Celtica* 23 (1999): 312-325.

<sup>209</sup> *Annals of Ulster to 1131*, trans. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), 369.

<sup>210</sup> *Annales Cambriae*, 17.

<sup>211</sup> Pauline Stafford, “Political Women in Mercia, Eighth to Early Tenth Centuries,” in Brown and Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, 45.

weaker territory, but it nonetheless avoided external invasion.<sup>212</sup> And, as we shall see, peoples outside of Mercia and Wessex believed Æthelflæd to be a queen.

### *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

But charters give us only one view of Æthelflæd. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, despite its brevity, shows us a more complete picture of this effective ruler. Æthelflæd first appears in the Mercian Register, inserted into B and C, in 910. In this year, both the Main Chronicle (cited as A, B, C, and D by Whitelock) and the Mercian Register write of a battle between the Danes and the English, which included King Edward and Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians.<sup>213</sup> The Mercian Register calls the English forces “victorious” and states that in the same year, “Æthelflæd built the borough at *Bremesbyrig*.”<sup>214</sup> Interestingly, *Bremesbyrig* was built the year before her husband’s death in 911 and yet he is not mentioned. Some historians suggest that Æthelflæd had taken primary control of Mercia after her husband became sick in 902.<sup>215</sup> We see that in the years of the most intense fighting with the Danes, Æthelflæd built at least two boroughs a year. From 910 to 918, Æthelflæd built eleven such boroughs, captured two (Derby and Leicester) from the Danes, and secured the oath of a third (York).

When viewing Æthelflæd’s building processes, we must look to her father for inspiration. Her construction of boroughs (or *burhs*) continued a process her father had begun during his reign. Alfred’s building campaign was a system of defense meant to protect his territory from Danish incursions. Wainwright links this building program to

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<sup>212</sup> Ian W. Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 78.

<sup>213</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 61.

<sup>214</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 61. This site is, as of yet, unlocated.

<sup>215</sup> Paul Hill, *The Age of Athelstan: Britain’s Forgotten History* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004), 86.

part of a national system, conceived by Alfred and continued by Æthelflæd and her brother.<sup>216</sup> Based on a reading of the tenth-century document “Burghal Hidage,” Alfred’s *burhs* were designed to be permanent settlements of people and fortresses for his semi-permanent garrisons.<sup>217</sup> Richard Abels writes that “the defensive system that Alfred sponsored, and its extension to Mercia under Ealdorman Æthelred and the Lady Æthelflæd, enabled his kingdom to survive.”<sup>218</sup> The burghal system of Wessex “became a tool for conquest and territorial consolidation after his death. Each stage of the conquest of the Danelaw by Edward the Elder, Ealdorman Æthelred and the Lady Æthelflæd was marked by the construction and manning of *burhs*.”<sup>219</sup> In fact, a Mercian charter talks of the building up of Worcester by both Æthelred and Æthelflæd “for the protection of all the people.”<sup>220</sup> The building of *burhs*, particularly for defense, shows us Æthelflæd’s military and social stratagems. She might not have held the formal title of queen, but she behaved like one.

Historian David Hill suggests that Alfred, Edward, and Æthelflæd built a series of *burhs* that were planned from their inception as either towns, which he defines as multi-functional defended sites, or forts, defined as single-functional military sites.<sup>221</sup> For Hill, the difference in the two was in their size: greater than sixteen acres led to a town, less than sixteen acres led to a fort.<sup>222</sup> For Hill, most of Alfred’s (and by

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<sup>216</sup> F. T. Wainwright, “Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians,” in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 47.

<sup>217</sup> Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, 199.

<sup>218</sup> Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, 199.

<sup>219</sup> Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, 217-218.

<sup>220</sup> Della Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 104.

<sup>221</sup> Della Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 202.

<sup>222</sup> Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, 202.

extension Edward's and Æthelflæd's) *burhs* were multi-functional sites where the royal, the military, and the market all met.<sup>223</sup> Della Hooke writes that within many *burhs*, "plots of land within the enclosed area were donated to tenants wishing to engage in trade."<sup>224</sup> The town of Worcester, fortified by Æthelred and Æthelflæd, had these elements of commerce. In a charter concerning the town, the church of St. Peter's was to share the penalties for fighting, theft, or dishonest trading, with Æthelred and Æthelflæd.<sup>225</sup> In 914, Æthelflæd enlarged the district of Warwick to encompass about 1,200 hides, which could be between 112.5 and 225 square miles.<sup>226</sup> Using Hill's formulation, Warwick was easily large enough to be a multi-functional site. Warwick also had a charter that described blocks of land given to tenants.<sup>227</sup> The formation of boroughs, then, created centers of trade and administration in addition to military garrisons.<sup>228</sup> We cannot, and should not, deny that these *burhs* were military installations and their formation could be regarded as military expeditions. Æthelflæd acted as a military commander when she built *burhs* in her territory.

At Alfred's death around 900, his son Edward succeeded to a divided and invaded land and faced a contested inheritance in the form of his cousin Æthelwold. He needed support from his father's allies, and he found such support through his sister Æthelflæd and her husband. In 903, Æthelwold and his army "harried all over Mercia"

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<sup>223</sup> Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, 202.

<sup>224</sup> Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, 118.

<sup>225</sup> Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, 118.

<sup>226</sup> Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, 105. Hooke lists the district at 1,200 hides. A hide could encompass between 60 and 120 acres, depending on local usage. 1,200 hides then would be between 72,000 and 144,000 acres, or between 112.5 and 225 square miles.

<sup>227</sup> Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, 118-119.

<sup>228</sup> Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, 199.

and the Mercians joined Edward against Æthelwold and the Danes.<sup>229</sup> Battle broke out again in 910 and the Mercians had a great victory at Tettenhall, killing many Danish men. Notwithstanding it being a Mercian victory, the battle is mentioned in versions C, D, and E and in the Mercian Register in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Shortly after the battle at Tettenhall, Æthelred died, perhaps as a result of wounds he received during the battle.<sup>230</sup>

With Æthelred's death, Æthelflæd would seem able for the first time to act as independent leader. F. T. Wainwright suggests that Æthelred was in poor health for much of his reign, stating that he "could do no more than offer advice from a sickbed."<sup>231</sup> His sources for Æthelred's continuing illness are the Irish *Three Fragments*, where Æthelred is "in a disease" from at least 902,<sup>232</sup> and a mention from Henry of Huntingdon, who wrote that Æthelred was "long infirm" before his death.<sup>233</sup> Wainwright states that we can believe these sources since Æthelred sent his army to battle alone in 909 and 910 and was not involved in the building of *Bremesbyrig* with Æthelflæd in 910 and therefore must not have been in any condition to command or direct Mercian efforts. This makes Æthelflæd ruler of Mercia as early as 902.

Despite this assertion, it is in 910 when Æthelflæd began her concentrated building program without her husband's assistance. Early in her rule, the *burhs* of Gloucester, Hereford, and Worcester were built. Æthelweard writes that the Danes had built fortifications in Gloucester in 877, so re-building this city as Mercian may have

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<sup>229</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 59-60.

<sup>230</sup> Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England*, 94.

<sup>231</sup> Damico and Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, 46.

<sup>232</sup> *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments*, 227.

<sup>233</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 167.



been of importance to Æthelflæd and her husband.<sup>234</sup> Of the eleven towns built during Æthelflæd's reign, five were on the border with Wales. Although poorer in resources, the Welsh border was still a significant area that needed protection. Welsh leaders had taken oaths of loyalty to Æthelred, which probably extended to Æthelflæd upon his death. However, in 916, a Mercian abbot was killed while in Welsh territory. Three days later, Æthelflæd sent an army into Wales where she destroyed *Brecenanmere* and took thirty-four hostages, including a Welsh king's wife.<sup>235</sup> Æthelflæd thus proved that she was not to be discounted in the military arena. And in no way does the Mercian Register even allude to Æthelflæd's gender in this, or any other, instance.

She continued to fortify towns and assist her brother in repelling the Danish forces for the next two years. Her remaining seven *burhs* were situated along Danish borders. Some, like those of Tamworth and Stafford, were even in Danish-held lands. Æthelflæd and her Mercian army focused on repelling the Danes to the north and west of Mercia. Wainwright suggests that Æthelflæd fought not only against the Danes, but also against the Irish-Norwegians who invaded Northumbria in 914. She fortified two *burhs* in 914/915, Eddisbury and Runcorn – both of which were further north than those *burhs* in central Mercia that were directed against the Danes. According to the *Three Fragments*, Æthelflæd directed these fortresses against the Irish-Norwegian leader Ragnald, whom she met in battle in 918 where “her fame spread abroad in every direction.”<sup>236</sup> Wainwright suggests that Æthelflæd was the active leader against the

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<sup>234</sup> Aethelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, 42.

<sup>235</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 64. *Brecenanmere* has been identified as Langorse Lake, near Brecon.

<sup>236</sup> *Annals of Ireland: Three Fragments*, 247.

Norwegians and that Edward was forced to step into this role once she died in 918.<sup>237</sup>

This can be evidenced by the two *burhs* Edward built in 919 directly north of Æthelflæd's.

One of her more important conquests for Edward was Derby, which continued to hold a Danish garrison. The Mercian Register tells us that Æthelflæd "obtained the borough which is called Derby, with all that belongs to it" while Edward fought due south and east and occupied Towcester and Huntingdon.<sup>238</sup> Their armies were not conjoined, but their building policies leave little doubt that brother and sister prepared and executed their plans in conjunction with the other. Wainwright calls their "close and constant cooperation" a coordinated strategy that "deserves to be called brilliant."<sup>239</sup>

New towns were a part of Alfred's defensive scheme against the Danes and we can assume the same for the towns built by his daughter and son. While Æthelflæd concentrated on building *burhs* in the northwest portion of Mercia, Edward built fortifications in the east, only moving north after his sister's death. We also cannot doubt that the creation of *burhs* impressed Alfred's royal power upon his subjects, both old and new. We can see, then, that Æthelflæd's building continued her father's protective stance. It might also have been her way of solidifying her own power over Mercia and of signaling this power to her enemies, her subjects, and perhaps even her brother.

Ian Walker suggests that the Mercian nobles accepted Æthelflæd as ruler as a way to keep Mercia independent from Wessex. The nobles did not seek Edward's

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<sup>237</sup> Damico and Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, 52.

<sup>238</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 64.

<sup>239</sup> Damico and Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, 49.

protection, and Edward did not advance into Mercia at Æthelred's death. Instead, they chose to maintain Mercia and its traditions by supporting their Lady and her daughter, the latter of whom could later be married to an ealdorman, who in turn would rule them as king.<sup>240</sup> Æthelflæd remained a widow in the seven years between her husband's death and her own, thereby smoothing the way for her daughter's accession and maintaining her own power.<sup>241</sup> Whether this was her choice, the Mercian noblemen's choice, or her brother's, we do not know. We do know that Edward did not challenge her supremacy in Mercia, although he did gain control over London and Oxford, traditionally Mercian cities.<sup>242</sup> Wainwright uses this occupation as a point to show how Æthelflæd "acquiesced willingly in the subordinate role allotted to her." Walker disagrees, arguing Æthelflæd conceded these cities in return for continued control of Mercia itself.<sup>243</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not give us any indication for either point, but Walker's argument is not outside the realm of possibility. And reading the Anglo-Saxon charters solidifies this possibility. The Wessex charters described above (S 367, S 367a, S 371) all concern ealdorman Æthelfrith and his lands – lands in and around London and Oxford. Æthelflæd and Æthelred confirm their charters with Edward "at the request of *dux* Æthelfrith."<sup>244</sup> We see Æthelfrith aligning himself with the king of Wessex, but doing so with the backing of his own lords. Walker proposes that Æthelfrith's land was too distant from the center of Mercian power and too exposed

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<sup>240</sup> Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England*, 97.

<sup>241</sup> Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England*, 98.

<sup>242</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 62. Asser writes that Alfred recaptured London in 886 and entrusted its care to Athelred. Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester also mention this event.

<sup>243</sup> Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England*, 99, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*.

<sup>244</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*.

to Danish attack for Mercian leaders to protect it through their own resources. Granting the land to Edward, therefore, released the Mercian leaders to focus on areas closer to their center.<sup>245</sup> This transfer seems to have been done with Æthelfrith's approval.

We do not sense any tension between Edward and Æthelflæd in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* until her death. In 918, the Mercian Register reports that she “died twelve days before midsummer in Tamworth, in the eighth year in which with lawful authority she was holding dominion over the Mercians.”<sup>246</sup> Version A tells us that Edward “occupied the borough of Tamworth, and all the nation in the land of the Mercians which had been subject to Æthelflæd submitted to him.”<sup>247</sup> The Mercian Register completes our description of Edward's capture of Mercia from Æthelflæd's daughter, Ælfwyn, who was “deprived of all authority in Mercia and taken into Wessex.”<sup>248</sup> We can surmise that Æthelflæd meant her daughter to succeed her, as the Mercian Register confers upon her “authority” in Mercia. Furthermore, since Edward needed to “occupy” Tamworth in order to subject the Mercians to his authority, Ælfwyn must have actually held some authority there, particularly because all these events happened directly after Æthelflæd's death in Tamworth.

The Mercian Register disappears from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as abruptly as it appears. The last entry is in 927 when Athelstan succeeded to the kingdom of Northumbria and accepted the oaths of other kings on the island. The majority of the lengthier Register entries concern Æthelflæd – she is in eight of the twenty notes. Two of the remaining twenty concern celestial events, one details a saint's translation, five

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<sup>245</sup> Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England*, 99.

<sup>246</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 67.

<sup>247</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 67.

<sup>248</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 67.

happened after her death, and the remainder concern Æthelflæd's immediate family – her father's death, her brother's accession, her husband's death, and her daughter's removal. She was obviously of importance to the Mercians and also to those men who wrote these telling annals. Since we also have versions of these events from sources far later than during her life, we can see that it was easy to tell the same story without having Æthelflæd in evidence. During the same period, she is mentioned by name only at her death, in version A. The Mercian army, as commanded by Æthelflæd, is mentioned three times in the versions A, C, and D. The Mercian monks could also have written this story without its main actor, but they chose to include her and her most significant events, both before and after her husband's death. All these chroniclers seemed not to care that Æthelflæd was a woman, as her gender is not mentioned once, in any version. Æthelflæd is also not paired in an obligatory fashion to any of the men in her life. She is not Æthelflæd, daughter of Alfred, sister of Edward, wife of Æthelred. She is Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians.<sup>249</sup>

In contrast, most modern historians always link Æthelflæd to her male relatives. For example, F. T. Wainwright's first sentence places Æthelflæd in context to the men in her life: "Æthelflæd was the daughter of Alfred the Great, sister of Edward the Elder, the wife of Ealdorman Æthelred of the Mercians and herself ruler of the Mercians for seven years after her husband's death." First published in 1945, Wainwright's description of Æthelflæd is so common to be unremarkable – except perhaps when comparing it to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s writers who always describe her as "Æthelflæd" or "Lady". As Christine Fell writes, Æthelflæd's title corresponds directly

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<sup>249</sup> Damico and Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, 44.

with that for her husband, Lord of the Mercians.<sup>250</sup> And in the versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* where she is missing, Fell reminds us that we must remember the West Saxon bias of much of the *Chronicle* and consider that suppression of women's achievements could be more about their place of birth than their sex.<sup>251</sup> It could be, she posits, a desire that "Mercian achievement should not be seen to outshine West Saxon" that caused Æthelflæd's relegation to the background.<sup>252</sup> A. Campbell suggests that Æthelflæd and Æthelred's removal from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* might have been because Edward was intent on looking forward and "may well have found it [Æthelflæd's deeds] irritating."<sup>253</sup>

We may believe that the Wessex writers had more than a passing interest in removing Mercian players from the scene. And in reading those annals from outside of Wessex control, we do see Æthelflæd as a strong queen and leader of the Mercian forces. Yet even in West Saxon version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the authors never mention Æthelflæd's gender. Æthelflæd is remembered, even in the tersest of contemporary sources, as the Mercian leader and a builder of military garrisons.

### *Later Sources*

This characterization was not to remain so gender-neutral. We might look at William of Malmesbury in conjunction with Æthelflæd – as someone who revered and wrote of this famous Lady. Writing of Æthelflæd in the nascent stages of the schools'

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<sup>250</sup> Fell and Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*, 91.

<sup>251</sup> Fell and Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*, 12.

<sup>252</sup> Fell and Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*, 12.

<sup>253</sup> Aethelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, xxix.

influence, he calls her a “spirited heroine” with an enlarged soul.<sup>254</sup> William begins by telling us that she was the “delight of her subjects” and a woman who refused the embraces of her husband after the difficulty of her daughter’s birth, adding that they were unbecoming to the daughter of a king. We do not know, William writes, whether her achievements were due to fortune or her own exertions. He suggests that a woman could only defend a man should fortune take a hand in it.<sup>255</sup> William’s other reference to Æthelflæd is to her position as foster-mother to Æthelstan. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not mention this, although the Mercian Register writes that the Mercians chose Æthelstan as their king.<sup>256</sup>

As William personifies the idea of the liminal historian, it behooves us to look a bit closer at his life. William was educated as a monk and he spent the majority of his life wearing the Benedictine habit. Rodney Thomson, in his biography of William of Malmesbury, writes that William was “a humane, reasonable, scholarly Benedictine in the best Bedan tradition.”<sup>257</sup> Yet, Thomson also acknowledges that William was a man at conflict with himself and that he is thus difficult to categorize.<sup>258</sup> I would like to revisit William’s career and present him in his conflicted position, as someone who lived on the cusp of the scholastic diffusion. He was a man who knew and understood both the old and the new styles of learning and in whom the monastic and scholastic programs can be seen. Although a monk, William’s life was affected by this scholastic movement in distinct ways.

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<sup>254</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847; reprint, 1968), 123.

<sup>255</sup> Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 124.

<sup>256</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 68.

<sup>257</sup> Rodney M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1987; reprint, 2003), 39.

<sup>258</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 39.

## William of Malmesbury

Born about 1085-90, William entered the monastery at Malmesbury as a boy and he would die there around 1143. Although William gives us little in the way of autobiographical detail, we learn in his *Gesta Regum* about his early education: “To Logic, the armorer of speech, I no more than lent an ear. Physic, which cures the sick body, I went deeper into. As for Ethics, I explored parts in depth, revering its high status as a subject inherently accessible to the student and able to form good character; in particular I studied history, which adds flavor to moral instruction by imparting pleasurable knowledge of past events, spurring the reader by the accumulation of examples to follow the good and shun the bad.”<sup>259</sup>

Examining this statement in detail, we see elements of the new education alongside those of the older monastic schools. Although William tells us that he paid little attention to it, he was taught logic and he then reports that he delved deeply into ethics – both cornerstone subjects for scholastic education.<sup>260</sup> William’s reasoning for the study of history also shows us his combining of older and newer forms of study. His goal for history is similar to the goal of saints’ lives – to serve as exempla for the reader. This goal of exempla is common amongst monastic writings. Nevertheless, William did not seek to explain the mysterious workings of God or to gain an understanding of the Judgment, as did many older historical works. Instead, William’s historical works are focused squarely in the modern era, with few references to biblical

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<sup>259</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 5.

<sup>260</sup> We can recall that one of Abelard’s more famous works was his *Ethics* and that Anselm advocated the study of grammar and logic in his *De Grammatico*.



history or divine revelation. It seems, then, that William received more than the standard monastic education at Malmesbury, an idea that Thomson agrees with, but seems to discount rather quickly in his estimation of William's career.<sup>261</sup> Thomson states that William lived "near the end of the great age of Benedictine scholarship, and though he apparently sensed that new forces were at work, associated with the continental Schools, he had little contact with them."<sup>262</sup> While we can say with relative ease that William never studied with the great teachers of the schools and that he never visited the centers of the new learning, we do know that William met Anselm of Canterbury. William intimately knew many of Anselm's works, including the *Monologion*, the *Proslogion*, *De Veritate*, *De Grammatico*, and *Cur Deus Homo*, among others.<sup>263</sup> Despite this, Thomson says that there is "no evidence that William read any early scholastic writings," and he announces that William's reading habits were "typically Benedictine."<sup>264</sup> Nevertheless, a short reading of Thomson's appendix of those works known to William includes classical works by Apuleius, Caesar, Cicero, Horace, Ovid, Plato, Terence, and Virgil (a favorite of William's), among others.<sup>265</sup> Even Thomson admits that William had an extensive and not-typically-Benedictine love for the pagan classics – a love we might see as more scholastic than monastic.<sup>266</sup>

William traveled fairly extensively throughout England and often had been to the areas he described in his works. His most important works are his histories, both of

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<sup>261</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 5.

<sup>262</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 8.

<sup>263</sup> See Appendix II "List of Works Known to William at First Hand" Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 203.

<sup>264</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 15.

<sup>265</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 202-204.

<sup>266</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 15.

which are concerned with Anglo-Norman English politics and life. His first work, the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, begins in the Anglo-Saxon period and ends in 1120. The follow-up book, the *Historia Novella*, was intended to bring the *Gesta* to the present day, with descriptions of Stephen's reign.

William then is hard to define and a perfect picture of the early twelfth century. He was a monk who traveled outside his monastic setting. Educated by the Benedictines, he nevertheless knew and accepted scholastic methods. Dedicated to a life apart, the political world drew him in and its foibles became his fodder.

William's attachment to the Lady of the Mercians could exist because of king Æthelstan, who was buried in Malmesbury and who was raised by Æthelflæd. Malmesbury also sits on the border with Mercia and not far from Æthelflæd's seat of power in Gloucester.<sup>267</sup> Yet William's Æthelflæd is not the historical figure depicted in the Mercian Register. The Anglo-Saxon monks never mentioned her gender; it did not seem to matter that she was a woman ruling in her own name during a time of intense strife. In William's narrative, she is seen through his twelfth-century eyes, eyes that discount a woman's ability to lead because of her sex. And William's chronicle is more positive about women's abilities than others in his day, written as it was for Robert of Gloucester, the Empress Matilda's brother and perhaps written as it was while the influence of the new fashions of thought were still relatively limited.

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<sup>267</sup> Æthelweard writes that the Danes were encamped at Gloucester during their raids into Mercia in the late 870s. It is interesting that Æthelflæd should situate herself here. Aethelweard, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, 42.

## Henry of Huntingdon

The scholastic historian Henry of Huntingdon, for example, also wrote of Æthelflæd. Raised in a secular clerical household, Henry became archdeacon of Huntingdon around 1123. His life was spent in the world of the ecclesiastic and the secular cleric.<sup>268</sup> Henry began his *Historia Anglorum* around 1133 and it is replete with ideas from the cathedral schools. Henry's vision of powerful women is, as we shall see, one of disbelief and at times, dismay.

Not always the most careful of scholars, Henry thought Æthelflæd to be Æthelred's daughter, perhaps because he could not conceive of a woman inheriting her husband's territories.<sup>269</sup> Henry closely followed the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in his reworking of Æthelflæd's life, but by 1150 the intellectual climate had changed and Æthelflæd's gender was a cause célèbre. She was "a man in valor, woman though in name" who although she was "born by sex a maid" should be called not queen but king, a "virgo virago."<sup>270</sup>

Medieval chroniclers are not the only ones complicit in Æthelflæd's reduction of power. Henry of Huntingdon's nineteenth-century editor called her "an extraordinary woman at a period when even manly virtues were rare."<sup>271</sup> Charles Oman, in his early twentieth-century history of England, wrote that Æthelflæd's importance was due to her

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<sup>268</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: 550 to 1307*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 193-195.

<sup>269</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, trans. Thomas Forester (New York: AMS Press, 1853, 1968), 166, note 161.

<sup>270</sup> Huntingdon, *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, 168, Christine Fell notes that both Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury call her "virago." Fell and Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*, 92.

<sup>271</sup> Huntingdon, *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, 168, note 162.

“energy and masculine spirit” particularly if we consider, he tells us, the “disabilities of women in those troubled times.” F. T. Wainwright, the acknowledged modern expert on Æthelflæd, writes that although Æthelflæd is interesting, “Edward was probably the more compelling personality and he was certainly the dominant partner.”<sup>272</sup> Scholars working on women’s history after 1970 tend to place Æthelflæd on stronger ground.

Nevertheless, we see in modern writings the biases of past chroniclers. David Jones writes that Æthelflæd “vowed a life of chastity after nearly dying in childbirth” and applied her energies to military pursuits, echoing William of Malmesbury.<sup>273</sup> The more scholarly *Battle Cries and Lullabies* repeats Malmesbury’s idea about Æthelflæd’s chastity but presents a more nuanced view of her military campaigns.<sup>274</sup> Helen Jewell does not mention Æthelflæd at all in her 2007 monograph on women in early medieval Europe and has a short paragraph describing Æthelflæd’s biography in her book on 1997 medieval English women – and she writes twice as much on her husband Æthelred.<sup>275</sup> Other modern scholars attempt to place Æthelflæd back into the chronicle of the early medieval world. Pauline Stafford calls her one of the greatest warrior queens of the age.<sup>276</sup> Christine Fell’s *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* devotes four pages to Æthelflæd. She aptly paints Æthelflæd’s reign and her inclusion in various contemporary sources.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Damico and Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, 46.

<sup>273</sup> David Jones, *Women Warriors: A History* (Dulles, Virginia: Brassey’s, 1997; reprint, 2000), 57. While this is a popular history with many errors (for example, Jones has Æthelflæd fighting with Alfred in 912, long after his death), his evidence directly points to the sources he consulted.

<sup>274</sup> Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1998), 83.

<sup>275</sup> Jewell, *Women in Medieval England*, 39, Jewell, *Women in Dark Age and Early Medieval Europe*.

<sup>276</sup> Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King’s Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

<sup>277</sup> Fell and Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*, 91-93.

By a careful reading of the medieval chronicles and charters, we gain a fuller picture of Æthelflæd. The view of her by monks, particularly those contemporary or near-contemporary writers, shows us a powerful builder and military leader. Later writers cloud this picture of Æthelflæd with her gender and her manly virtues. By William of Malmesbury's time, the image of powerful female rulers had become an anomaly, even if, as we shall see, the reality had not. This will be aptly portrayed by a discussion of Adela of Blois – a woman who possessed as much political power as did Æthelflæd and whose vast accomplishments became the fodder for poets and historians alike. An Anglo-Norman countess, Adela controlled enormous tracts of land and the futures of her children. While as powerful as Æthelflæd, she suffered from the vagaries of historical bias: while Æthelflæd's gender is never mentioned in contemporary sources, Adela is portrayed as a woman who uses sex – much to her husband's detriment.

### *Chapter 3*

#### *The Strange Case of Adela of Blois (c. 1067-1137):*

##### *A Germanic Leader Subject to New Rules*

Young Adela was quite a catch. Born “in the purple” to William, the new King of England, it was no wonder that she was highly prized in the small marriage market of European nobility. At a young age, she was comfortably married off to a neighboring count, which was a good step for her father to take. Adela married Stephen of Blois sometime between 1080 and 1084.<sup>278</sup> Worried about increasing Angevin control near his borders, William’s arrangement of the marriage between Adela and Stephen helped to secure both the Norman and the Thibaudian<sup>279</sup> borders.<sup>280</sup> Adela managed nicely with her new husband, a man who was easily eighteen years her senior and theirs became more than a marriage of convenience. Kimberly LoPrete, in her extensive biography of Adela, writes, “The couple developed a cooperative relationship grounded in trust and respect, and perhaps even affection, despite their age difference of at least eighteen years.”<sup>281</sup> Additionally, the six to eight children Adela bore shows a “certain sexual compatibility” between the two.<sup>282</sup> Stephen’s letters to Adela from the Holy

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<sup>278</sup> Kimberly LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, Ltd, 2007), 24.

<sup>279</sup> This appellation stems from the counts of Blois-Chartres who trace their ancestry from Thibaud, the first count of Blois. See Kimberly LoPrete, “The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois,” *Albion* 22 (1990): 569-589.

<sup>280</sup> LoPrete, “The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois,” 7.

<sup>281</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 71.

<sup>282</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 72.

Land begin with an endearing salutation bearing Stephen's love for his wife. She is his "sweetest friend" and "most amiable wife." He calls her "his love" and "dearest."<sup>283</sup>

Her life may have gone unnoticed by historians, for much of it was ordinary, except that Adela was a Norman woman whose male relatives ran most of the northern European world. Additionally, Adela herself was a strong and intelligent woman whose calculated thinking and management saved her husband's rule as count and placed her son on a throne. As such, the historians of the Anglo-Norman world could not discount this vital woman. Looking at histories written both in England and on the continent, we meet a sharp and cunning woman who was admired by many and feared by some. Additionally, reading the chronicles about Countess Adela of Blois shows us the distinct move from monastic acceptance of powerful women to clerical denigration of women's authority.

#### *Accounts of Adela's Life*

In modern accounts, Adela is nagging, formidable, and prone to angry outbursts.<sup>284</sup> We are told that her husband was "bitterly rebuked by his wife, family, and vassals" after his return to France.<sup>285</sup> She is called "arrogant, self-willed, and proud," a woman who ruled with "an iron hand" and who persistently interfered in

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<sup>283</sup> Stephen calls her: "dulcissima amica, mi dilecta, dulcissimae atque amabilissimae coniugi." Letters found in Appendix I in LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 449.

<sup>284</sup> John T. Appleby, *The Troubled Reign of King Stephen* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 6.

<sup>285</sup> Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 42.

church affairs.<sup>286</sup> She “dominated” her court and her children, going so far as to remove the eldest from his inheritance without any sufficient reason.<sup>287</sup>

These characterizations surround the event for which Adela is perhaps best known in contemporary histories: her husband Stephen’s disastrous Crusading adventures. As Sally Vaughn writes, both Adela and Stephen “aligned themselves with the Reform Papacy.”<sup>288</sup> This alignment, combined with the rush of other nobility to join the Crusade, probably factored in Stephen’s decision to answer Urban II’s call to try to liberate Jerusalem.<sup>289</sup> In 1096, Stephen joined Robert Curthose, Robert Count of Flanders, Raymond Count of St Gilles and Bishop of Le Puy as leaders and rulers on the First Crusade.<sup>290</sup> Adela provided a substantial portion of Stephen’s initial expenses for his journeys from her dowers, which Stephen acknowledged in his second letter to her. He reassures her that “of gold, silver and many other kind of riches I now have twice as much as your love had assigned to me when I left you.”<sup>291</sup> Adela provided him with significant financial support that he assures her that he has more than doubled. She also took control of Blois during Stephen’s absence. Each letter also addresses Adela’s rule and authority while Stephen is away. Stephen exhorts her to “watch carefully” over the land and vassals and for her to do her duty to her children and vassals.

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<sup>286</sup> Jonathan Simon Christopher Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 120.

<sup>287</sup> David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154* (Harlow: New York, 2000), 11-13.

<sup>288</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 209.

<sup>289</sup> Crusade historians have long recognized the connection between crusading and the reform papacy. See, most famously, Carl Erdmann, *Origins of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshal W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>290</sup> Carol Sweetenham, ed., *Robert the Monk’s History of the First Crusade* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 91.

<sup>291</sup> *Letters of the Crusaders Written from the Holy Lands*, trans. Dana Carleton Munro (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia, 1897), 5-8.



This letter reached Adela before the siege of Antioch and Stephen's flight from battle. Stephen was not present when the Franks captured Antioch due to illness. When he learned that a massive Turkish army was about to relieve the city, he gave up on the crusade altogether.<sup>292</sup> Stephen watched the besieged city with despair. Robert the Monk tells us that Stephen "fled, panicked with fear, returned to his castle and stripped it bare and set out to ride back to Constantinople."<sup>293</sup> More damning, Stephen also convinced the Emperor of Constantinople to turn back his rescue of the city. Antioch did not fall. Stephen was disgraced, "ending in ignominy."<sup>294</sup> While Stephen must have known about Antioch's spectacular defense and victory, he rode all the way back to France and did not complete his crusading vow. If Stephen returned to France "to find his lordly prestige diminished," it was through no fault of Adela's at home.<sup>295</sup> Excommunicated by Pope Paschal in 1099, along with everyone else who had abandoned the expedition, Stephen was shamed.

### *Negative Accounts*

Most of the modern and negative descriptions of Adela in this context come from a reading of Orderic Vitalis's *Ecclesiastical History*. Orderic became attached to the abbey of Saint-Evroult when he was ten and he would remain with the abbey until his death in 1142.<sup>296</sup> He began his thirteen-volume history around 1119 and it ended with his death. He worked within the monastic school and library, where he was part of

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<sup>292</sup> Rosalind M T Hill, *The Deeds of the Franks and Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London: Clarendon Press, 1972), The *GF* suggests the illness was faked.

<sup>293</sup> Sweetenham, ed., *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade*, 158.

<sup>294</sup> Sweetenham, ed., *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade*, 90.

<sup>295</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 101.

<sup>296</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 17.

the scriptorium. Despite his purely monastic life, Orderic had connections with the new scholastic programs. The monastery of Saint-Evroult had close associations with the cathedral school of Rheims and several of Anselm's works from his tenure at Bec were part of the library in the monastery.<sup>297</sup> Despite rarely leaving his monastery, Orderic's work reveals a meticulous man sensitive to and well informed about contemporary events. Orderic's writing style suggests his liminal status – scholastic methods and ideals creep into the older monastic methodology in his history.

Here, Orderic presents Adela overly strong, demanding, nagging. Orderic first shows us Adela in bed with her husband Stephen, reminding him of his Crusading failures "between friendly conjugal cajolery."<sup>298</sup> Despite Stephen "knowing the perils and dangers," Adela continued her wheedling during sex, until Stephen "recovered his courage and strength."<sup>299</sup> Orderic then described Adela as "sagax et animosa," which can be read as sharp and bold as well as wise and spirited as Chibnall translated it.<sup>300</sup>

Our modern perception of Adela is colored by Orderic's description more than by any of the earlier monastic portrayals of this provocative and powerful ruler. Even Adela's staunchest modern supporters mention her "persuading" Stephen back on crusade, and that Orderic's vision has a "ring of authenticity to it."<sup>301</sup> Yet this story is patently false. Orderic had no idea what happened in any conjugal bedroom, let alone one located about two-hundred miles from his monastery. He chose to portray Adela in this manner. Obviously neither he nor anyone else knew exactly what transpired in

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<sup>297</sup> Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 97.

<sup>298</sup> Orderic Vitalis, Book X, 325. *inter amicabilem coniugii blandimenta*

<sup>299</sup> Orderic Bk X, 325.

<sup>300</sup> Orderic Bk X, 325.

<sup>301</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 114.

Stephen and Adela's bedroom. Why does he choose to portray Adela thus? There was no political advantage to Orderic or his monastery to disparage her or her line. There would, however, have been sufficient reasons for educated observers of history to express their disapproval of women acting as power brokers in the new bureaucratically inclined political climate of the twelfth century, where scholars were more frequently becoming royal advisors.

### *A Twelfth-Century Ruler*

Writers could not ignore Adela or her activities. She was a bold, strong and intelligent woman whose calculated thinking and management saved her husband's rule as count, fortified her marital lands, protected her brother-in-law's lands, eased relations with the French crown, and placed one son in an archbishopric, one in a duchy, and one on a throne. Kimberly LoPrete's major work on Adela seeks to rehabilitate the countess's image by using other works in addition Orderic's. She argues that Adela was "one of the most prestigious, influential, and effective power brokers in the turbulent secular and ecclesiastical politics of the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries."<sup>302</sup> Looking at histories written both in England and on the continent, we meet a sharp and cunning woman who was admired by many and feared by some. A closer look at several of these histories shows us how Adela's powerful activities could be turned from positive and admiring to negatively comical.

After Stephen's succession to the Thibaudian lands, he seems to have consulted his wife frequently. She "joined with him in all aspects of comital administration and

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<sup>302</sup> LoPrete, Book on Adela.

took decisions independently besides implementing joint ones.”<sup>303</sup> LoPrete suggests that contemporaries viewed Adela as a “countess who shared the authoritative powers of comital lordship with her husband.”<sup>304</sup> By the time Stephen became count, Adela had given birth to at least one son. Perhaps her relative youth and her status as mother to the young heir led Stephen to consider his more advanced age and to include Adela in his ruling. She was a “virtual co-ruler” with Stephen as soon as he took control of his inheritance in 1089 and remained in a leadership position for the next thirty-one years.<sup>305</sup> Adela appears in all Stephen’s extant acts as Count, then later on as Stephen’s regent while he was on Crusade, as regent for her young son William, and as co-sponsor with her son Thibaud once he becomes count and until she retired to a monastery in 1120.<sup>306</sup>

Adela therefore was prominent in the politics of Blois and the Thibaudian lands for over thirty years. From 1089 to Stephen’s death in 1102, she was present for twenty-five charters, witnessing them as co-ruler.<sup>307</sup> In fact, Adela is involved in all but four of Stephen’s charters.<sup>308</sup> She also appears in ten charters during her regency for her son. After her eldest son William was removed from his father’s inheritance and her next son Thibaud was made count in 1107/8,<sup>309</sup> Adela was involved in twelve charters.

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<sup>303</sup> Jewell, *Women in Medieval England*, 95.

<sup>304</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 91.

<sup>305</sup> LoPrete, “The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois,” 578.

<sup>306</sup> See LoPrete, “The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois.”

<sup>307</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, see Appendix 1 for a listing of Adela’s charters, letters, and political appearances.

<sup>308</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, See Appendix 1.

<sup>309</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 218. LoPrete discusses why William was passed over for Thibaud. She states that William was respected, but seen as a poor prince and that he was less interested and less capable of being prince. One of LoPrete’s major contentions is that Adela did whatever necessary to create and maintain a strong county, going so far as to disinherit one son in favor of another. See also, LoPrete, “The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois.”

She granted privileges, heard legal cases, sold and gave away land, defends fugitives, and settled disputes. Adela's retirement to the abbey of Marcigny in 1120 marked a distinct slowdown in her political appearance in charters. After that point she was present in only two, but her letters increase from 1120 to her death in 1137. During her life, she influenced historians, poets, abbots, and archbishops. We have over thirty extant letters written to the countess and five letters from her. LoPrete writes: "the instances in which popes and prelates sought and received her support attest to the countess's position as a leading power broker in the international politics of her day."<sup>310</sup>

The majority of the letters to Adela come from Ivo of Chartres and Anselm of Bec and Canterbury. Adela and Stephen sided with Ivo in his election, and Adela had perhaps even recruited Ivo to Chartres.<sup>311</sup> Educated at the abbey of Bec and the provost of the abbey of Saint-Quentin,<sup>312</sup> Ivo would become an important ally for Adela. She "swore to protect him in his role," of her own volition, and without the presence of Stephen.<sup>313</sup> Ivo and Adela's relationship was generally good, but occasionally contentious. Adela's support of her cousin Adeliza over a charge of adultery brought Ivo, Anselm, and Adela into conflict.<sup>314</sup> Adela requested Ivo's aid in the contested union between her cousin Adelaide and Adelaide's husband, William of Breteuil. While we do not know the nature of her request, she may have been asking Ivo to help legitimize the marriage. This was a difficult problem for Ivo, as he had previously

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<sup>310</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 303.

<sup>311</sup> Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent*, 32-33.

<sup>312</sup> Bruce Brasington, "What Made Ivo Mad?: Reflections on a Medieval Bishop's Anger," in *The Bishop Reformed: Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. John S. Ott and Anna Trumbore Jones (Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), 211.

<sup>313</sup> LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 77.

<sup>314</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 212-213.

fought against the union of King Philip and Bertrade, going so far as to be imprisoned for a short time.<sup>315</sup> He responded coldly to Adela: “You do not look prudently enough to your own salvation or others’ nor do you consider how much danger or infamy threatens me over this.”<sup>316</sup> Although his conscience dictated against it, Ivo agreed to help Adela because of her long-standing support of him.<sup>317</sup> Sally Vaughn suggests that Ivo could only have helped Adela through his connection to Anselm and through Anselm, to King Henry I. And Henry did help Adelaide’s son Eustace, who eventually gained control of his father’s patrimony.<sup>318</sup> Eustace would also become a supporter of Adela’s brother, Henry I. Anselm intervened a second time with Ivo and Adela during a conflict over cathedral canons – Ivo wished to admit low born men of whom the countess disapproved. Ivo wrote that Anselm mediated between the clerks and the countess to arrange for a compromise between the two.<sup>319</sup>

Eadmer, the historian who gives us a bright picture of this period, wrote positively of Adela in his *Historia Novorum* and of her relationship with Anselm. Brought up from infancy in the abbey of Christ Church Canterbury, Eadmer was a tireless supporter of Canterbury and her causes.<sup>320</sup> Around 1093, Eadmer joined the household of Anselm when that eminent scholar joined the community.<sup>321</sup> Although deeply touched by Anselm, Eadmer does not seem to have inherited much of Anselm’s

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<sup>315</sup> Kimberly LoPrete, “Adela of Blois and Ivo of Chartres: Piety, Politics, and Peace in the Diocese of Chartres,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 14 (1991): 136.

<sup>316</sup> “Nec saluti vestrae vel illorum satiscommode providetis, neque quantum periculum vel quanta infamia mihi super hoc immineat aliquatenus praecavetis.” J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, vol. 162 (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg Press, 1844-1865; reprint, 1965), letter 5, col. 15.

<sup>317</sup> LoPrete, “Adela of Blois and Ivo of Chartres: Piety, Politics, and Peace in the Diocese of Chartres,” 136.

<sup>318</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 212.

<sup>319</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 213.

<sup>320</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 231.

<sup>321</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 232.

new humanistic methods. He remained with Anselm until his death, then served and traveled with the next archbishop, Ralph, until ill health had him return to Canterbury permanently.<sup>322</sup> Always concerned with the primacy of Canterbury over York, Eadmer never ceased being a monastic thinker in an increasingly secular world. His *Historia Novorum* was his history of Anselm's public duties and his characterization of both Anselm and the events surrounding the archbishop form an interesting and important whole for our study of Anglo-Norman relations at the turn of the century.

When Anselm left England because of Henry I's confiscation of Anselm's lands, Adela welcomed him in her castle. Although Henry was her brother, Adela seems to have genuinely liked the archbishop and requested his presence at her home. Eadmer tells us that Adela was "remarkably generous" to Anselm during his exile and travels.<sup>323</sup> Eadmer does not write of the first meeting between Adela and Anselm, which probably occurred during his trip to Rome in 1103, outside of mentioning Adela's generosity.<sup>324</sup> Anselm reports in a letter to the monks of Canterbury that he was received with "joy and honor" by Countess Adela during his travels.<sup>325</sup>

Eadmer tells us that she had been ill and this state prompted Anselm to acquiesce in her wishes. R. W. Southern expounds on the history surrounding this illness of Adela's. In 1105, Anselm was convinced that he would receive no help from the papacy in his struggle with Henry over the lands of Canterbury, and he decided to excommunicate the king without papal approval.<sup>326</sup> Anselm left his exile in Lyons "in

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<sup>322</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 237.

<sup>323</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 175.

<sup>324</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 207.

<sup>325</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 207.

<sup>326</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 176.

order to put himself in a position from which he could effectively excommunicate King Henry.”<sup>327</sup> Anselm’s most important meeting with Adela was to happen during his second exile from England. Anselm was seeking Henry’s excommunication for disobedience to papal commands just as Henry was poised to conquer Normandy from his brother. Living in Lyons, Anselm wrote for Pope Paschal’s intervention into the affair.<sup>328</sup> Paschal could not act quickly enough and Anselm, realizing “it was useless to wait any longer at Lyons for any help from Rome” decided to excommunicate Henry himself.<sup>329</sup> He left Lyons for Rheims, perhaps to give Henry time to reconsider his sins.<sup>330</sup> Adela, perhaps hearing of the battle between Anselm and her brother, quickly intervened. En route to Rheims, Anselm received word that Adela was ill at her castle in Blois and requesting his presence.

Instead of traveling to Rheims to excommunicate Henry, Anselm found himself on the road to Blois. It was in Anselm’s best interests to visit Adela, especially in her illness, as she had always supported him in word and deed. Additionally, Adela had chosen Anselm as her spiritual father.<sup>331</sup> If she truly lay dying, Anselm had little choice but to delay his visit to Rheims and travel to Blois. By the time they arrived in Blois, Adela had recovered and begged Anselm to stay several days. Eadmer had a special insight into this time, as he was traveling with Anselm and spoke as a witness to the events. Adela, he says, entertained them lavishly for several days.<sup>332</sup> During this time, Adela and Anselm held intense and personal conversations. Adela sought advice on the

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<sup>327</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 176.

<sup>328</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 243.

<sup>329</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 174.

<sup>330</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 244.

<sup>331</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 39.

<sup>332</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 175.



best way to live her life and pressed Anselm as to his departure from England. Anselm, we are told, did not spare Adela's familial feelings, but told her of his excommunication of her brother, the king of England. She was, we are told, greatly distressed at this knowledge and determined to end the conflict.<sup>333</sup> Vaughn rightly modifies the traditional account of Adela's illness as unproblematic and writes that Adela was clearly the intermediary through whom a compromise would be made.<sup>334</sup>

Obviously cured of her illness, Adela escorted Anselm to Chartres, where she knew her brother would shortly be. Eadmer mentions in an aside how Henry was conquering Normandy from his brother Robert and thus spent much of his time there rather than in England. Henry hears of their coming and sought to regain some power in the discussion, by changing the venue to suit himself. He wrote and asked Adela to bring Anselm to him in Normandy so that they could make peace. His sister complied and the three of them met in Laigle to talk over their differences. Henry acted overjoyed to see the archbishop, "having given up some of his former brusqueness," and after Adela mediated a discussion between them, all seemed well.<sup>335</sup> The king restored Anselm's revenues, and Anselm restored Henry to God's good graces.<sup>336</sup> At this point, Eadmer seems to forget Adela's presence, and that Anselm and Henry rarely left each other's sight. LoPrete suggests that Adela's intervention "prepared the way for Henry's lasting reconciliation with Anselm," yet Eadmer quickly bypasses the miracle

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<sup>333</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 175-176.

<sup>334</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 244.

<sup>335</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 176.

<sup>336</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought*, 177.

that Adela wrought.<sup>337</sup> Nevertheless, we can gather much information about her importance from this short episode.

Adela had chosen one of the most powerful churchmen of the day to be her confessor. He agreed to this service and, by Eadmer's accounting, he took this duty as seriously as he took all his ecclesiastical responsibilities. Anselm visited Adela in 1105, a time when she ruled Blois alone, as regent for her young sons. Stephen had been dead since 1102 and Adela ran the duchy after his death much as she had before it: wisely and formidably. Anselm flew not just to meet a woman in his spiritual care, but a strong leader of an important duchy, one he knew could help him in his exile from England.<sup>338</sup> Adela showered Anselm and his men with hospitality, showing her both in the role of a good Germanic leader who provided for guests and in the role of wife and mother who does much the same. Worried about her brother's rift with Anselm (for political or spiritual reasons, we do not know), Adela sought to bring Anselm and Henry to an accord. Her letter to her brother did not go unnoticed. Adela and her support of his new kingdom were important to Henry. Henry knew of Anselm's connection to Adela and perhaps he also saw the opportunity to end, or forestall, his feud with Anselm. Anselm did not travel to Chartres and Laigle alone – it was Adela who brought him to both cities. It was Adela who brokered the conciliatory meeting and it was Adela's connections that laid the foundation for an eventual reconciliation. Anselm acknowledged Adela's part in the compromise in a letter to Pope Paschal where he tells Paschal that "it happened that through the countess of Chartres, sister of the king, a

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<sup>337</sup> LoPrete, "The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois," 581.

<sup>338</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*.

woman faithful to the Church of God and obedient to your precepts, the king and I came together for speaking with a certain hope of a good outcome.”<sup>339</sup> In this episode, we see a woman of strength and power. One who had the ability to move men, both figuratively and literally.

While “woman as peacemaker” is an obvious historical role in both Christian and Germanic texts, Adela did more than merely suggest peace: she aggressively created it. Adela’s letters to both Anselm and Henry produced results. Anselm sped to her side, ready to minister to her needs; Henry acquiesced in her demands and merely changed the venue, hoping to regain the upper hand. Adela, it could be said, manipulated both men, in order to get the results she wanted: Anselm returned to England and Henry returned to the Church’s good graces.

One of the authors of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* mentions Adela. Begun by William of Jumièges, it was based on Dudo of Saint-Quentin’s *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*.<sup>340</sup> We have little information on William of Jumièges, except that he was a monk and archdeacon, born sometime around 1000.<sup>341</sup> Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigny both wrote redactions of the text and each interpolated and added information throughout the work. Elisabeth Van Houts’s fine translation places all three texts together where she separated William’s work from Orderic’s and Robert’s with typeface.<sup>342</sup> She does not, unfortunately, separate Orderic’s and Robert’s texts. Either Orderic or Robert wrote about Adela in their redaction of the *Gesta*

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<sup>339</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 245.

<sup>340</sup> *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, trans. Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, vol. 1 (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1992), xxxv.

<sup>341</sup> *Gesta Normannorum*, xxxi.

<sup>342</sup> *Gesta Normannorum*, cxxxi.

*Normannorum*. Based on the surrounding information included by Van Houts, the monk Robert of Torigny seems the most likely author.<sup>343</sup> Additionally, Robert may have been writing his version at the behest of the Empress Matilda, Henry I's daughter and Adela's niece.<sup>344</sup> While the Empress and Adela may not have been close (particularly considering Adela's son Stephen was the Empress's bitter rival, as we shall see in chapter five), Robert's positive mention of Adela could easily fall within his pro-female references that are scattered throughout his sections considering the Empress.

The section on Adela is brief, but significant. We are told that after Stephen's death, Adela "ruled the country nobly for some years" because her sons were too young to rule on their own.<sup>345</sup> Once her son came of age, Adela took the veil at Marcigny and lived the remainder of her life for God's glory. The author does not talk of Adela's relationship with Henry and Anselm. He does not mention her husband's disastrous crusading history nor her son's future as the king of England. Adela here stands on her own, without the normal supporting cast of father, husband, or son. In fact, the men around Adela fade into the background. Our focus is strictly on Adela and her ability to rule an important and large county. Despite this impressive record, we have here only this one mention of Adela, which is a bit disappointing. We do not see this author's take on Adela's relations with the famous Anselm, with her brother Henry, or her husband Stephen. Adela is definitely not erased in this text, but is diminished by only one mention of her life. If Robert of Torigny is our author for this section, his

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<sup>343</sup> Van Houts mentions Robert of Torigny and his autograph copy in the paragraph above the Adela reference, where Adela is briefly mentioned. *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni.*, trans. Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), n. 5, 276.

<sup>344</sup> *Gesta Normannorum*, lxxxvii.

<sup>345</sup> *Nobiliter rexit comitatum vil 2Gesta Normannorum*, 277.

minimization of Adela's life might have been a consequence of his relationship with her son's adversary, Empress Matilda.

Another clue to this character of Adela's rule is in Baudri of Bourgueil's poem dedicated to her. He called her worthy of the name of queen, adorned in virtue, learned in poetry and books. He declared that if custom did not prohibit it, the countess could bear arms herself. Baudri then richly described Adela's bedchamber in a long allegory of learning and power. Baudri ends his letter with a plea for a cope, a plea he reiterates in another letter dated to 1107, just before he is made archbishop of Dol, a position Kimberly LoPrete suggests Adela procured for Baudri.<sup>346</sup>

Our last positive endorsement of Adela and her rule comes from Hugh of Fleury, whom we met in the introduction. Although we have little information about it, his monastery was near Thibaudian lands and it had a "pronounced tradition of contact with England." The Abbo of Fleury visited England in the tenth century and the abbey had maintained contacts with English and Anglo-Norman monks ever since. Hugh himself dedicated one work, the *Tractatus* to King Henry I, a second book was dedicated to the Empress Matilda, and yet another to Adela herself.<sup>347</sup> Seen in this light, Hugh of Fleury had a decided interest in the affairs of Adela's family: one book dedicated to her brother, one book dedicated to her, and one book dedicated to her niece.<sup>348</sup>

Hugh of Fleury, according to modern historians, wrote two separate histories. The first, the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ends in 843. The second, the *Liber de modernis*

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<sup>346</sup> LoPrete, "The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois," 582, Monika Otter, "Baudri of Bourgueil, "To Countess Adela"," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 11 (2001): 61-141.

<sup>347</sup> Patrick Healy, *The Chronicle of Hugh of Flavigny: Reform and the Investiture Contest in the Late Eleventh Century* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006), 97.

<sup>348</sup> Karl Leyser, *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbors, 900-1250* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982), 264.

*regibus Francorum*, begins in 842 and ends in 1108, with Hugh's death not long after in 1118. The dates imply that Hugh believed the works to be connected, and the copyists of his text must have thought so as well, because these two texts were often copied together without any separation. In general, the earliest manuscripts begin with the Assyrians and end with Charlemagne. Interestingly, both of Hugh's original texts were initially dedicated to women: Adela and the Empress Matilda.<sup>349</sup> Hugh dedicated the first, and shorter, work to Adela, countess of Blois. A genealogy of the French kingdom and his *Liber de modernis regibus Francorum* was dedicated to Empress Matilda. Additionally, Hugh also dedicated his Chronicle to Ivo of Chartres, with the note that he had already sent the manuscript to Adela and wished for Ivo's comments. Hugh might have done this knowing Ivo's and Adela's close, although not always genial, relationship.

Yet, of the four twelfth-century copies of the chronicle available at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, only one is dedicated to Adela, the countess of Blois. This manuscript seems to be the oldest and the longest of the twelfth-century copies. His dedication to Adela is not unusual in its tenor or content. It is also not remarkable for a work to be dedicated to a noblewoman for, as we have seen, patronage was an important job of the nobility and of women in particular. Less usual, perhaps, is the type of work that Hugh dedicated to Adela. Hugh addresses a serious work about kingship and history to a noble lady inhabiting the lands next to his own, which by itself

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<sup>349</sup> Joseph Strayer, "Hugh of Fleury" in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1982), 319. He writes that Hugh composed an *Ecclesiastical History* in two versions, one of which was dedicated to Adela of Blois. He then writes that Hugh compiled a history of the kings of France, which was dedicated to Matilda.

offers an important indication of the connections between a work of history and patronage.

In his dedication, Hugh calls Adela his venerable countess and most serene lady.<sup>350</sup> He dedicated his book to her because she was “foremost among the many princes of our age, illustrious in your nobility, outstanding in your probity, and erudite in letters, which is nobility or great civilization.”<sup>351</sup> Hugh continues his pro-female stance in a preemptory defense regarding his dedication to a woman: “For the female sex should not be deprived of knowledge of deeper things, as we shall clearly declare in the following reading for truly great industry of mind and elegance of upright customs is found in women.”<sup>352</sup> Continuing, Hugh even rehabilitates Eve. He states that God rebuked both her and Adam and then rehabilitated humanity through the undefiled Mary, “Divine nature did not accomplish this but decreed that human nature would be restored to its original dignity. Whence it assumed flesh from woman so that human nature through the incarnation might have the ability to return to the beatitude it had lost by this blessing.”<sup>353</sup>

Hugh begins his manuscript with the ancients, the Assyrians and Scythians. The first passage, seen in the introduction, bears repeating here:

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<sup>350</sup> “venerabili comitisse, serenissima domina” Fleury, “*Historia Ecclesiastica*,” 349.

<sup>351</sup> “cum sitis nostri aevi multis preponenda proceribus, tum generositate preclara, tum probitate precipua, tum quoniam estis litteris erudita, quod est gentilitium sive civilitas magna.” Fleury, “*Historia Ecclesiastica*,” 349. Translations of Hugh’s prologue by Joan Ferrante. “*Epistolae*,” ed Joan Ferrante. (Place Published: Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning, Columbia University, 2007), <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/about.html>.

<sup>352</sup> “Sexus enim femineus non privatur rerum profundarum intelligentia, verum, ut in sequenti lectione lucide declarabimus, solet aliquando feminis inesse magna mentis industria et morum probatissimorum elegantia.” Fleury, “*Historia Ecclesiastica*,” 350.

<sup>353</sup> “Quod divina maiestas non pertulit, sed humanam naturam ad pristinam decrevit reformare dignitatis nobilitatem. Unde sumpsit de femina carnem, ut haberet in eius incarnatione ipsa humana natura, unde posset ad illam quam perdiderat beatitudinem eius beneficio remeare.” Fleury, “*Historia Ecclesiastica*.”

But the Scythians' origins were no less illustrious than their empire, nor were they celebrated more for the excellent qualities of their men than for those of their women. The men, indeed, founded the Parthian and Bactrian [nations], which we are discussing, while the women founded the kingdoms of the Amazons. Thus it is unclear to anyone pondering the past deeds of men and women which gender among them is the more illustrious.<sup>354</sup>

Although many medieval historians mention the Assyrians and the Amazons, Hugh's focus on female political power is unusual. Hugh continued with the Amazons, their battles against the Greeks, and their government at home. Scholars have suggested that the Greeks invented the Amazons as an inverse to their society, to help define the perfect Greek woman by creating a counter-ideal.<sup>355</sup> The idea of the Amazon may be a reflection of reality, as recent archeological research has shown that Scythian women (long associated with the Amazons) fought on horseback alongside their men.<sup>356</sup> The medieval scholar accepted Plato's view and believed the Amazons to have existed, a race apart, women who ruled and fought without men.<sup>357</sup> Whether they are figments, phantoms, or foes, Amazons have captured the imagination of readers since ancient times. Hugh does not denigrate the Amazonian matriarchal system. He merely passes over their accomplishments and losses while highlighting their rule and authority.

Hugh's epilogue continues his praise of Adela and women's intelligence: "But I dedicated such a compact and honorable volume not to uneducated princes, for whom the literary art is to be scorned, but deservedly to you, so that the monument of your

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<sup>354</sup> "Sed Scythae non minus illustria principia quam imperia habuerunt, nec virorum magis quam feminarum virtutibus claruere; quippe cum viri hos de quibus agimus Parthos Bactrianosque, feminae vero eorum Amazonum regna condiderint. Itaque res gestas virorum mulierumque considerantibus incertum est, uter apud eos illustrior sexus fuerit." Fleury, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 351.

<sup>355</sup> Deborah Levine Gera, *Warrior Women: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus* (Boston: Brill, 1997), 18, Josine Blok, *The Early Amazons* (Boston: Brill, 1995), 2.

<sup>356</sup> Gera, *Warrior Women: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus*, 90.

<sup>357</sup> Gera, *Warrior Women: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus*, 25.



name would never be tarnished by age, which is hostile to the memory of those who come later.”<sup>358</sup> Hugh of Fleury, monk and historian, sought Adela’s patronage and influence and he did so by flattering her political characteristics, which must have been well known in the region of the Thibaudian lands.

How then, does Adela change from being a powerful and well-respected lord to being a shrewish bold wife? The texts lead us to believe that Adela and Stephen had a cordial, if not loving, relationship. They show us that Adela held sway over secular and spiritual politics within her sphere, both with and without her husband. They show us a woman unlike Orderic’s shrewish wife. Adela is perceived by the monk Eadmer to be similar to the strong Germanic women our earlier monks seemed comfortable with. She ruled her territories, placed her sons and daughters in politically advantageous positions, and sought concord with Churchmen in her realm.

To understand this, we must look at the increasingly misogynistic milieu of the medieval author. In the early years of the twelfth century, a new intellectual misogyny was emerging. And this intellectual misogyny colors how women are presented in texts, because the men who wrote the texts were intimately involved in the milieu of the cathedral school and the educated cleric. Authors like Orderic, steeped in the culture of the twelfth century, shifted women out of intellectual spheres, out of political spheres, and out of mystical spheres. They did this because they were cementing these as places for men, and men only. They needed to define themselves in a way that made them dominant within these spheres, in a way that indeed made them their sole possessors. They needed to distance themselves from women and distance women from their new

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<sup>358</sup> Fleury, “*Historia Ecclesiastica*.”

world. Yet the schoolmen lived in the world, not separated from it. They lived with and around women so they could not completely discount women and their authority. While their texts could not be complete without the powerful women who inhabited history, these women became merely wives, lovers, sisters, and mothers, not the builders, fighters, and politicians they rightly were.

Adela of Blois was not the only Anglo-Norman woman who received this type of treatment. Her mother, Matilda of Flanders, and her sister-in-law, Matilda of Scotland, also had their power reduced within historical texts. As the first two Anglo-Norman queens, they hold a vital and important place in the historiography of early Anglo-Norman narratives. While not portrayed as shrewish as Adela was by Orderic, the stories of both these women also change related to the intellectual leanings of their writers. It is to them that we now turn.

## Chapter 4

### *Conquest Queens: Matilda of Flanders, Matilda of Scotland and their Historians*

This is a tale of two Matildas, queens of lands foreign to their birth, wives and mothers of powerful and cunning men, and the subjects of scribal pens. Today, we number Matilda of Flanders and Matilda of Scotland as two of the early Anglo-Norman queens, important women in an exciting historical period. While we might consider the records of these women are sparse, we easily recognize the men who wrote of them: Eadmer, Orderic Vitalis, William of Poitiers, William of Malmesbury, and John of Salisbury. Looking at these historical narratives gives us an opportunity to understand both these strong women and the influential men who wrote of them. It will also illustrate how the increasingly scholastic training both in and outside of the monasteries affected the place of these women within historical texts. As the eleventh century drew to a close and the twelfth century opened, teachers focused more heavily on dialectic and logic, even in staunchly monastic settings like Bec. Although these patterns of thought are more closely associated with the cathedral schools and later universities, their testing grounds were oftentimes to be found in the monastery, particularly in Normandy. Indeed, the Norman abbey of Bec arguably led the way in the development of dialectic thought.<sup>359</sup>

Recently, the number of monographs on the importance and place of Anglo-Norman women in medieval society has increased, many based on the writings of the men listed above. Sally Vaughn's *St Anselm and the Handmaiden of God* is a study in

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<sup>359</sup> Vaughn and Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning*, 7.

Anselm's interactions with women and how his letters with them helped him to create a picture of ideal relationships. The book is especially important for this study, since Anselm had long-standing friendships with both Matilda of Scotland and, as noted in the previous chapter, Adela of Blois.<sup>360</sup> Susan Johns' *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Anglo-Norman Realm* includes many details on familial and aristocratic power for this important period, including both how it was portrayed in manuscripts and how it may have actually played out.<sup>361</sup> Lois Huneycutt's biography, *Matilda of Scotland*, seeks to redress the veritable silence surrounding one of England's most influential queens.<sup>362</sup> These and other works create for us a sense of the characters and personalities of these notable women. Nevertheless, many of the books generally present these women according to one of two patterns: either as transferring legitimacy and power to men or else as wielding power themselves. I am interested in the temporal and intellectual moments when the narrative shifts, where a woman who exercised power becomes one who merely legitimates a man's power. Using stories about these women by the principal Anglo-Norman historians, we see how women's own agency slips and their purpose of legitimating male authority grows.

### *The Historians*

Before looking at the stories of Matilda of Flanders and Matilda of Scotland, however, we should first review the motivations and lives of the historians who wrote of them. Monastic historians wrote two of our works. These men were educated

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<sup>360</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 205-271.

<sup>361</sup> Susan M. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (New York, 2003), 30-53.

<sup>362</sup> Lois L. Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 1.

primarily within the monasteries and lived the majority of their lives within monastic walls. Despite their cloistered existence, monastic historians often wrote for the secular world and were intimately related to that world through familial, social, and economic ties. The various authors of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* wrote primarily from their monasteries and while their entries often take political turns, their outlook was fundamentally shaped by monastic life. Eadmer was one of the most prominent monastic historians of the twelfth century. Eadmer wrote his *Historia Novorum* around 1109 to showcase Anselm's political life as Abbot of Bec and Archbishop of Canterbury, as opposed to his personal life, which he described in the *Vita Anselmi*.

Three other men worked on the cusp between the school and the monastery, neither fully monastic nor fully scholastic historians, men whom we have already described as "liminal historians." These are men who were educated with scholastic ideas but lived within monastic settings, or men who were educated in the older monastic style but lived within secular scholastic settings. Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury, and Robert of Torigny are the liminal historians who wrote of these two women.

William of Malmesbury's and Orderic Vitalis's careers has been described above. The third liminal historian of this group, Robert of Torigny, entered the monastery at Bec around 1128 where he eventually became prior before leaving to become abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel in 1154.<sup>363</sup> He was, as he tells us, "an avid reader and collector of religious and profane books"<sup>364</sup> and we can assume he drank from the

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<sup>363</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, lxxvii.

<sup>364</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, lxxviii.

humanist and scholastic culture inherent at the monastery of Bec.<sup>365</sup> He also “took an active part in the secular business” of the two monasteries where he lived.<sup>366</sup> Robert fits into our category of liminal historians: trained in several aspects of scholastic methodology (the “profane books” he collected), living as a monk, and active in the secular world.

While Robert kept most of the *Gesta Normannorum* intact, he did add one final book, book viii, in place of the epilogue.<sup>367</sup> This book concerned the life of Henry I and it is here where we gain information about Matilda of Scotland. That Robert had some connections to Henry’s family is clear in a remark he makes concerning his wish to write a *Life* of St Margaret, which he dedicated to Matilda of Scotland, Margaret’s daughter and Henry’s wife.

Our two scholastic writers, William of Poitiers and John of Salisbury, form the final group of writers. William of Poitiers is one of our closest sources for the life of William the Conqueror. Born about 1020, William fought with Duke William in his campaigns in France.<sup>368</sup> From around 1045 to 1050, William studied at the cathedral school in Poitiers, itself an offshoot of the cathedral school of Chartres, a leading center of the new humanistic and scholastic studies.<sup>369</sup> William returned to Duke William’s household as his chaplain, who later appointed him as the archdeacon of Lisieux.<sup>370</sup> At the request of the Duke (now king of England), William wrote the *Gesta Guillelmi Ducis*

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<sup>365</sup> Vaughn and Rubenstein, *Teaching and Learning*, 6.

<sup>366</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, lxxviii.

<sup>367</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, lxxx.

<sup>368</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 99.

<sup>369</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 99.

<sup>370</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 99.

*Normannorum et Regis Anglorum* between 1073-1074.<sup>371</sup> William's studies in Poitiers place him squarely within the new milieu of the scholastic historian. Although concerned to edify his readers with "the spectacle of the transitory nature of earthly prosperity," his use of classic authors like Cicero, Livy, and Suetonius outweigh his biblical quotations.<sup>372</sup> Trained in the cathedral school, with its focus on the classics, William used Cicero over Augustine in his justification of William of Normandy's invasion of England.

William's placement at the ducal and royal courts gave him a unique perspective on his subject. Fulsome in his praises of his king, we must read William's work knowing his panegyrist tendencies that led him to produce "a biased, unreliable account of events."<sup>373</sup> Although missing its beginning and ending, the *Gesta Guillelmi* gives us information about Duke William's life from his early manhood until 1067. Within his text, we also gain information about Matilda of Flanders and her roles. William of Poitiers abandoned his work in 1071, possibly because his patron (and King William's half-brother) fell from favor at court.<sup>374</sup>

When we look at John of Salisbury, we see the schoolman who works for the court in a public and paid profession. He was a full-fledged scholastic historian. Educated in Paris under the famous lecturers of the day, John's life epitomizes the scholastic cleric. He was a cleric of the new order, an educated man who spent no time

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<sup>371</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 99.

<sup>372</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 100.

<sup>373</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 102.

<sup>374</sup> Davis/Chibnall state that Orderic writes William of Poitiers was "forced by unfavorable circumstances to abandon his work" possibly because of health reasons or a fall from favor. It seems he stopped writing when Odo fell from power since Bishop Odo of Bayeux may have been one of William of Poitiers's patrons. William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, translated by R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), xvi.

behind monastic walls. Despite working in and around the ecclesiastical realm, John spent his life in the temporal, secular world. John achieved what so many schoolmen wished for, an administrative position. He worked as a papal functionary, a secretary and counselor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and as a representative to the royal court. John wrote in order to record important events he felt would be forgotten, especially those events he had witnessed as a papal functionary. He lived and worked within the ecclesiastical and secular governments while writing political, historical, and philosophic works.<sup>375</sup> His only purely historical tract, the *Historia Pontificalis* was finished around 1164. These memoirs present to us the interesting and sometimes ironic viewpoint of a cleric educated in the mid-twelfth-century.<sup>376</sup> They are focused on John's life as a papal functionary, a representative at court, and his relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>377</sup> His memoirs were probably written from notes and diaries and are primarily eyewitness accounts, although he uses older chronicles (like Sigibert's) as a model. He focuses on political legitimacy and on the idea of the corporate state. There are women in John's works; however, these women have been reduced to a passive and pale shadow of their former selves. He is a good example of the intellectual, bureaucratic cleric who sees little need for the powerful and outspoken women of past histories.

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<sup>375</sup> Christopher Brooke, "John of Salisbury and His World," in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 2.

<sup>376</sup> H. Liebeschütz, *Medieval Humanism in the Life and Writings of John of Salisbury* (London: Warburg Institute, 1980), 12.

<sup>377</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, "John of Salisbury as Historian," in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 169.



All of these men's histories of the Anglo-Norman world are populated by a variety of influential and important women, women like Matilda of Flanders and Matilda of Scotland. Yet when reading of them, their prominence and authority fades from view in the later scholastic histories. Where the Matildas exert power in the works of historians like Eadmer and Orderic, they lose their active status for men like William of Malmesbury and by the time John of Salisbury is writing, the women have almost been erased from the sources entirely. Viewing several important events in each woman's life shows us how their history was changed and rewritten by monastic and scholastic historians. As we can see, it is not a question of women fading from the record over time, as these histories do not necessarily progress sequentially. Rather, it is a new and ascendant way of thinking that edges the women from the manuscript pages.

*Matilda of Flanders c. 1031 - 1083*

Matilda of Flanders had every right to be worried the day she set foot on England's shores in 1068. Her husband was still fighting for the lands he had just conquered and had not been long in Normandy in the past two years. On one of his infrequent visits, she became pregnant again, and it was heavy with child that she stepped off the boat. Pregnant and in a potentially hostile country, Matilda had come to claim a crown that was hers by no right other than conquest. Indeed, William of Poitiers writes that William had refused the crown when it was first offered to him

because he wished his wife to be crowned with him.<sup>378</sup> Janet Nelson writes that the coronation ceremony was bilingual, so that both Normans and English would understand and accept the rite, but this triggered a riot, with William's guards panicking and setting the church on fire would have given Matilda pause.<sup>379</sup> And months later, as her husband jaunted across the ever-greening hills, did she wish for her own women and walls while she lay confined in childbirth? Was she happy upon her return to Normandy? We know so little of the workings of Matilda's life.<sup>380</sup> We have very little information about her public persona and the points of her rule, let alone any knowledge of her private life. We know she came to England only once, in 1068, which suggests William needed her in Normandy managing his duchy while he himself was busy trying to subdue England.<sup>381</sup> She stayed less than a full year before returning to Normandy and she never left that familiar territory again. While in England, she was consecrated as William's queen and bore him one of four sons, Henry. In Normandy, she helped rule for her absent husband, signing charters with his other Norman lords. She was to bear William nine children, two of whom would be kings of England.

Three examples will serve to show us how Matilda of Flanders' status changed from active to passive, how she moved from being portrayed as a competent ruler to merely a royal mother. The first example concerns Matilda's marriage to William, the

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<sup>378</sup> William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, trans. Marjorie Chibnall and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 148-149.

<sup>379</sup> Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, 395.

<sup>380</sup> While there is no monograph on Matilda of Flanders, historians of William the Conqueror often dedicate space to his wife. David Charles Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact Upon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), Appendix C, Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *The Saxon & Norman Kings* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1963), 165. He writes of their faithful marriage and her bloodline, Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 49-51. She has several pages on Matilda of Flanders, one of the longest pieces on this queen in modern sources.

<sup>381</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Marjorie Chibnall, Reprint ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968-2003), ii, 208-210.

second her life in Normandy while William invaded England, and the third her coronation as queen of England.

His adolescence behind him, William the Bastard needed to solidify his hold over a truculent country and an aristocratic spouse would help. Urged by his counselors, he agreed to find a suitable wife. Many women in northern Europe would have been available for William, but he sought a wife who would lend him her bloodline as well as her womb. William approached Baldwin of Flanders after hearing of Baldwin's young and reportedly beautiful daughter. Whether physical beauty or not, by virtue of her relation to the kings of France, Matilda had the added inner beauty of royal blood, and her father was soon receiving William's envoys. Baldwin was said to be "well-pleased" with the offer and escorted his daughter himself to William at the town of Eu.

The liminal historian Orderic Vitalis writes of this marriage in detail. His references to Matilda are not long nor are they terribly precise. We learn very little about her which, considering Orderic's verbosity, is surprising and disappointing. Orderic tells us that the marriage was opposed at the council of Rouen, almost certainly with an accusation of consanguinity. The couple ignored the restriction, and Orderic is careful to point out that William married Matilda "legally as his wife," in all probability to counter William's own illegitimate status and his resulting inheritance problems.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, translated by Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, volume II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 131.

It has been pointed out by scholars such as David Douglas that this marriage encountered significant roadblocks.<sup>383</sup> Douglas notes that Pope Leo IX forbade the marriage at the Council of Rheims in 1049. Christopher Brooke adds that despite the ban, the marriage was celebrated in 1051, without the pope's consent.<sup>384</sup> Scholars are uncertain as to why the marriage was prohibited. The most commonly asserted reason was consanguinity: either because of marriages by Baldwin of Flanders or Richard of Normandy, or because of their common descent from Rollo.<sup>385</sup> Brooke cites Lanfranc's denouncement of the marriage as a sin and states that the sin may have been consanguinity through marriage ties, as he could find no blood ties forbidding the match.<sup>386</sup> Orderic Vitalis states that many religious people accused William of marrying a relative. According to Orderic, William took this charge seriously, no doubt because, as the bastard child of a duke who had had to fight to preserve his inheritance, he understood the importance of a legitimate marriage. William and Matilda sent envoys to the pope asking his opinion in the matter. It was not until 1059 that Pope Nicholas II sanctioned their marriage but he induced both William and Matilda to set up monasteries as reparation. Orderic writes that the pope "pointed out that if he were to order a divorce this might cause a serious war between Flanders and Normandy."<sup>387</sup> He ordered penance for the couple and absolved them of any wrongdoing. They set up two

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<sup>383</sup> See Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, Appendix C, where he outlines possible arguments against the marriage.

<sup>384</sup> Brooke, *The Saxon and Norman Kings*, 136.

<sup>385</sup> Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, 417-426.

<sup>386</sup> Brooke, *The Saxon and Norman Kings*, 137. According to the genealogy tables in David Douglas's *William the Conqueror*, Matilda of Flanders and William of Normandy were not related by blood. William's paternal aunt Eleanor was married to Baldwin IV, count of Flanders, after his marriage to Ogiva, by whom he had Baldwin V, Matilda's father. So, Matilda's step-mother was William's aunt making them, in turn, step-cousins. Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, table 1, 418.

<sup>387</sup> *Gesta Normannorum*, 147.

monasteries in Caen where offices were said for their souls--William's in honor of St Stephen and Matilda's in honor of the Holy Trinity.<sup>388</sup> Orderic mentions Matilda's continued agency by writing that Matilda set up this monastery of Sainte-Trinité at Caen in response to the Pope's sanction. Matilda was buried there at her death, and their daughter Cecilia was given as oblate when the monastery was dedicated.<sup>389</sup>

Elizabeth Van Houts states that "there is no contemporary evidence to support Orderic's story" and cites both Gibson and Bates to back her contention.<sup>390</sup> She then writes that the proposed marriage was discussed at the Council of Rheims in 1049 and that there was a "prohibition of the projected marriage, on unknown grounds." Indeed, the Rheims report cites no explicit reason for the ban.<sup>391</sup> Despite the uncertainty here, a look at both Matilda's family tree and an area map suggests why some may have opposed the nuptials. Matilda's paternal grandmother was Eleanor, a legitimate daughter of Richard, duke of Normandy. William's father Robert was Eleanor's brother. This made Matilda and William second cousins and too closely related for marriage.<sup>392</sup> Peter Damian, the philosopher, cleric, and reformer of the late eleventh century, helped to define marriage consanguinity for Pope Alexander II. He delineated it as those people related within the seventh degree—Matilda and William would appear indeed to meet this criteria.<sup>393</sup> Others may have opposed the wedding based on territory.

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<sup>388</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, trans. Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 495.

<sup>389</sup> Ordericus Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, trans. Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts; (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

<sup>390</sup> *Gesta Normannorum*, 148.

<sup>391</sup> Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, 76.

<sup>392</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 141.

<sup>393</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, 140-141.

Flanders butts up against the dukedom of Normandy and linking those two areas together effectively cuts off the Île de France from the English Channel and any major sea access.

Despite these problems, the marriage did occur sometime between 1050 and 1051.<sup>394</sup> William linked himself to Flanders and to France, as Matilda's mother was Adela, a daughter of Robert II, king of France. Additionally, he solidified his hold on Normandy as Matilda had a (very) distant right to those lands as a granddaughter of Richard. This tactic, of using female bloodlines to expand and justify territorial rule, would hold William in good standing throughout his career.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* adds a few details to Orderic's account. The Chronicle's mention of Matilda is succinct, like most of its entries. That this author chose to mention her at all is interesting, considering how most of the Anglo-Saxon monks who wrote the chronicle could be excused for "forgetting" any Norman. Matilda is in the Worcester manuscript, under the 1067 entry. We are told that after Easter, "the Lady Matilda came to this land, and Archbishop Aldred consecrated her queen in Westminster on Whit Sunday."<sup>395</sup> Directly following this, we see William leave to quell an uprising in the north and Matilda is soon forgotten.

Dissecting this short passage, we see two notable points. One is the mention of Matilda by name with the framing "Lady" before it. Few women were written of by name and fewer still with an appellation equivalent to "Lady." The use of this title allows us to see that Matilda was respected, at least for her birth if not her character—

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<sup>394</sup> Again, a reading of Douglas' appendix gives several good reasons, including Robert's birth, as reasons why the wedding was probably celebrated in 1050/51. Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, Appendix C.

<sup>395</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Michael James Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), 202.

indeed, few Anglo-Saxons would have had any direct knowledge of her since she spent so little time in their country. The second important point is her consecration. Like previous and future queens of England, the archbishop at Westminster crowned Matilda. The act made her formally England's queen. It shows us that by 1068 William felt comfortable enough with his seizure of England to fetch his consort and have her crowned. Also by this time, William sought to consolidate his rule over the English; and by crowning his wife he guaranteed an uneasy populace that he was their king to stay. This was important enough for William that he bade his wife come to England despite the advanced nature of her pregnancy. This act was clearly more of a public relations gesture than a reflection of political reality, as William immediately thundered towards rebellious lords in the north.

Matilda is quickly forgotten in the chronicle and does not receive mention again until her death. Once more, the Worcester manuscript gives us our information. It notes, in 1083, that Matilda died on November 2. Here, she is described as "King William's queen." It is perhaps surprising, given what we know of the importance of the office of queen in England, that the chronicler describes Matilda only in conjunction with her husband, and not as an independent entity. With the sheer number of Mauds and Matildas in the eleventh century, it was wise to observe which Matilda died. However, can we take away a slightly pejorative tone from this note? That Matilda is merely William's queen and not England's? Two other queens who died during their reign, Margaret of Scotland and Matilda II, are not named in conjunction with their men. Both these women are named only as Queen, without any other distinction. Perhaps the monks knew that many would recognize Margaret and Matilda II for what

they were and felt the need to explain Matilda I's person a little more carefully. This would be understandable, as Matilda only visited England once, to accept her consecration as queen. Perhaps it is a note of resentment that she was indeed William's queen rather than England's—an admittedly speculative observation, but not unreasonably so.

Moving forward, with the scholastic historian William of Poitiers, it is Matilda's bloodlines that become paramount. "Her wise and blessed mother had nurtured in her daughter a lineage many times greater even than her paternal inheritance. If you ask about her mother's lineage, you should know that her mother's father was Robert, king of Gaul, who, son and grandson of kings, was himself the progenitor of kings."<sup>396</sup> According to William, the marriage was quickly performed and the happy couple soon moved on to Rouen.

Looking at Matilda's marriage through William's eyes, we see an academically minded historian reducing her personality to a point of royal lineage. The scholastic John of Salisbury diminishes her even further by doing no more than mention Matilda's children and citing only William's name when he does so. Later scholastics like Roger of Wendover and Henry of Huntington write similarly of Matilda: she is a mother of future leaders only, and hardly even a wife to William.

A more compelling example revolves around Matilda as a respected leader who works with her husband, Duke William of Normandy. It is with the scholastic, and panegyrist for William the Conqueror, William of Poitiers where we see our first

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<sup>396</sup> *Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, trans. Marjorie Chibnall and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 33.



illustration of Matilda's administrative agency. As William was close to the ducal family, he may have had intimate knowledge of Matilda's authority. He writes that Matilda ruled Normandy in William's stead while he was invading England. "For its government had been carried on smoothly by our lady Matilda, already commonly known by the title of queen, though as yet uncrowned."<sup>397</sup> The number of charters in Normandy signed first by Matilda bears witness to this assertion.<sup>398</sup>

Orderic, who makes heavy use of William of Poitiers, adds the detail that Matilda was ruling on behalf of William the Conqueror's eldest son Robert, about twelve years old at the time of the Conquest. The Poitiers manuscript does not mention Robert, although we can assume that he had a role in governing, and this position gained in importance as he aged, as his name becomes linked with his mother's in several charters. Additionally, Robert signed charters while Matilda was in England for her coronation in 1068. Another aspect of Matilda's strength, unseen in the chronicles, is her financial power. Van Houts posits that Matilda may have provided William his flagship for the invasion of England, based on the ship list.<sup>399</sup> Additionally, she funded her son Robert's exile and kept a separate staff in her own name while in Normandy.<sup>400</sup> It seems significant that most chroniclers do not bring up these items. Orderic and William of Malmesbury are the only two historians who mention Matilda ruling for William. William of Malmesbury has only the king's officers left in charge in

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<sup>397</sup> *Gesta Guillelmi*, 179.

<sup>398</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 51.

<sup>399</sup> Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, "The Ship List of William the Conqueror," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1987): 159-183.

<sup>400</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 50.

Normandy,<sup>401</sup> although he does mention Matilda signing charters. The scholastically trained William of Poitiers mentions Matilda had “carried on” the government of Normandy “smoothly.”<sup>402</sup> The scholastic, John of Salisbury, never mentions Norman government after William has conquered England.

Matilda’s coronation is the third point where we see authors erasing her history. Few historians even write of the momentous occasion. While William of Poitiers does not write of the coronations, he does, as noted, give us an insight into Matilda’s marriage and her importance to her husband with regards to William’s coronation. He tells us that William at first refused to be crowned king in England because of Matilda’s absence. He wished her to be crowned with him because he had learned, William tells us, that marriage vows were holy and he respected both them and his wife.<sup>403</sup>

Nevertheless, our best source for Matilda’s coronation is our liminal chronicler, Orderic. Her husband, he writes, summoned Matilda to England during the second year of his reign. On Whitsunday, the archbishop of York, who had crowned William, anointed Matilda as queen consort. Although William’s coronation followed the English rites, the ritual was changed when the congregation was asked to accept William as its king.<sup>404</sup> Additionally, when Matilda was crowned, the archbishop said God had placed her over the people and that she shared royal dominion with her husband, another addition to the English rite.<sup>405</sup> Our only major source for this surprising event is the liminal historian Orderic. Despite his often negative portrayal of

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<sup>401</sup> *William of Malmesbury’s Gesta Regum Anglorum*, trans. Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 288.

<sup>402</sup> “egerat in gubernaulo domina nostra Matildis” *Gesta Guillelmi*, 178-179.

<sup>403</sup> “secum uelle coniugem suam coronari” *Gesta Guillelmi*, 148-149.

<sup>404</sup> Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, 248.

<sup>405</sup> Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, 249.

women (as we saw with Adela of Blois), Orderic could also write with conviction of a woman's influence, if it was, like Matilda's, also meant to support her husband's political power. Even so, no other author considers it important enough to write of it.<sup>406</sup>

These short examples serve to show us how the history of Matilda's active political life could be curtailed. Whereas the monastic historians show her as an involved and effective leader, by the time John of Salisbury is writing, Matilda has been reduced to side notes. She is merely William's wife and mother to his children. The scholastic historians John of Salisbury and Henry of Huntingdon only mention Matilda twice in each of their texts: once when listing William's children, and once at her death and burial at William's monastery of St. Stephen's in Caen, rather than at her own church of the Holy Trinity, also in Caen, and where, in fact, she actually was buried.<sup>407</sup> When reading of Matilda in the works of these more scholastically minded historians, we are to understand her place in the grand scheme of William's legitimacy as a king and as a man. Matilda herself is not important here, merely the royal and legitimate blood she brings to his children.

#### *Matilda of Scotland c. 1080 - 1118*

Like her predecessor, Matilda of Scotland left her natal land to become queen of England. England had been without a queen for some time, as Matilda of Flanders preceded William in death and William II had no queen. Matilda of Scotland's ties to England were closer than Matilda of Flanders'; in fact, she was more closely related to the English crown than her husband, King Henry I. And like Matilda of Flanders,

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<sup>406</sup> Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, 376.

<sup>407</sup> Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 503.

nobles and ecclesiastics debated Matilda of Scotland's marriage. The most famous churchman of her day, Anselm of Canterbury, consecrated her marriage and crown on the same day. Yet getting to the church door proved difficult for Matilda of Scotland and the incident gives us interesting insights into women's authority in the twelfth century.

Looking at Matilda of Scotland, we see a shift in attitude towards women and power and with her marriage to Henry I. Here we can track Matilda's diminishing authority. These are the undisputed points: in November 1100 Matilda and Henry married, directly after Henry's coronation.<sup>408</sup> Their marriage had been opposed by several of his lords based on consanguinity and Matilda's childhood in a nunnery. Archbishop Anselm heard the case, judged in favor of the marriage, performed the wedding, and consecrated Matilda as queen. It is a simple anecdote, told in several lines, yet it is also convoluted and complicated.<sup>409</sup>

Our first and earliest work, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, tells us the briefest of tales. In it, the "king took as his wife Maud, daughter of King Malcolm of Scotland and the good queen Margaret, King Edward's relative, of the rightful royal family of England. And on the Feast of St Martin, she was given to him in Westminster with great honor, and the archbishop Anselm married her to him and afterwards consecrated her

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<sup>408</sup> Matilda was born an Edith, named for a queen of England. She later changed her name to Matilda upon moving south. The name Maud, a derivative of Matilda, is often seen in historical sources. I will refer to her as Matilda of Scotland or Matilda II.

<sup>409</sup> See Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 183-190 for an excellent account of the varied problems surrounding this event.

queen.”<sup>410</sup> Like so many of the chronicle entries, this short passage must be unpacked for us to understand its many subtleties.

We learn first that Maud (a version of the Germanic Matilda) was an important noble: the daughter of a king and related to the last Anglo-Saxon king, Edward the Confessor. The words “rightful royal family” may hint, and none too subtly, that the writer felt Henry lacked the proper pedigree and with this marriage, Henry may be giving his conquering clan’s name much needed legitimacy. Modern scholars follow this line. according to Christopher Brooke, Henry married Matilda to appease the English people, since she was a niece of Edgar Atheling.<sup>411</sup> Henry was, he writes, giving the “shadow of legitimacy to [his] usurpation.”<sup>412</sup> Additionally, Sally Vaughn points out that Anselm performed the marriage, which he as archbishop should have done, but considering the possible problems with the marriage, his performance indicates the value of this marriage to both political and religious leaders.<sup>413</sup> Her wedding was an important event and held at Westminster, presumably so that she could easily be crowned queen after the ceremony. Finally, we can see her importance to the chronicler in the mere mention of her name, as Henry’s is not seen in this passage at all. The chronicle also later notes her death and burial at Westminster in 1117.

We get little impression of Matilda as a person from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. There is little sentimentality or intensity to this passage that might suggest how our chronicler felt about Matilda, or even about Henry. Also, we get no suggestion that the

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<sup>410</sup> Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 236.

<sup>411</sup> Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *From Alfred to Henry Iii, 871-1272*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1961), 160.

<sup>412</sup> Brooke, *From Alfred to Henry Iii, 871-1272*, 192.

<sup>413</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 186.

legality of the marriage had been questioned. Our only indication is the chronicler's insistence on Matilda's lineage and its importance to England as whole.

Our longest report on the marriage comes from the monastic historian Eadmer, our best placed if not always reliable witness to the events.<sup>414</sup> Eadmer notes Matilda's parentage, including her relationship to the old kings of England. Working closely with Anglo-Norman culture and the court, Eadmer's version steers clear of the "rightful royal family" line prominent in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; however, he does list more completely Matilda's relations to Edward, Edmund, Ethelred, and Edgar. In addition, his work gives us our fullest record of Matilda's pre-marital strife and its resolution. For example, Eadmer seems to state that Anselm had little knowledge about Matilda prior to her marriage to Henry, when he had quite a bit of knowledge. Anselm had been involved in this case since Matilda was thirteen when he had suggested marriage to William Rufus, who then considered the young Matilda, already in a nunnery. In fact, Anselm sent letters to the Bishop of Salisbury regarding her possible marriage to Alan the Red. Eadmer's portrayal of Anselm occasionally led him to bend events to fit his framework of Anselm.<sup>415</sup> Here Matilda is actively concerned with her case, appearing before Anselm at least twice and pleading her story with him on both occasions. She is calm and appreciative of the archbishop, humbly seeking his counsel, and petitioning on her own behalf. She is not represented by a father, brother, cousin, nor any other male relative. And Henry, her groom, does not factor in this narrative at all. He does not

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<sup>414</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 185.

<sup>415</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 185-186.

vindicate his bride nor attack his detractors. And it was a maiden who defended, countered, and politicked in order to obtain her desired outcome.

The major problem with Matilda's and Henry's marriage stemmed from an incident in Matilda's youth. As a child, Matilda and her sister had been sent to her aunt, Christina, a nun at the abbey of Romsey. Soon thereafter, the sisters moved to Wilton Abbey. Both Wilton and Romsey were centers of female learning and literacy, prior to and after the Conquest.<sup>416</sup> Matilda herself approached Anselm to tell of her childhood. She explained to the archbishop that she had indeed worn a veil, but only at the insistence of her aunt and only to protect her chastity from the rampaging Normans.<sup>417</sup> Hermann of Tournai suggested that one ravaging Norman was William Rufus, who had sought a young bride at Wilton.<sup>418</sup> Matilda stated that she chafed under the veil and tore it from her head at every opportunity, even going so far as to stomp on the headgear. Anselm needed to handle this matter subtly, "with great finesse" as he had not once, but twice induced a woman, Gunnhild, to return to the abbey for having been seen in the veil.<sup>419</sup> She twice left a nunnery for advantageous marriages and was twice ordered by Anselm back into the nunnery.<sup>420</sup> Following accepted Anglo-Saxon legal tradition,<sup>421</sup> Matilda produced witnesses and took an oath, again all without a proxy. After hearing the testimony, Anselm left the decision up to "the great men of the realm."<sup>422</sup> Vaughn

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<sup>416</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 19.

<sup>417</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 126.

<sup>418</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 18.

<sup>419</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 199.

<sup>420</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 199. She was not well-suited to a nun's life and did manage to escape with a third marriage and a move outside of England.

<sup>421</sup> Henry Adams and Ernest Young Henry Cabot Lodge, James Laurence Laughlin, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905).

<sup>422</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 128.

suggests that Anselm acted here with prudence and saved himself from scandal by allowing the nobles to make the decision.<sup>423</sup> After hearing their judgment, Anselm stated that Matilda could legally dispose of her own person and was not to be bound by dedications and vows that she had not personally been involved with.<sup>424</sup>

Continuing in his narrative, Eadmer writes that several days later, Anselm married Matilda and Henry at the doors of the church where he repeated his judgment and asked anyone in the crowd to declare any other contrary findings. The crowd “cried out with one accord that the matter had been rightly decided,” and the marriage was finalized.<sup>425</sup> Eadmer closes his account citing his own eyewitness authority: he himself was present, hearing and seeing it all. All the while, he gives us a very interesting account, with a strong female protagonist who is not just willing, but able, to stand on her own feet and clear-headedly present her own legal case.

The next narrative account of Matilda’s time in the nunnery comes to us from another monastic historian, Orderic Vitalis. Marjorie Chibnall ascribes Orderic’s story to “a remark attributed by Eadmer.”<sup>426</sup> Although a short interlude in a massive history, this version of the tale does provide us with some new and interesting information. He begins Matilda’s story with a brief outline of Margaret, her mother, and Margaret’s good deeds. Orderic describes her as eminent for both her birth, where she was descended from a long line of kings, and her virtue, which she used for the benefit of churches and the poor. He tells us that Margaret sent her daughters to her sister, a nun, after the death of her husband. Margaret’s wish was for them to be brought up with

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<sup>423</sup> Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 200.

<sup>424</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 128.

<sup>425</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, 131.

<sup>426</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vi, 273.



sound doctrine and educated in both letters and morals.<sup>427</sup> Never does he say that either girl took vows within the nunnery at Romsey (the name of the monastery, another detail omitted by Eadmer). In fact, he insinuates quite the opposite, writing that when they reached “marriageable age” the pious sisters looked to God for help in choosing their mates, bereft as they were of family.<sup>428</sup> Matilda, he writes, received two proposals for her hand before accepting the offer from King Henry of England, including possibly one from Henry’s older brother, William Rufus.<sup>429</sup>

Orderic’s version of the marriage is brief to the point of terseness. He writes: “When Henry became king of England he wedded this maiden, and had by her Prince William and the Empress Matilda.”<sup>430</sup> He quickly dispatches Matilda’s sister and returns to his narrative of Scottish politics. Never does he hint at any controversy surrounding the marriage, at Anselm’s involvement, nor at the problems these caused the Empress. Yet by his treatment of Matilda and the marriage, we can see that Orderic sides with Eadmer and Anselm in judgment of the case. A holy and well-connected woman raised Matilda and she herself was nurtured with religious morals. Nevertheless, once of the proper age, Matilda was expected to contract a marriage and leave the nunnery; this would only be acceptable if she had not taken vows. Marjorie Chibnall posits that Orderic knew of Anselm’s decision, yet he never notes it. Other authors, indeed most, who write on these topics mention the controversy and Anselm’s adjudication. Why Orderic chose to leave this out is perplexing. Perhaps he felt this to be of little importance in Anselm’s great life, or perhaps he felt it did not reflect well on

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<sup>427</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vi, 273.

<sup>428</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, iv, 273.

<sup>429</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 23.

<sup>430</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, iv, 273.

Anselm. It is odd for it to be missing in Orderic's account, especially as Eadmer does write of this episode.

The liminal historian William of Malmesbury writes a different version of Matilda's marriage. His primary description of the wedding is brief; however, he does enlighten us with tales of the controversy. Nevertheless, Matilda's power is already slipping away with Malmesbury's writings. The most important aspect of the queen is now her bloodline. As we shall see, William does not describe her approaching Anselm, taking an oath, or defending herself. She is not an active participant in his narrative. Instead, she needs proctors to speak for her and assure the authorities of her worthiness. Her most important attributes are her royal heritage and her children, not her eloquent speeches.

Giving us an account of her life and death, William begins with her lineage and relations to both the kings of Scotland and England. He then recounts her childhood in the nunnery where he alludes to the one action he allows Matilda: that she chose to conceal herself from her father's proposed marriage alliances. "Wherefore, in order to have a cover for refusing an ignoble alliance, which was more than once offered by her father, she wore the garb indicative of the holy profession."<sup>431</sup> Unlike Orderic, who has a mother placing Matilda in the nunnery for an education, and Eadmer, who has an aunt protecting Matilda's chastity with the veil, Malmesbury has Matilda hiding from her father to wait, we assume, for a noble alliance. This alliance does happen when Henry chooses to take Matilda to his bed.

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<sup>431</sup> *Gesta Regum*, 453. This is not unlike old Roman martyr stories: young girls secretly adopt Christianity and refuse marriage proposals, to the consternation of their family; obviously this is not the same, but it might suggest why William is comfortable with that aspect of the story: it's the sort of thing Christian women do.

Here, Malmesbury writes, the matter became controversial. Without naming Anselm, William tells us that no one, not even the archbishop, would consent to the marriage until witnesses assured everyone that Matilda had never taken vows and that she had only worn the veil to protect herself from suitors.<sup>432</sup> Matilda needs witnesses, presumably male witnesses, to state her case and defend her right to marry. Then, without skipping a beat, he tells us that Matilda bore two children, one of either sex, and lived chastely except for sharing the king's bed. Our focus is placed on Matilda as a conduit of royal bloodlines, as one who transfers power, not one who holds power.

Robert of Torigny also fails to mention the opposition to Matilda as a bride. His account of the marriage is concise but positive. He focuses on Henry I, who caused "great rejoicing to many"<sup>433</sup> because he was the son of both a king and a queen (Matilda of Flanders and William I) and had been born and educated in England. This author states that Henry wed in order to lead a life according to the law, which we can presume points to earlier sexual indiscretions on Henry's part. When turning to Matilda, he places her in direct context with her more famous relatives: her mother, Margaret, and daughter, Empress Maud.

Matilda is lauded for her "holiness and learning, as well secular and spiritual,"<sup>434</sup> and the author alludes to the life of her mother Margaret for those wishing further information. Additionally, he praises Maud (Matilda's daughter and the future Empress of Germany) as having her mother's name and good qualities.<sup>435</sup> Regarding

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<sup>432</sup> *Gesta Regum*, 453.

<sup>433</sup> *History of King Henry I*, in *Church Historians of England*, translated by Rev. Joseph Stevenson, vol. V (London: Seeleys, 1858), 10.

<sup>434</sup> *History of King Henry I*, 10.

<sup>435</sup> *History of King Henry I*, 10.

the actual wedding ceremony, he repeats most of the information contained in earlier chronicles, including that the wedding occurred on St. Martin's day (November 11) and was performed by Anselm. Anselm, he tells us, that man of holy memory, married Matilda to the noble king Henry and on the same day crowned her with the royal diadem.<sup>436</sup>

The only other mentions of Matilda in this chronicle concern her death<sup>437</sup> and a strange economic arrangement between Henry, Robert, and Matilda. Robert returned from Jerusalem angry that his brother had claimed England after William II's death, before Robert had had a chance to press his own rights to the crown. Robert, therefore, readied a fleet bound for England. Henry in turn raised a body of troops, but the two brothers were spared from actual combat by an economic arrangement: the king would pay Robert 4000 marks of silver as one-time-payment. The count, in return, remitted a like sum to "queen Matilda, his brother's wife."<sup>438</sup> This odd treaty was eventually broken and Robert taken prisoner by his brother in 1106. Never do we hear why Robert gave the money, why it was Matilda who received it, or what she did with the money, if she received it at all. Despite these short mentions, our picture of Matilda conveys the same sense as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: an educated princess, a skilled diplomat, and a worthy political partner married to a noble and worthy king by the famous Anselm.

Another important narrative on Matilda's suitability, or unsuitability, appears in our scholastic historian, John of Salisbury. Despite John's link to the church at

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<sup>436</sup> *History of King Henry I*, 10.

<sup>437</sup> Matilda's demise consists of half a line and in the second half, Henry marries his second wife Adeliza. Despite the literary proximity, Henry's second marriage happens in 1120, three years after Matilda's death.

<sup>438</sup> *History of King Henry I*, 11

Canterbury and his connection to Anselm, whose biography John wrote as part of an unsuccessful effort to get Anselm canonized, he never mentions Anselm or his place within the controversy. He does, however, add a new twist. John relates Matilda's marriage to us through the report of Stephen and Empress Maud's litigation and appeal to Pope Innocent II regarding the disputed English crown. The Archbishop of York pled Maud's case against the Bishop of Lisieux, who represented Stephen. The latter bishop charged that Maud could not inherit her father's kingdom on the basis of two major points. His first argument is the one we see in Eadmer's work: that Henry had dragged Matilda of Scotland, Maud's mother, from the monastery at Romsey and deprived her of her veil.<sup>439</sup> His second is rather new: he accused Matilda of incest and claimed the Empress was thus born of an incestuous union.<sup>440</sup> This harkens back to William's and Matilda's problems at their marriage, as seen above. The Bishop of Lisieux may have brought up this charge of incest, flimsy though it was, in an attempt to discredit the Empress Maud with any and all available arguments.

John tells us that the Archbishop of York replied that the church had "confirmed the marriage which you attack" and that Maud was anointed as empress, which would never have happened to a nun's daughter.<sup>441</sup> The archbishop never announced, nor does John write, that Anselm performed the ceremony. He merely writes that "a highly-born king solemnly married the daughter of a famous monarch,"<sup>442</sup> echoing earlier assessments of Matilda's noble lineage. Neither the archbishop nor John counters the

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<sup>439</sup> John of Salisbury, *The Historia Pontificalis*, trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 83.

<sup>440</sup> John of Salisbury, *The Historia Pontificalis*, 83.

<sup>441</sup> John of Salisbury, *The Historia Pontificalis*, 85.

<sup>442</sup> John of Salisbury, *The Historia Pontificalis*, 85.

incest charges that would have made the empress illegitimate. Despite the refusal to debate this last point, its insertion in John's work is important. Just by repeating these rumors, John gives credence and weight to their accusations.

In no other chronicle have we seen Matilda so maligned. In the entirety of the section on her suitability, not once does John mention Matilda by name. Matilda does not function as an individual in this account; in fact, she shows no action at all. Instead, John chooses to relate the points of incest and illegitimacy, focusing the reader's attention on Matilda's ability to create legal heirs. Matilda's only importance lay in her bloodline and not in her activity.

In this record, we have seen Matilda's authority decline as different historians treated the incident through the lenses of their education and professions. Monastic historians have no qualms about showing Matilda as a strong and forceful woman acting on her own behalf. The liminal historian does not remove her voice completely but chooses instead to focus more on her royal blood and ability to legitimize her children. The scholastic historian effectively silences Matilda. She is, for him, merely a vessel through which lawful heirs pass.

We now turn to the next two Anglo-Norman queens, women whose situations created the perfect backdrop for their political acumen. The Empress Matilda and Matilda of Boulogne politicked and marshaled support for their own parties during the English Civil War, from 1135-1154. With Matilda of Scotland's death, the death of her son William, and her husband Henry, who had no other heirs, a succession crisis brought a civil war to the Anglo-Norman realm. Adela of Blois third son Stephen with his wife Matilda of Boulogne fought for the crown against the Empress Matilda and her

brother, Robert of Gloucester, the imminently capable natural son of Henry I. Despite the complicated political maneuverings of both women, the impact of the scholastic program had become so ingrained that rarely do we see them portrayed as gender-less: their positive or negative traits were always held up against their female-ness.

## Chapter 5

### *Virago Queens: Matilda of Boulogne and Empress Matilda Forgetting their Sex*

#### *The Problem*

The twelfth-century English civil war is one of the more convoluted periods in British history. It all stems, as is so frequently the case, from an inheritance dispute. In fact, the English civil war<sup>443</sup> of the twelfth century could be viewed as family politics writ large. Henry I had high hopes when he married Matilda of Scotland in 1100 and many of these hopes were realized. Once he gained control over England, and especially after he had imprisoned his brother Robert, his rule was generally stable. Additionally, Matilda was a good queen and gave a son and a daughter. When Matilda died in 1118, Henry had only one son who had grown to young adulthood. William, his son, was well liked by most of his nobles.

Unbeknownst to Henry, however, were the dim days of 1120, when his heir, his daughter, and several of his nephews and nieces drowned in the Channel. Known as the White Ship disaster, the tragedy claimed the lives of many of the nobility. Even routine sea travel was dangerous in the Middle Ages, of course, but contemporary historians sought a more rational and moral explanation, suggesting that the group who left the Norman shores on their return trip was drunk, and most medieval sources, recalling the

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<sup>443</sup> David Crouch makes a good argument as to why the period of Stephen's reign should not be called The Anarchy, the continuation of social and legal institutions. See his Introduction in Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 9. Hugh Thomas has reassessed recent work on Stephen that calls for the dismissal of the term "anarchy" for this period and he concludes that there was significant and widespread violence prevalent during the wars. He does not call for a return to "anarchy" but for a nuanced view of medieval warfare that was not only political but personally violent as well. See Hugh M. Thomas, "Violent Disorder in King Stephen's England: A Maximum Argument" in Paul Dalton and G. J. White, *King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154)* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2008), 139-170. Based on these two scholars, I will call this period a civil war, with the understanding that destruction was prevalent upon many during Stephen's reign.



survivors' stories, recount that at the very least, the captain of the ship was intoxicated.<sup>444</sup> Whatever the cause, Henry almost immediately thereafter married Adeliza of Louvain in an attempt to gain a new heir. The crown he had fought for so tenaciously was now in jeopardy, and Henry needed to solidify his regal line.

Adeliza would not bear Henry any children, even in the fifteen years of their marriage. The sources are silent on this point, but it is interesting to note that Adeliza would have at least seven children by her next husband, William d'Aubigny, after Henry's death.<sup>445</sup> Considering his childless marriage to Adeliza, Henry needed to take new action to secure his lineage. Despite several well-placed young men (his nephews Stephen of Blois and William Clito and his bastard son Robert of Gloucester chief among them), he took his only remaining child for his heir: a young woman, living in Germany, and as of 1125 the widow of the Emperor Henry V. Henry recalled Matilda to him at her husband's death, a child he had not seen in over sixteen years.<sup>446</sup> He required his nobles to swear to accept her as lady and to "swear to give England and Normandy after his day into the hand of his daughter," and then had her married to Count Geoffrey of Anjou—not an obvious choice, since the Angevins and Normans were frequent enemies<sup>447</sup> It was not at all common for a woman to rule in her own name in the twelfth century. Nevertheless, the plan might have succeeded, if Matilda had not been a woman. And had Henry not had a nephew with eyes on the crown.

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<sup>444</sup> The White Ship disaster is recorded in John of Worcester, Orderic Vitalis (who has the fullest account) and the *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. See also Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 761. Henry of Huntingdon accuses the youths of sodomy, which he says caused their deaths. Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 466.

<sup>445</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920).

<sup>446</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother, and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 44.

<sup>447</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 256.

*Empress Matilda (c. 1102-1167)*<sup>448</sup>

The empress is a complex character. Her modern biographer, Marjorie Chibnall, writes that she may have been “cold and proud”<sup>449</sup> but that “in spite of her faults . . . she was a remarkable woman.”<sup>450</sup> Matilda was intelligent and crafty; her tactics rivaled those of her opponents, and she frequently had the upper hand in military maneuvers and diplomatic corners. Yet she was unable to take control of her father’s patrimony and rule for more than several days as Lady of the English. Chibnall aims, in her biography, to bring to light Matilda’s place in Anglo-Norman history in a more positive manner than she has previously been seen.<sup>451</sup> Despite this modern treatment, even in the most generous of contemporary sources, the Empress often comes across as complicated and haughty.<sup>452</sup>

She was not well known and that could have contributed to the nobles disavowing their promises to her father. Her husband was also not well received by the Anglo-Norman nobles. His family had long been at odds with the Norman court, particularly over the county of Maine, and their marriage was a highly calculated move by Henry I to secure his border and lands by bringing Anjou into his realm of influence, and away from the machinations of the King of France and William Clito.<sup>453</sup> Matilda’s marriage to Geoffrey was a point of contention not only amongst Henry’s nobles. We

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<sup>448</sup> For ease of reading, I will refer to this Matilda as the Empress.

<sup>449</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 60.

<sup>450</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 3.

<sup>451</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 4.

<sup>452</sup> Our most important contemporary sources for the Empress include: William of Malmesbury, *The Historia Novella*, trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum, Gesta Stephani*, trans. K. R. Potter and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*.

<sup>453</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 54.

first sense Matilda's imperial pride in the negotiations for her marriage to Geoffrey of Anjou, a mere count and ten years her junior (he would have been a mere fifteen years old at the time of the wedding). Chibnall writes, "It is doubtful that Matilda accepted the proposal without protest" and she cites Robert of Torigny's *Interpolations* and his statements that Matilda was "unwilling to acquiesce to the marriage" as proof.<sup>454</sup>

Hildebert of Lavardin, a friend of Henry I's and an ardent letter writer to powerful women in the Anglo-Norman realm, wrote to the Empress asking her to explain the argument between herself and her father, a letter that certainly could be dated to this period.<sup>455</sup> Despite Matilda's protests, she and Geoffrey were married in 1128. It was an uneasy alliance and one punctuated by both internal and external conflicts. Geoffrey seems to have put Matilda aside in 1130<sup>456</sup> and she did not return to him until 1131 where she was "sent to her husband and was received with the pomp that befitted such a great heroine."<sup>457</sup> She left England in 1131, not to return until 1139 with Stephen as king. The *Gesta Stephani*, an anonymous chronicle and perhaps our most important source for this period, suggests that this marriage to an outsider was the reason the nobles felt it acceptable to break their oaths to Matilda.<sup>458</sup>

Matilda's half-brother Robert of Gloucester was well liked and had he not been illegitimate, few doubt that he was qualified to be king. An interesting story in the

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<sup>454</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 55.

<sup>455</sup> Ex quo igitur comperi ventos in vestrum obsequium aspirare, statim litteras ad vos dedi, ratus advectum de Anglia, qui voluntatem regis nobis aperiret, quive declararet quem affectum de contumelia filiae patris pectus induerit. J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, vol. 171 (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg Press, 1844-1865; reprint, 1965), cols 291-292.

<sup>456</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 58.

<sup>457</sup> "Missa autem post hec filia regis viro suo recepta est, fastu tanta viragine digno." Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 489.

<sup>458</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 11.

*Gesta Stephani* relates that several men approached Robert with the throne, which he declined in favor of his sister's son Henry, at the time only two years old.<sup>459</sup> David Crouch doubts the story's veracity, but does acknowledge that Robert was a potential claimant to the throne.<sup>460</sup> Jim Bradbury wonders if Henry might not have wanted Robert for the throne, as Robert's marriage "built him into a possible contender."<sup>461</sup> Despite these views, Robert eventually threw his lot in with his sister's and became her most ardent supporter against their cousin Stephen.

But Matilda was not able to maintain sufficient support to regain her rightful position as her father's heir. William of Malmesbury gives us our most positive contemporary account of the Empress. He dedicates his *Historia Novella* first to "his well-beloved lord Robert" of Gloucester, one of the empress's most important allies. Matilda, therefore, figures heavily in the work.<sup>462</sup> In his Prologue, William tells us that he will begin with the empress's return to England after the emperor's death. Although she was "reluctant to return" as she was accustomed to Germany, Matilda heeded her father's men and returned to his side in 1125.<sup>463</sup> Shortly thereafter, Henry bound his nobles to accept Matilda as their "lady" if he died without a male heir.<sup>464</sup> In her, William writes, lay the legitimate succession, which she retained through her father, grandfather, uncle, and through her mother's family.<sup>465</sup> William wrote that Henry obliged his nobles, bishops, and abbots, to accept his daughter Matilda as their Lady,

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<sup>459</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 12-13.

<sup>460</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 34.

<sup>461</sup> Jim Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-1153* (London: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1996), 6.

<sup>462</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 3.

<sup>463</sup> "inuita ut aiunt imperatrix rediit" Malmesbury, *HN*, 5.

<sup>464</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 7.

<sup>465</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 7.

should he die without male heir. William of Malmesbury's, or perhaps Henry's choice of words is interesting here. The oath was of loyalty to the Empress's rights of succession, not to be her father's heir.<sup>466</sup> He then goes on to explain that the regnal succession lay in her blood, perhaps leaving the door open for a son of Matilda's to become ruler instead of his mother.<sup>467</sup> Marjorie Chibnall states, "in spite of the oaths taken to Matilda, much remained vague in her future prospects."<sup>468</sup> Not yet married to the unpopular Geoffrey of Anjou, the nobles good-naturedly jostled to be the first to take the oath. Robert of Gloucester and Stephen of Blois, "as rivals in distinction strove with each other for the honor of swearing first."<sup>469</sup> Robert ceded to Stephen, as the elder of the two. Immediately after Matilda's marriage to Geoffrey of Anjou, William states that many nobles began to rescind their oaths, because Henry had married their Lady to a foreigner. Matilda returned to England in 1131 where she received either a new or renewed oath of fealty from Henry's nobles<sup>470</sup>—the second oath he required his nobles to take, and thus an indication of his growing worries about her ability to pacify the country (and at his own inability to produce further children). One source wrote that there was a third oath swearing in 1133 where Henry designated his young grandson Henry to be king after his death.<sup>471</sup>

But the nobles remained concerned about Matilda's inheritance, and while Henry lay dying, several men queried him about the succession. William writes that

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<sup>466</sup> Judith Green, "Henry I and the Origins of Civil War," in *King Stephen's Reign*, ed. Paul Dalton (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 15.

<sup>467</sup> "dominam recipere" Malmesbury, *HN*, 7.

<sup>468</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 56.

<sup>469</sup> "dum emula laude virtutem inter se contenderent quis eorum peior iuraret" Malmesbury, *HN*, 9.

<sup>470</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 21.

<sup>471</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 61.

Henry “assigned all his lands on both sides of the sea to his daughter in lawful and lasting succession.”<sup>472</sup> Despite William’s assurances as to Henry’s wishes, the succession was not so easily decided. After Henry’s death, Stephen of Blois rushed to London, while Matilda and Geoffrey shored up support in Normandy. Because of this hesitation, Stephen became king of England in December 1135. Ever the fair historian, William tells us, with a typically acute character observation, that Stephen was “a man of energy but lacking judgment, active in war, of extraordinary spirit in undertaking difficult tasks, lenient to his enemies and easily appeased, courteous to all.”<sup>473</sup> Writing at Stephen’s accession to the throne in order to please a patron who was hostile to the new king, William attempted to explain the activities of Stephen while staying true to his message of the Empress’s legitimacy. Stephen was “a very kingly man” who would have done better, in William’s opinion, had he “acquired the kingdom in a lawful way.”<sup>474</sup>

*Matilda of Boulogne (c. 1105-1152)*<sup>475</sup>

Stephen, Count of Mortain, was the son of Adela and Stephen of Blois. His mother was a daughter of William of Normandy who was married into the Thibaudian family to secure that frontier for her father.<sup>476</sup> Two of her brothers had been kings, William Rufus and Henry I, while a third, Robert of Normandy, had fought in the

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<sup>472</sup> “filiae omnen terram suam citra et ultra mare legitima et perhenni successione adiudicavit.” Malmesbury, *HN*, 25.

<sup>473</sup> “Vir quidem impiger sed imprudens, armis strenuus, immodici animi ad quelibet ardua inchoanda, lenis et exorabilis hostibus, affabilis omnibus.” Malmesbury, *HN*, 29.

<sup>474</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 37.

<sup>475</sup> For ease of reading, I will refer to Matilda of Boulogne as the queen.

<sup>476</sup> See Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*.

crusades alongside her husband, Stephen of Blois. As we have seen, Adela was a strong, powerful woman who ruled Blois and her children with cunning and subtlety.

Always close, Adela and her brother Henry (now king of England) continued their cooperative relationship into adulthood. In 1107 Adela's oldest son William was settled as the Count of Sully and her second son Theobald had been installed as count of Blois.<sup>477</sup> Always careful to maintain her patrimony, Adela sent her next son, Henry, to be educated and remain in the Church.<sup>478</sup> Stephen should have been bound for the monastery as a third son, but his mind was more suited to matters military, and when it became apparent that he was ill suited for the clergy, Adela revised her plans. Her brother Henry eventually sent for Stephen and reared him in his own household.<sup>479</sup> Adela's youngest son, Henry, would be cloistered at the monastery at Cluny until his uncle called him to England in 1126, where he became first abbot of Glastonbury and then, in 1129, bishop of Winchester.<sup>480</sup> Henry would prove himself a politician worthy of his mother, and he would play a large part in his brother's kingship in England.

Henry brought Stephen into his court sometime between the battle of Tinchebray in 1106 and 1113 when we have record of Henry paying for Stephen's knighthood and bestowing upon him the county of Mortain.<sup>481</sup> Later, Henry married Stephen to Matilda of Boulogne.<sup>482</sup> Henry did not have to cast far for Stephen's wife: she was his own wife's niece. Not only would this bring Boulogne into direct contact with Henry's rule, it also solidified his connection to his wife's family. In a move that

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<sup>477</sup> LoPrete, "The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois," 580.

<sup>478</sup> LoPrete, "The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois."

<sup>479</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Book vi, 42.

<sup>480</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 13.

<sup>481</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 17.

<sup>482</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 21.

would be echoed in his daughter's marriage to the count of Anjou, Henry designed the marriage to curb the advances of his nephew William Clito, by placing Boulogne's support squaring with the English monarchy.<sup>483</sup> Matilda was her father Eustace's only living child and had been given rights to Boulogne by her father. We are unsure who initiated the marriage proceedings, but the arrangement was agreeable to both parties, and Stephen and Matilda were married prior to 1125, perhaps as early as 1119.<sup>484</sup> Matilda became Countess of Boulogne shortly after her marriage (1125) when her father retired to a Cluniac monastery.<sup>485</sup> She and Stephen ruled there until giving her patrimony to their eldest son Eustace in 1147.<sup>486</sup> The sources have little to say on the marriage or early years of their lives together. They had five children, two of whom preceded Matilda in death, with the eldest (Eustace) being the one most mentioned in chronicles.<sup>487</sup>

### *The Instigation*

We do not know what made Stephen decide to bid for the English crown when Henry died. One source, the *Gesta Stephani*, suggests that Stephen made for England like Saul, "after forming a mighty design."<sup>488</sup> We do know that many of Henry's men followed Stephen. Some of them felt a woman should not rule.<sup>489</sup> Others seemed not to

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<sup>483</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 51.

<sup>484</sup> Green, "Henry I and the Origins of Civil War," 13.

<sup>485</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 21.

<sup>486</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 245.

<sup>487</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 356.

<sup>488</sup> R. H. C. Davis, "The Authorship of the *Gesta Stephani*," *The English Historical Review* 77, no. 303 (April 1962): 224, and a truncated version of this article appears in the introduction to K. R. Potter and R. H. C. Davis, *Gesta Stephani* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 5.

<sup>489</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 66.



care about the gender of the ruler, but did not want Matilda in particular ruling.<sup>490</sup> As we have seen, something about her personality and her new husband, Geoffrey of Anjou seemed suspect.<sup>491</sup> And some genuinely felt Stephen would make a better ruler than Matilda.<sup>492</sup>

King Stephen gained the crown as much by chicanery as by right and spent his entire reign fighting the rival claimants. His time was spent in battle, in preparation for battle, or in prison. During much of this time, Stephen relied on his cronies and familiars to help him rule the recalcitrant country. One of his staunchest allies was also a cunning strategist whose diplomacy and leadership helped Stephen out of many tight times. She was also his wife—Matilda of Boulogne.

Matilda of Boulogne enters the Anglo-Norman scene quietly, compared to her sister-in-law's grand entrance. While the empress barges and blusters her way across England, Matilda watches and waits. In comparing the queen and the empress, Jim Bradbury calls the queen "a more admirable character."<sup>493</sup> It is not until her husband himself is removed from the stage that Matilda comes center. Our fullest account of her actions is, unremarkably, in the *Gesta Stephani*. While the author of the *Gesta Stephani* remains anonymous, R. H. C. Davis posits that it was Robert of Lewes, bishop of Bath.<sup>494</sup> Robert had been a monk before his succession to the bishopric. Davis's assessment is based on places the author was familiar with, on the author's "obsession" with Episcopal orders, and on Robert's political affiliations with Henry of Blois, and his

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<sup>490</sup> Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda*, 15.

<sup>491</sup> This is the view put forth by the *Gesta Stephani*, 12-14.

<sup>492</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 8-9.

<sup>493</sup> Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda*, 103.

<sup>494</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, xxxiv.

fall from Stephen's side after 1148. David Crouch follows Davis's decision, stating that the author of the *Gesta* "may well have been the bishop [of Bath] himself."<sup>495</sup> Antonia Gransden believes the author to be a secular clergyman, but does not accept Davis's argument for Robert of Lewes. She writes, "There remains the possibility that the author was a Frenchman," and is content with the author remaining anonymous.<sup>496</sup> The consensus is that the author was a bishop or at least a cleric and was not a monk at the time of the writing.

### *The Succession Crisis*

The years between 1135 and 1154 contain a series of important and convoluted actions. Focusing on a few important events prior to 1140 and on the period of intense activity between 1140 and 1142 allows us to evaluate the presentation of the Empress and the Queen during a time when both held political and military power.

In December 1135, less than 25 days after Henry's death and before his burial, Stephen was crowned king. Robert of Gloucester arrived in 1136 and, after much soul-searching, he bowed to Stephen as king. Always concerned about his patron, William of Malmesbury walked a fine line when explaining Robert's oath to Stephen. We are told that Robert "wearied his mind with much reflection" until he took a conditional oath where he did homage for as long as the king "maintained his rank unimpaired and kept the agreement."<sup>497</sup> As William related, "for some certain reasons," the Empress Matilda

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<sup>495</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 80.

<sup>496</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 190.

<sup>497</sup> "multa cogitatione fatigaret animum," "quamdiu ille dignitatem suam integre custodiret et sibi pacta seruaret." Malmesbury, *HN*, 30-32.

and Geoffrey of Anjou did not return to England at Henry's death.<sup>498</sup> Chibnall suggests that Matilda knew Normandy to be of more importance than England and that she then chose to bolster her support on the Norman shores before turning to England. She "acted as quickly as possible to assert her rights where they were most likely to be accepted."<sup>499</sup> We might also consider, although few others have done so, that Matilda was pregnant with her third son, William, who would be born in July 1136. Matilda could scarcely have viewed a dangerous winter crossing of the Channel confidently at such a time, haunted as it was by her brothers and cousins. Nevertheless, she was active in Normandy with Geoffrey, bringing him a contingent of troops in late 1136.<sup>500</sup>

Perhaps the most important event for the Empress during this time was Robert's official defiance of Stephen in 1138 and his subsequent turn to his sister's cause.<sup>501</sup> After Robert's defection from Stephen and his voyage to Normandy, several other English nobles joined him in defying the king. Shortly thereafter, we get our first glimpse of Queen Matilda in action. Stephen "turned a sharp sword" against his defectors, attacking nobles and towns across England.<sup>502</sup> While Stephen captured the castle and drove out Geoffrey Talbot from the city of Hereford, "the queen besieged Dover with a strong force on the land side" and sent to Boulogne for additional aid.<sup>503</sup> Orderic tells us that the people of Boulogne "gladly carried out their lady's

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<sup>498</sup> "certis ex causis" Malmesbury, *HN*, 26-27.

<sup>499</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 66.

<sup>500</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 67.

<sup>501</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 43.

<sup>502</sup> "acutum ensem exercuit" Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vi, 520-521.

<sup>503</sup> "Regina uero Doueram cum ualida manu per terram obsedit" Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vi, 520-521.

commands.”<sup>504</sup> Orderic and Henry of Huntingdon are the only writers to mention the Queen’s successful siege of Dover.<sup>505</sup> Both Orderic’s and Henry’s blithe treatments of the Queen’s military actions recall a monastic sensibility—the Queen is merely acting as a lord under her king—her gender is not mentioned, at least not in this instance.

The year 1139 also saw the Empress alight on English shores. In September, the Empress and Robert landed near Arundel and took shelter with their stepmother Adeliza, remarried to William d’Aubigny. The Empress remained with Adeliza for only a short time. In William’s view, the Empress was cast out because of Adeliza’s “broken faith” and “female fickleness.”<sup>506</sup> The *Gesta Stephani* suggests that Adeliza accepted Robert and the Empress as guests only, not as an invading force.<sup>507</sup> John of Worcester adds that Adeliza worried she would lose her rank in England by supporting the Empress and she protested to Stephen that she had merely offered hospitality to former dependents, as was customary.<sup>508</sup> In a move much decried by Henry and Orderic, Stephen allowed the Empress (named a wolf in a sheep-field by Orderic) to leave Arundel for Oxford, even offering her escort.<sup>509</sup> David Crouch defends this action, writing that Stephen acted as best he could in a difficult situation.<sup>510</sup>

Following sieges and skirmishes in 1140, the two sides met at a peace negotiation in Bath. The Queen appears in Stephen’s stead, while he remained in London. Robert of Gloucester represented the Empress. The negotiation was unfruitful

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<sup>504</sup> “dominae suae iussa libenter camecent.” Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vi, 520-521.

<sup>505</sup> Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 713.

<sup>506</sup> “fidem fefellerat” “feminae leuitate” Malmesbury, *HN*, 60-61.

<sup>507</sup> “quasi hospitandi gratia” *Gesta Stephani*, 86-87.

<sup>508</sup> John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, trans. Thomas Forester (New York: AMS Press, 1854), 268.

<sup>509</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vi, 534-535, Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 722-723.

<sup>510</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 109.

as “vainly, vainly they wasted both words and time.”<sup>511</sup> The situation deteriorated quickly, and in 1141, the Empress’s faction captured Stephen at the battle of Lincoln. Though “not lacking in spirit,” Stephen could not overcome Robert’s forces.<sup>512</sup> At first held with respect to his authority and their relations, the Empress soon had Stephen confined to chains after he was found wandering outside.<sup>513</sup> All the sources agree that many nobles switched to the Empress’s side at Stephen’s capture.

Stephen remained imprisoned as the Empress advanced on London, where she requested Henry of Blois to crown her queen. Henry and a number of other bishops agreed to “receive her as lady of England” so long as she did not break her agreement to support the church.<sup>514</sup> As Stephen remained king, Matilda could not be crowned queen. Chibnall calls this an “intermediate stage before Stephen could be persuaded to renounce his title.”<sup>515</sup> We might think of Matilda as “Lady” perhaps not unlike the Lady Æthelflæd: queen in all but name. Henry apparently felt justified in switching allegiances, since his brother had broken his promises of support with a series of arrests of bishops.<sup>516</sup> Edmund King suggests that Henry chose his words carefully, that his “rhetoric” of “lady of England and Normandy” introduced the need for Matilda to make peace with Stephen’s family: she was not queen, but Lady.<sup>517</sup> King points to a charters Matilda signed after 1142 where she is seen with her son Henry and not alone, as she had previously been. She was “not *heres* but *successor*; she transmits title; it is her son,

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<sup>511</sup> “inaniter, inaniter triuerunt et verba et tempora” Malmesbury, *HN*, 79.

<sup>512</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 87.

<sup>513</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 87.

<sup>514</sup> “in dominam Angliae recipere” Malmesbury, *HN*, 88-89.

<sup>515</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 102.

<sup>516</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 52.

<sup>517</sup> Edmund King, “A Week in Politics,” in *King Stephen’s Reign*, ed. Paul Dalton (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 73.

not herself, who is heir.”<sup>518</sup> This, he argues, reiterated the language of Matilda’s first oath: “cui soli legitima debeatur successio.”<sup>519</sup>

This is a crucial period for the Empress and one in which her faults cost her the crown promised to her by her father. The London burgesses counted and acted as a great magnate, a magnate who needed to be pleased and pampered by the crown.<sup>520</sup> The Empress found this difficult to do. William writes of how difficult it was “to reduce the Londoners to acquiescence.”<sup>521</sup> Crouch calls the city “divided” with both pro-Angevin and royalist factions separating the city.<sup>522</sup> As it turned out, the Londoners refused to accept her rule and the Empress soon fled the city. Many contemporary historians point to her egotistical and haughty bearing—possibly the result of growing up in the German imperial household, as she had left English shores at the tender age of eight.<sup>523</sup> For Henry, it was her “insufferable arrogance” that “alienated the hearts of almost everyone.”<sup>524</sup> The *Gesta* author calls her “headstrong,” “haughty,” and “insolent,” a woman who refused to rely on the advice of her male supporters.<sup>525</sup> Not surprisingly, William of Malmesbury’s view differs greatly. “The Londoners, who had always been under suspicion and in a state of secret indignation, then gave vent to expressions of unconcealed hatred; they even laid a plot, it is said, against their lady and

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<sup>518</sup> King, “A Week in Politics,” 75.

<sup>519</sup> King, “A Week in Politics,” 75, Malmesbury, *HN*, 6.

<sup>520</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 94-95.

<sup>521</sup> “molis Lundoniensium animos permulcere posse” Malmesbury, *HN*, 96-97.

<sup>522</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 172.

<sup>523</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 17.

<sup>524</sup> “in superbiam intolerabilem” “omnium fere corda a se alienauit” Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 738-739.

<sup>525</sup> “praecipitanter agere” “fuerat supercilii et arrogantiae indicium” *Gesta Stephani*, 120-121.

her companions.”<sup>526</sup> The Empress fled to Oxford under cover of night, leaving London and a possible end to the war behind her.

For the next year, the Empress and the Queen would be the main antagonists of the civil war. Queen Matilda did not idly await her husband’s return. She instead had to move decisively to gain her husband’s release. In the course of the next several months, while Stephen is imprisoned, Matilda took control of the fight against the empress. Using both diplomatic and military means, the queen advanced her husband’s cause. She maintained and gained support from recalcitrant barons and townsmen. She, with the help of William of Ypres, controlled Kent and its environs.<sup>527</sup> She coaxed and flattered with letters to the empress and others. The *Gesta* author reminds us of her gender by calling her a “woman of subtlety and a man’s resolution.”<sup>528</sup> When her diplomatic words failed, she wasted no time in gathering an army and advancing on the empress’s position. For some time, the civil war in England was fought between two women and yet the sources are surprisingly laconic on this point. Both the queen and the empress commanded military men across the chessboard of England. The queen sought not only Stephen’s release, but more importantly, that her son “enjoy the property which had been left him by her own father.”<sup>529</sup> Matilda knew that the empress would not give Stephen’s liberty without jeopardizing her own hold on the crown, so Matilda subtly and effectively told the empress what she needed to hear. The queen was saying that her son Eustace would not stand to inherit the crown after his father.

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<sup>526</sup> “Lundonienses, semper suspecti et intra se frementes, tunc in aperti odii uocem eruperunt; insidiis etiam, ut fertur, dominam eiusque comites appetiuerunt.” Malmesbury, *HN*, 98-99.

<sup>527</sup> Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 738.

<sup>528</sup> “astutie pectoris virilisque constantiae femina” *Gesta Stephani*, 122-123.

<sup>529</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 123.

She requested only the counties of Mortain and Boulogne for Eustace: his father's lands granted by Henry I, and her own lands from her father.<sup>530</sup> Despite her pleas, Matilda was denied. The Empress refused the request, which led to Henry of Blois's defection from her camp and the resumption of hostilities between the factions.<sup>531</sup> In fact, the *Gesta* author tells us the Queen "was subjected to the most harsh and opprobrious taunts and reproaches."<sup>532</sup> He emphasizes that Matilda was rejected and rebuked in person, an incredibly dishonorable act considering that she was the rightful queen. Our author then writes of Matilda's response to this insult with obvious pride in her actions:

[S]he dispatched a magnificent array of troops from the opposite side of the river to London, in full confidence of achieving, by force of arms, what was denied to her prayers. She issued her commands, to the effect that they should ravage the outskirts of the city with the greatest animosity, carrying fire and sword, rapine and plunder, before the very eyes of the countess and her followers.<sup>533</sup>

The Londoners, therefore, upset at the empress's demands and ego, gave the city into Matilda's hands and agreed to release Stephen. They rang the bells of war unto the empress to "free themselves from the yoke of the new tyranny which was imposed upon them."<sup>534</sup> Matilda had won the day and forced the empress to capitulate.

The *Gesta* author continues his tale with Queen Matilda's triumphant entry into London after the empress was "driven in terror" from the city.<sup>535</sup> He tells us that the queen was well received by the pro-Angevin Londoners (we can assume the royalist

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<sup>530</sup> Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, 180.

<sup>531</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 101.

<sup>532</sup> "cum duris et inhonestis conuiciata iniuriis" *Gesta Stephani*, 123.

<sup>533</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 93.

<sup>534</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 93.

<sup>535</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 94.



supporters were silent) as the rightful ruler and it is here that he reminds us again of Matilda's gender. For Matilda, the author says, was "forgetful of the womanish weakness and softness of her sex," and she acted like a man in creating a band of allies through entreaties and bribes.<sup>536</sup> It is interesting that he feels the need to mention Matilda's sex both times she is acting the diplomat and not when she is acting the commander. It seems that women were generally seen as working through the methods of discourse and not through feats of arms; however, this author only points to Matilda as a woman when she is using the discursive sword. He goes on to describe Matilda's gathering of forces, especially when she "boldly importuned" the bishop of Winchester to secure her husband's release. One would think that Matilda could count on the Bishop's assistance, as he was also Stephen's brother, but Henry often switched sides whenever most convenient for himself. We are told that he was moved by Matilda's tearful supplications and began to think of ways to free his brother. Tears are commonly the womanly weapons of choice in many of the sources, and it is interesting that this author does not make more of them. He chooses instead to direct us towards her active deeds rather than focus on her passive weeping.

The empress meanwhile foresaw the Bishop Henry's machinations and marched with an army to Winchester to forestall him. Henry in turn called upon Stephen's loyal barons and hired mercenaries to protect him and the city. Again, Matilda sprang into action. She came to Winchester with a powerful and splendidly arrayed army and she harassed the empress's troops. Our author tells us that it was "the most strange and singular" siege. Here we expect him to emphasize how two women fought for control

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<sup>536</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 94.

over the city. That anomaly, however, does not seem to cross his mind. Instead, he gives us military strategy—the two parties fought in the most awkward of positions, with it is difficult to tell who was besieging whom. It was during the battle that the queen’s original goals were met. The Earl of Gloucester, the empress’s brother and staunchest supporter, was captured during the battle and traded for Stephen. Her husband and king was now free.

We hear little of the queen from the *Gesta* author following this episode. He does not even see fit to mention her death. From this point on, his narrative is concerned with Stephen and the empress, with only minor mentions of the other members of Stephen’s family. Matilda’s efforts, however grand, fade from view as soon as Stephen is released.

The Empress, however, continued to fight for her inheritance. Besieged in Oxford, she escaped once again from a dire situation. We end our journey with William here, as his history closes with the empress walking six miles once outside of Oxford, “a manifest miracle of God.”<sup>537</sup> We similarly lose as witness Orderic Vitalis, who died while Stephen was still imprisoned. For the end of the story, therefore, we must rely primarily on the *Gesta Stephani* and Henry of Huntingdon. The violence continued intermittently over the next several years and saw the addition of both Eustace and Henry fitz Empress as combatants. Eustace finally received his mother’s lands in 1147 and a wife not shortly thereafter. Queen Matilda died in 1152 and Eustace in 1153. Stephen and the Empress agreed to end their quarrel and Stephen accepted her son as

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<sup>537</sup> “est enim evidens Dei miraculum.” Malmesbury, *HN*, 132-133.

his heir. The young Henry did not have to wait for long, for his cousin died in October 1154.

*Forgetting a Woman's Weakness*

What, then, do these authors wish us to understand from their representation of the Matildas? The *Gesta* author's portrayal of Queen Matilda is interesting for several reasons. First is his praise of her—he need not have told us of these actions at all. The imprisoned king made Stephen's side look feeble and having a woman take such decisive action could also have weakened Stephen's reputation. We could argue that she both helped and hindered her husband's cause. She hindered him in that any male who needed a woman to stand up for him would have appeared as ineffectual. In addition, we might argue that her appeal was geared for her son and not her husband. We may read Matilda as having given up on her husband's cause as king and therefore attempting to salvage what she could for her son. In this way, Eustace becomes much more important for Matilda than Stephen, for it is through her son that Matilda could continue to live richly. Nevertheless, she continues to be a help to Stephen. She assists him as she faces the empress head on and argues for Stephen's immediate release. Additionally, she petitions for her son as a rightful heir, appealing to the empress's own sense of justice. Once the appeal is denied, Stephen's queen becomes male in order to save her son's inheritance, and perhaps even her husband's throne, from the ravages of the civil war. This author presents us with a strong woman, a woman who has “masculine resolution,” perhaps in response to Stephen's imprisoned impotency. She, not a counselor or noble, calls an army and commands it to destroy the great city of

London. She threatens and cajoles, burns and damages, whatever is needed in order to achieve her goal. The author, who might have had call to denigrate her actions based solely on her sex, does not question her intelligence and drive. In fact, the two occasions when he mentions her gender are quite small compared to the rest of his description. And these passages occur when he describes her diplomatic messages, not when he gives the account of her military endeavors. Perhaps the insult to her dignity as queen is enough to account for her force of arms, and the author felt no need to explain away her martial exploits. It is not until Matilda was received in the city of London that he mentions her gender again, once more in connection with diplomatic rather than martial qualities. Here, her weakness and softness are forgotten because of the need to rule and control. Her bravery and courage, in addition to her words, drew men and allies to her and Stephen's cause.

Both references to her gender are made in a similar manner. First, he tells us that Matilda sloughed off her feminine ways and assumed a masculine stance. She became brave and resolute, courageous and powerful. These identity traits are more commonly seen in male leaders, but since our male protagonist had been forcefully removed from the stage, it was up to Matilda to assume a new and different garb. And these new clothes seem to fit well, for nowhere are we told of Matilda wavering in any manner. To obtain these new traits, Matilda shed her womanliness, her softness, and her weakness. Our author does not question that she did these things. Perhaps, we might ask, could it be that Matilda herself was never weak?

It is also an interesting point that Matilda's new "male" characteristics are pointed out during diplomatic exchanges more often than during military endeavors.

Maybe if she acted in male fashion during these exercises, it would be easier for an audience to believe that she had the resolution to command an army. For both times that the author writes of Matilda leading her army, first against London and second against Winchester, he does not qualify her command in any way. Here Matilda stands resolute. Using Matilda thus points to how strong she was and the loyalty that she engendered for her husband's sake. It also shows us the unenviable position of Stephen himself. At the point when the empress entered London, it looked as if Stephen had lost support and the crown itself. Matilda's quick actions forestalled this loss but not before showing us how close Stephen was to defeat. As our author was writing the *Gesta* of Stephen himself, he needed to show Stephen in the best possible light, and the incident of his imprisonment would have been very difficult to whitewash. Instead of focusing on Stephen's weak position, the author focused attention on his strong and determined wife. By doing so, the author kept potency in Stephen and his party. Matilda kept the impetus for her husband's side and therefore made it impossible for the empress to coalesce support under her banner.

Another important aspect of this text is the contrast between the queen and the empress. We can sense a grudging respect from this author for the empress, especially during the turbulent period of Stephen's incarceration. He uses like-minded words when discussing the empress's battle tactics during the engagement over Winchester, commenting that she always rose "superior to the weakness of her sex," that she held an indomitable spirit and a strong resolution.<sup>538</sup> Like the queen, the empress was also resolute and above her gender's inherent frailty. Both these women possessed more

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<sup>538</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, 97.

than sufficient capabilities that became obvious once the times required of them swift and sharp action. That our author chose to focus strength on Matilda and the empress suggests that the women's positions were highly regarded by both friend and foe.

William of Malmesbury also provides us with an interesting description of these medieval women. Directly after Robert's renunciation of Stephen, William of Malmesbury announces to us that he plans to discuss the fact that "virago in Angliam venit, ius suum contra Stephanum assertura." [the formidable lady came to England to vindicate her right against Stephen.]<sup>539</sup> This is an important line, as it marks William's more intense focus on the Empress and her actions. It also tells us how he viewed Matilda. To this point, William has referred to Matilda as a daughter, a sister, a wife, and an empress. His usage of *imperatrix* alerts us to his support of Matilda and her cause. Although she remains *imperatrix* throughout William's text, she is also *virago*, as in the above phrase: "virago in Angliam venit." Aptly translated by K. R. Potter as "formidable lady," the word can also be translated "heroine" or "female warrior." The etymology alerts us to an important facet of the word: it was from the Latin *vir*, man, and means, at its core, "man-like." William did not conceive of Matilda and her strengths on her own terms, but as compared to men—what is a heroine if not man-like in her power and determination?

This single word shows us an important change from the earlier monastic ideals of femaleness to the viewpoint more characteristic of the early days of the schools. Peter Coss in his work on medieval English women explains the change thus: "The gender definition of the age puts considerable emphasis upon the exercise of public

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<sup>539</sup> Malmesbury, *HN*, 43.

authority and upon military activity. The division into masculine and feminine characteristics has the effect of de-emphasizing female activity. A stark expression of the effects of the resultant role definition is the appearance of the word *virago* to describe an active female, i.e. a pseudo-male.”<sup>540</sup> We see this distinction making its way into texts like William of Malmesbury’s at the advent of the new scholastic thinking. Earlier texts do not refer to any woman as “*virago*” despite any military or political accomplishments.<sup>541</sup> William, because of his existence within a cultural milieu that favored the newer forms of thought that helped to redefine feminine roles, had a difficult time imagining a powerful woman without seeing her in a manly role. In addition to the Empress, he also described Æthelflæd and Adela of Blois as “*virago*.”<sup>542</sup>

Looking at Henry of Huntingdon’s portrayal of the Empress Matilda we find her almost completely erased. Not once does Henry refer to Matilda by name. She appears six times within the text. Three times she is “King Henry’s daughter;” twice she is referred to as having “been the empress of Germany;” and once she is Duke Henry’s mother.<sup>543</sup> In the six instances where she is mentioned, she is passively acted upon. She “received an oath;” she was “besieged at Arundel;” in London, she is “received as Lady,” and then is “lifted to insufferable arrogance” whereupon she is subsequently “driven out” and “forced to flee.”<sup>544</sup> The only active deed Matilda has is when “provoked by a womanly rage, she ordered the king, the Lord’s anointed, to be put in

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<sup>540</sup> Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2000), 30-31.

<sup>541</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *virago* first appears in English in 1100, used by Ælfric in *Hom. I. 14* “Beo hire nama Virago, þæt is, fæmne.”

<sup>542</sup> “Adela, Stephani Blesensis comitis uxor, laudate in seculo potentiae virago” Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, book iii, 276.

<sup>543</sup> Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 709, 711, 723, 739.

<sup>544</sup> Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 709, 723, 739.

chains.”<sup>545</sup> And even here, her action is brought on by first by a passive, violent, and notably “womanly” emotion. Matilda has ceased to have any actions of her own – she is merely acted upon by events. Matilda of Boulogne fares worse in Henry’s account – she is mentioned only once, when “the queen and William of Ypres” oppose the Empress after Stephen’s capture.<sup>546</sup> With this scholastic historian, who admittedly had ties to royalist patrons, the powerful and active women in the English Civil War barely exist at all.

We do not know how these individual men felt about the women in their midst. We do, however, see their notions of gender and the roles that men and women were supposed to play. The cultural changes surrounding the scholastic intellectual movement affected how writers presented both Matilda of Boulogne and the Empress Matilda. Had these stories been written in the preceding century, we may have seen more detail regarding their military actions. In fact, we might have seen them leading their troops, instead of modern historians calculating the dates of Stephen’s imprisonment in order to determine if Matilda could have been responsible for his later release through a great show of force. Despite living as a monk, even William of Malmesbury cannot escape the new thought and its effect on the perception of women. For men like the *Gesta* author and Henry of Huntingdon who inhabited the secular world more frequently, and in whom the scholastic program had become second-nature, the likelihood was less that they would present women as strong on their own terms.

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<sup>545</sup> Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 741.

<sup>546</sup> Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 739.



### *Conclusion*

The production of historical narratives is colored by many different factors. It is easy to discount how these medieval men wrote about women by way of their professions, their lifestyle, their location, and their familial or occupational connections. I do not deny that an anti-Mercian writer would discount Æthelflæd or that Stephen of Blois's biographer would negate the actions of the Empress Matilda. These are valid reasons for downplaying a particular person's activities. But we must look at a variety of factors when attempting to understand how gender fits into historical production. The close observation of historical texts shows how the rigorous scholastic training shaped and changed medieval writers' perceptions about gender.

No matter where John of Salisbury, William of Malmesbury, or Orderic Vitalis lived, who they worked for, or why they wrote, their thought processes had been shaped by a particular stamp of intellectual inquiry. This scholastic blend of dialectic and logic seeped into even the most innocuous areas – their presentation of women. By the time John and Henry of Huntingdon were writing, the basic ideas about gender had shifted. It was not a large shift, or particularly noticeable by writers then, or now. But a shift was occurring and had been for the last forty or so years. This shift made it impossible for men educated in the scholastic way to view powerful women in the same fashion as did their predecessors. In their intellectual world, women did not act in the ways of Adela of Blois – and when they did, they only did so by relinquishing their gender.

When William dedicated his history to the Empress Matilda, he presented both Matilda and her mother as paragons of virtue and compassion, as wise mothers and

learned ladies.<sup>547</sup> His dedicatory epistle to Robert of Gloucester reads with more vigor. He mentions the earl's energy and the perils Robert has endured to buy England's peace.<sup>548</sup> Despite William understanding the possibilities of women's political strength (as evidenced by the military and political struggles between the Empress and Stephen of Blois), William could only conceive of women who acted thus as "manly" and as women who had forgotten their sex. Compared to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, William's Æthelflæd is a completely different woman – she has a terrifying birth and refuses sexual intercourse, thereby denying her female gender so she could become strong and martial. Æthelflæd was a "virago" who became a tower of strength and terror.<sup>549</sup>

Scholastic historians devalue the women because these writers have a new and different intellectual culture than the earlier monastic men. Despite working for secular patrons such as nobles and monarchs, the monastic writer held the ideal of aloofness from secular interference. The scholastic writer could not hold to this ideal, as his goal was employment in either a secular or ecclesiastical bureaucracy.

Despite the scholastics' wish to live for faith, they often depended on their royal or governmental patron. Scholastics were aiming for a place at a court, whether royal, aristocratic, or ecclesiastical. The scholars' primary concern was study, income, and a steady occupation. They had interaction, or at least experience, with powerful women. More so, perhaps, than the monk did, whose first concern was prayer and sacrifice. Yet this experience did not translate onto the page in positive ways. Since the clerks and

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<sup>547</sup> *Gesta Regum*, 7.

<sup>548</sup> Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 11.

<sup>549</sup> Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 199.

monks who wrote and copied historical narratives lived and operated within the structures of the reform movements and within the intellectual communities of their day, it is not surprising that their texts mirror their societies. Medieval writers are notoriously bad historical thinkers, in that they tend to imagine a historical past in terms of the present in which they live. As many readers discover, medieval authors make no excuses for their biases or presumptions. Their histories of the distant past, therefore, do reveal the present in which they wrote. Their works not only reflect current conduct, but their beliefs about the past also helped to shape that conduct. The writing of history in the Middle Ages is not just a reflection of society, but also an active attempt to reshape that society.

Medieval Europe has a reputation of being a misogynistic period, a time when women were denigrated as evil and as the gateway to hell. R. Howard Bloch calls the “ritual denunciation of women” in the Middle Ages an idea that is “on the order of a cultural constant.”<sup>550</sup> Bloch himself declares that the discourse of medieval misogyny lasts from the early church fathers and that it has a uniformity of terms.<sup>551</sup> Yet the subject, or signification, of woman was not stable, particularly during the early twelfth century, and the cathedral-school-educated intellectual elite of this period recreated a view of women that had long-lasting effects. Investigative questioning, doubt, and the search for truth drove the scholar to ever-higher pinnacles.

In particular, the scholastic discussions on universals helped to change the intellectuals’ ideas about women. The debate depended on a need for a definition of

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<sup>550</sup> Bloch and Ferguson, *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy*, 10.

<sup>551</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

words and their meanings. In a sense, scholastics began to define what it meant to be a man or a woman in their world. This systemization required selection and omission: those things or people that did not fit the definition had to be redefined or excluded.<sup>552</sup> The classifications limited women, in particular their place within the secular political world. Women did not rule; men ruled. Women did not fight; men fought. Women bore children, women were conduits, they did not hold power. If a woman did rule, fight, or hold power, she was a virago, outside the normal realm of femaleness, and therefore suspect and possibly a sign that something was askew. These scholastic ideas affected how men wrote history, often in diverse and minute ways. Georges Duby suggested that the early twelfth century was the period when the social schema of the Three Orders came back into vogue.<sup>553</sup> Women did not fit well into the categories of those who work, pray, or fight. Since women were not to be active, when a historian found an anecdote in which a woman was aggressively wielding power, it did not resonate culturally for him. It would not have made sense and would not have been important for the story he was trying to tell. So the narrative was demoted, changed, or dismissed entirely, much like Æthelflæd's story was changed and almost dismissed in William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Signification exists only in relation to other significations; Judith Butler makes this argument concerning gender in her work, but the idea has resonance in the universals debate of the twelfth century. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 18-22.

<sup>553</sup> Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 13.

<sup>554</sup> It is easiest to define something by what it is not and this is pointedly so for masculinity, which Victor Seidler argues is "an essentially negative identity." Victor Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 7. See also Townsend and Taylor, *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, 29.

Eadmer's Matilda may have seemed a foreign concept to the scholastic historian and a good writer knew what his readers would and would not accept. John of Salisbury's world would not have presumed that Matilda of Scotland would give her own oath, nor defend herself to an archbishop. His description of her needed to match his own biases and his world's expectations, and it did: his Matildas were mothers only, not politically powerful women. Here we see the interconnectedness of intellectual scholarship and historical writing. John worked and wrote for a courtly audience of men. John's education suggested that women belonged outside the political arena, that they did not belong in the ordered scheme of government, that they were best suited to provide rulers, but not to be rulers. Nevertheless, women were part of the courtly scene and undoubtedly they continued to carry political sway.

These shifting attitudes towards women within various intellectual communities show how the concepts of women within history and perhaps in the world at large were changing. The more scholastic training a writer had, like John of Salisbury, the less likely he was to portray strong and capable female rulers. By presenting these women as mothers, daughters, and sisters only, these later historians lost sight of their political power. The scholastic author's version of history could not include the same woman we were presented with by the monastic chroniclers.

Altering these histories changed how all women were seen in the reality outside the manuscript. Reading only one version of a woman's record does not give us the full story. These women, who lived real and messy lives, affected the world, through their actions, their bloodlines, and their texts. Our general instinct for interpreting gender and the changing role of women in society is to look at what narrative and legal sources tell

us that contemporary women did. Yet the manner in which these later schoolmen retell the past plays an active role in reducing women's social status in the later twelfth century. What remains for us is the written word. And wherever texts appeared, they changed the relations between authors, listeners, and readers.<sup>555</sup> These changing intellectual trends directly affected how men wrote about, and thus how we perceive, medieval women. Therefore, it behooves us as historians to look at all the available narratives to see the changes wrought by scholastic pens. And the more scholastically trained a historian, the more cautious and careful we must be about the reconstruction of the women's lives about whom he wrote. It is only through doing this that we can hope to uncover the legitimate lives of these powerful and remarkable women.

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<sup>555</sup> Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 80.

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