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Elite Medieval Women during the Crusades

A Comparativ Study of Melisende of Jerusalem, Urraca of Leon, Matilda of Tuscany and Eleanor of Aquitaine

Master's thesis in History
Supervisor: Randi Bjørshol Wærdahl
May 2023



Doña Urraca, Villanueva de Cameros, 1857

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Abstract

This master thesis is a comparative study of elite medieval women who exercised power between 1050 and 1200 a.d, its aim is to prove that women wielding both soft and hard power was not exceptional as stated by Wemple and McNamara in 1973, but rather a rare occurrence that was within the norms of contemporary expectation. The main four subjects of this study are: Melisende of Jerusalem, Urraca of Leon, Matilda of Tuscany and Eleanor of Aquitaine, these are chosen due to their chronological and geographical placements, as well as their similarities and differences in the gathering and expenditure of legitimate public authority. The examinations of this thesis will be of the difference between married and inherited power, of the impact of presence of male authority on female authority and the possible apocryphal nature of the imagery of women clad in armour. Through these comparisons the conclusion that the rise of primogeniture did not, as Wemple and McNamara claimed, cause a decline in elite medieval women's access to power.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven er en komparativ studie om mektige middelalder kvinner som utøvde makt mellom 1050 og 1200 e.kr. dets mål er å bevise at kvinner som utøver både myk og hard makt ikke var eksepsjonelle slik Wemple and McNamara påstod i 1973, men heller sjeldne tilfeller som var innenfor normene til samtiden. De fire hoved subjektene til denne oppgaven er som følger: Melisende av Jerusalem, Urraca av Leon, Matilda av Toscana og Eleanor av Aquitaine. Disse er valgt på grunn av deres plassering både i tid og geografisk, men også på grunn av deres likheter og forskjeller i samlingen og forbruket av legitim offentlig autoritet. Utforskelsene til denne oppgaven vil være på forskjellen mellom gift og arvet makt, på innvirkningen nærværet av mannlig autoritet hadde på kvinnelig autoritet og den potensielle apokryfe naturen av bildet av kvinner kledd i rustning. Gjennom disse sammenligningene til vi konkludere at den økte bruken av primogenitur ikke førte til en nedgang i mektige middelalder kvinners tilgang til makt slik Wemple og McNamara foreslo.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 1973 a theory which created a new paradigm was introduced by Suzanne Wemple and Jo Ann McNamara. This theory they defined as such “ (...) elite women’s access to power declined c. 1050 with the expansion of centralized government. The enforcement of monogamy by the Church, and the rise of primogeniture.”¹ In this thesis I shall examine elite medieval women from 1050 to 1200 to examine whether this was the case. This is in following the “Beyond Exceptionalism” paradigm introduced by Heather J. Tanner in her book *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power*² This paradigm is focused on combating this idea that their access to power declined. This they do by exemplifying powerful women who lived in this period.

the 11th and 12th century became the start of the Crusades, a period of warfare initiated on behalf of the papacy with the goal to reclaim the Holy Land. This led to not only great many changes in the established European kingdoms, but also led to the establishment of kingdoms in the middle east and north Africa. Namely the kingdom of Egypt, and the kingdom of Jerusalem. Here we will see women joining the crusades, as followers, as pilgrims and according to some sources as crusaders themselves.

The papacy and the landed nobles of Europe might have been allies of their march towards Jerusalem to assist the pilgrims. But the conflict of investiture of bishops, the nobility would prefer to give such a title to their vassals or allies, whilst the papacy was increasingly tired of the laymen invested to such high position within their organization. This conflict would colour European affairs just as much as the crusades did those abroad. The rise of ecclesiastical power, both by their enforcement of monogamy by also by more fervour use of excommunication, meant there was ways for women both to act as allies and enemies of the Holy See.

1.1 – Approach

During the time of the Crusades multiple women across Europe were wielders of soft and hard power, in this thesis I shall examine why they were not exceptional, and despite the rise of primogeniture, the hereditary system would still in some circumstances favour women. To do this I will first explain who these women were, how they came into power and how their lives progressed from birth to death. This will show that 1) there were many cases of women

¹ Tanner, 2019, s. VII

² Tanner, 2019, p.2

achieving power. 2) they had different means of achieving it and 3) that they could wield said power in a multitude of ways.

Then I shall examine the two main ways of getting power and how this affected their rule by analysing the difference between those that inherited their power and those who married into said power. Here the comparison will be limited to ability to exert power, the area in which they could exert power and lastly what factors matter when considering their potential for wielding power

This then leads us into the examination of how these women could wield their power, first we are going to examine soft power, which relates to diplomacy and social pressure, attributes and skills that are often associated with women and therefore accentuated in the research about them. However, as none of these women acted in isolation I will differentiate the analysis between those who acted in the absence of male authority, those who acted in the presence of male authority as well as how the presence of ecclesiastical interest affected their rule. Many of the women will be featured in all three subchapters as circumstances in their life changes. This then allows us to contrast and compare not only between the elite medieval women but also between themselves at different stages of their lives. This will allow us to find conclusions based on a large enough amount of empirical evidence to do so with credibility.

We will then, by the same methods, see how these elite medieval women exercise hard power, military power. Here we will differentiate between direct military power which is the participation and commandeering of battle and the indirect exercising of hard power which is the enabling and manoeuvring of armed conflict. In this chapter we will see that not only did these women exercise hard power in the same manner as one would assume of a man, but also that it was not limited by their ability. They did not only serve as military commanders due to exceptional skills, but because that was what was demanded of them.

Their power will be examined through analysing the reaction, consequences, and the legacy of their rule. They would, as one might expect of a powerful noble gain rivals, opponents, and enemies, who would seek to discredit their rule. I will examine how this was done, by which methods it was done and the motives behind such actions. Through this we will find evidence of not only their power but also the legitimacy of their rule.

Lastly, the issue of the apocryphal nature of a woman clad in armour will be discussed, this is imagery that will appear throughout the thesis presented by both primary and secondary sources. I will examine why this occurs, whether there is any truth to the claims of female soldiers, why they would invent such stories but also, most importantly, what this all tells us about how the possibility of warring women was perceived.

1.2 – Theory

Power as a concept in and of itself will not be defined, it is not necessary for this thesis. However, what is meant by exercising power must be defined. We will instead be applying the terms of soft and hard power as introduced by Tanner. These will be employed to show how these women could exercise power, and to show that they did so with the same tools as their male contemporaries. Soft power includes diplomacy, intercessions, societal pressure, and will mostly be covered in chapter 6, where we will see how they employed their ability to politically manoeuvre to exert their moral and legal authority, demonstrated by rhetoric in charters and letters, by patronage or by gifts to churches, hospitals, and culture. Hard power is according to Tanner the martial authority and ability to direct and command soldiers, armies, and militia. This is most easily done by examining primary sources of battles.

One note on the application of terms, the use of hard power is rarely employed when examining women. However, with the intention of the thesis to prove both the unexceptionalism of elite medieval women, as well as the fact that as long they achieved legitimate moral and legal authority, they could exercise power in much the same way as a man. This is to disprove a theory that defined the Wemple and McNamara paradigm, namely that elite medieval women were exceptional and that their access of power was declining from 1050 and beyond. The moral and legal authority is defined thusly: Legal authority implies that the hierarchy and system in the laws affirms the position the person has attained. It is supported by law. However, the more important one in this thesis is the moral authority. To have moral authority means that the authority that it is also affirmed by what people believes to be fundamental truth. If the accepted fundamental truth was that women never could rule, they could not be invested by moral authority. However, as will be exemplified, they were invested with such authority. Their disposal of this authority is what will be defined in this thesis as exercising power. Any attempt to enforce and expend authority is exercising power. Because said power is only attainable through a system enforced by the moral and legal authority, the exercise of it is also tied to the same authority.

One difficult aspect by any such thesis that attempts to prove unexceptionalism is that it often relies on the feelings of contemporaries towards the matter. This might be hard to prove, however, an oral historian, Portelli explains that after we have established that the statement we have fulfilled the philological criteria needed for any such source. In the case of this

thesis this means it has to be contemporary and geographically relevant. Any statement, even if they might be factually wrong can be psychologically true, something that in some cases – like the contemporary feeling towards female soldiers – might be of equal importance to any factually reliable primary sources.

1.3 – Method

As a primary method to examine the opportunities of medieval women during the time of the first and second crusades, this thesis will use comparisons as its main method. In these comparisons it employs Tanner's distinction between "Soft" Power and Hard Power as defined above.³

This will be broken up into different categories depending on the context in which they had to manoeuvre, as whether there was a contending male authority figure present mattered massively to their possibilities, as well as their relationships with the church. These are therefore separated into three distinct subchapters where their utilization of soft power will be scrutinized.

Hard power, which will be covered in chapter 5, will be split up into direct and indirect use of hard power. Direct would imply either participation in the battle itself, which rarely if ever happened, or taking direct tactical and strategic control over the army, which was far more common for regents. Indirect implies that the regent or the elite medieval woman beyond making decisions of entering conflict would delegate to more fitting or experienced commanders.

This distinction is important for the last empirical chapter, which explores the apocryphal nature of women exercising direct hard power by being a presence on the battlefield clad in armour. This will be done by examining the motivations behind the sources that claim such participation, as well as literary analysis based on genre tropes of hagiographical writing.

To do this correctly we have to – according to Kathryn Kish Sklar – identify crucial causal paradigms through comparisons.⁴ It is therefore a chapter on these women's biographies is included, as well as the empirical chapter mainly pertaining to comparing different women in similar circumstances. Because only through such inspection can we prove anything.

³ Tanner, 2019, p.2

⁴ Levine, 2014. p 343. Levine quotes Sklar in her defence of comparative history

1.3.1 Delimitation Period

Due to Wemple and McNamara's established paradigm about the declining of access to power for medieval elite women notes the start of the decline at 1050, it seemed prudent to use this year as the beginning to the delimitation period. Not because the thesis necessarily aims to conclude in agreement with this assessment, but rather to explore whether there is a notable change in the attitudes and options for elite women to inhabit positions of authority, or rather as Tanner claims, it was expected accepted and routine throughout the period.⁵

This fits neatly with some of the largest conflicts of the Middle Ages, The First Crusade was called in 1089 by Pope Urban II⁶ and the Second Crusade was called in 1145 by Pope Eugene III, whom also recognized the reconquista as a part of the same movement in 1147. the Third Crusade would be spearheaded in 1189 by King Phillip II of France, King Richard I Lionheart of England and Emperor Frederick I of the Holy Roman Empire.⁷

Therefore, it seemed historically interesting to see how these factors interplayed. Wemple and McNamara's paradigm about the decline of female authority as well as the period of the early crusades. The thesis then limits its main period of examining to the 150 years between 1050-1200, although some examples might exceed these limits, Eleanor of Aquitaine for example died in 1206, but the thesis are only attempting to examine the elite medieval women's opportunity to exercise power within these general limits.

1.3.2 Subjects

The subjects of the thesis have been chosen on three factors. 1) Their political career and its distinctiveness from the other subjects. 2) Their geographical position within Europe and its distinctiveness from the other subjects. 3) Their placement in time, where their closeness in time was valued. It was important to choose subjects that one could reasonably argue was a diverse enough representation of elite women in medieval Europe to claim any form of general pattern, which is the reasoning behind the subjects being from Spain, England, France, Italy and Jerusalem, with the notable exclusion of Germany. This was done not because of a lack of subjects, Empress Matilda of the Holy Roman Empire could have served as such, but as she shared similarities with other subjects in the thesis and as Matilda

⁵ Tanner, 2019, p.2

⁶ Allen & Amt, 2003, p.39

⁷ Allen & amt, 2003, xviii

of Tuscany, although Italian, was a part of the empire and had Emperor Henry IV as her liege, she served as a subject who could also exemplify the Germanic part of Europe.

1.4 – Source Criticism

As this is a thesis that uses sources from many different periods of time and schools of thought it is necessary to be critical of what they include, exclude, inflate, conflate or extenuate.

The primary sources of this thesis include: William of Tyre, Orderic Vitalis, Thomas of Beverley, William of Newburgh, Donizo, Anne Komnena, Albert of Aachen, Baldric of Dol, Fulcher of Chartres, Robert the Monk, Lucas de Tuy, Juan de Soria, Rodrigo of Toledo, Odo of Deuil, The Chronicle of Sahagun and The Historia Compostela.

These all wrote about the women or, as was the case for quite a few of them, should have written of these women. Therefore, it is important to critique exactly who they were and what their interests were. Many of them will be critiqued in the chapters they appear, this include the Sahagun and Compostela Chronicle, Odo, Donizo, Komnena, Orderic and William of Tyre, but it still seems essential to give a general overview in this chapter.

The secondary sources for the most part fall into one of two camps, Those pertaining to the old paradigm, set by Wemple and McNamara, and the new paradigm, set by Heather J. Tanner. They either pertain to the idea that these women were exceptional, or to the idea that they were not, but rather a part of the norm. I will also briefly touch on the secondary sources from the seventeenth and nineteenth century with for example Vedriani, Agnes Strickland and J.R. Planché.

1.4.1 – The Chroniclers and Charters

The primary sources of this period are comprised of either charters, letters, or chroniclers. These gives us insight into the general procedures of events and life that these elite women would encounter. However, letters are rarely preserved, even more rarely if the sender or recipient was a woman. Charters deals with grants, gift, patronage, or decisions and are written by a chancery in a formulaic language, and the chroniclers were written by clergymen, often on commission.

Let's look at the letters first, because they are as close to unbiased first-hand information of people's perception of each other that we can find. Pope Gregory VII's letter to

Matilda⁸ is a great example of this, which due to our knowledge of Matilda's ability to read and write we can assume was meant for her eyes only. The inter-personal relationship displayed in the words of letter as well as the trust in her ability as a commander serves as evidence to Donzio's possibly biased chronicle.

There are also "letters to the people" which were statements given to a town or city, which for example gives us information like Urraca using the title of Queen of All Spain, for presumably the first time after her father's death in 1109.⁹ Which due to him not claiming the same title, shows her ambition for her rule. They are however less useful in examining inter-personal relationship beyond inclusion or exclusion of spouses or children.

The main problem with any of these letters is authenticating them, especially in the case of personal letters which was meant to be held private. The reason we still have some of them is due to copies being made, them being referenced in books or similar. Any action of copying runs the risk of changing the original message, especially as it might include modernization or translation of the language. However, all the letters referenced in this thesis are accepted and used in peer-reviewed secondary sources and does not serve as the only evidence to any claim they are presented to support.

Charters, on the other hand, has the distinct advantage of being issued by a chancery and archived. They are also sealed with wax seals from both issuer and witnesses. This means that it is far more plausible to ensure authenticity of said charters. However, they are most often used to grant, gift, or give patronage to someone and something and can in most cases only prove a relationship between the issuers who signed. Like for example in the case where we know that a coalition and allyship between Urraca and Count Henry of Portugal had been made due to them collectively issuing a charter.¹⁰

The last and most important primary sources are the chronicles, which detail what happened in a specific geographical area in a specific time period. William of Tyre's *A History of Deeds Beyond the Sea* thus concerns Jerusalem during the First and Second Crusade. One important factor to establish immediately is that even though these are counted as primary sources. William of Tyre was born over 30 years after the conclusion of the First Crusade.

This means that when he writes about the events that transpired during it, he relies on secondary information. And not even firsthand accounts are all the same. This will be furthered explored in chapter two, but even in the case of Pope Urban II's speech which started

⁸ Fraser p.131

⁹ Ferreria, 2011, p.233

¹⁰ Azevado, The medieval Portuguese documents (Documentos Medievais Portugueses), 1:37-38

the First Crusade, Fulcher of Chartres, Robert the Monk and Baldric of Dol, all said to have been present, fail to recount the same speech.

What they do manage however, is to recall general topics that were brought up. This probably because they would hear the speech, but not write it down before much alter meaning they in essence had to make up a new speech hitting the same crucial points.

Therefore, when we use the chronicles, it is important to analyze what would be the most important facets and avoid relying too much on details. What someone said exactly might have been lost, but what they meant have not.

It is also important to consider that they did not write apolitically or unbiased. So when considered what would constitute as personal reflections made by the author their life, afflictions and personal biases must be accounted for. Donizo would write more favorably about his patron Matilda than Odo of Deuil would of his patron Louis VII's ex-wife Eleanor.

They are also, as names such as Robert the Monk perhaps suggest, members of the church, and therefore harbored ecclesiastical interests. This will be mor elaborately explored in chapter 8, but it meant that they could favor certain virtues and inflate those if they considered the ruler to be fitting such treatment, as in the case of Matilda and Melisende, or they could inflate or invent vices to harm their reputation if they did not, as was the case with Urraca and Eleanor.

1.4.2 – Old and New Paradigms

The paradigm Wemple and McNamara are credited with creating I the introduction to this chapter. That women which exercising political power beyond the year 1050 was exceptional is built on older research, some on which appears in this thesis.

For examples Agnes Strickland's work about the queens of England, written in the 1880, or Planchè's journal about the first count of Norfolk, Raoul. The latter has the obvious issue of not strictly being about a woman, and the reason for its inclusion is its mentions of Emma de Gauder, as it is one of few sources who do so. This means that the information presented about Emma is scarce and lacks collaborating sources. However, Planchè does not claim to know anything about Emma beyond what his sources tells him.

The former, Stricklands *Queens of England* on the other hand, plays into the continuing defamation of Eleanor. Her description of Eleanor as thoughtless and beautiful,

and even though she was accomplished, all she sought from life was enjoyment.¹¹ This description might be where Maher Lazar's depiction of her joining the crusade due to boredom originated.¹²

Strickland would go on to explain that she compensated for an ill-spent youth by being wise and benevolent in old age, a feat Strickland says she shares with few women.¹³ This is, as far as the source material shows an invention by Strickland as she applied Victorian standards to a medieval woman. We know little about Eleanor's personality beyond the charters she wrote, which by nature had to be diplomatic, all we can judge her by is the actions and decisions she took, of which she in her youth would have had less opportunities to make.

Using Eleanor as an example we can see how this trend of inventing details extends into the 20th century with Marion Meade's 1976 biography. In it she does much the same thing as Strickland as the information we have of Eleanor's life is limited. Much of what she infers about Eleanor's actions or feelings are interpreted, but in difference to Strickland she does not claim to know the truth and is up-front about the assumptions she is making.

However, she does adhere to the idea of Eleanor being exceptional by pointing out things she was doing or achieving as unique. Despite, as we will see later on in the thesis, there being many other examples of women in similar situations achieving the same.

In Alison Weir's *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, she is far more conservative in implying anything about Eleanor, as the source material would not support knowing anything about her feelings or motivations, she ends up being on the sidelines in her own book. This is however not a bad thing as Weir is stating about Eleanor is therefore more reliable.

This is the case for most of the secondary sources pertaining and focusing to the medieval women in this thesis, especially the older ones. As such much of the information has to be evaluated on the basis of the evidence presented.

Lastly, there is an argument to be made that many of the sources from the 70's and 80's being influenced by second-wave feminism, but as it does not directly affect the points being made in this thesis that will not already be covered by the examinations done in chapter 8, it seemed unnecessary and detrimental to the thesis scope to devote space to it here.

In the last few years, the paradigm of moving beyond exceptionalism has emerged

¹¹ Strickland, 1882, p. 93

¹² Lazar, 1976. P. 39

¹³ Strickland, 1882, p. 109

spearheaded by Heather J. Tanner. This wish to prove that women exercising power was not exceptions to the rule but rather the norm does in some instances color their articles and conclusions.

The general issue is their willingness to detach the women from the hierarchies to which they belong. Because only through truly autonomous, independent action can they be proven to be “elite medieval women.”

This fallacy ignores the fact that no one in the Middle Ages operated autonomously of their social hierarchy or family. This is why this thesis is split into sub-chapters depending on their relation to this hierarchy, as well as the conclusion showing how it's the hierarchy which enables exercise of power, and it is only left to the elite medieval women to use it well.

For example, Melisende's queenship is solely because her father Baldwin II willed it so. It is not because she started from the bottom and maneuvered herself to the top, however, her being able to retain said power is down to her own ability to do so.

1.5 – Historiography

The historiography of elite medieval women is defined by its necessity to rely on a small set of sources due to a lack of focus on their lives, both through history but also by their contemporary chroniclers. This has led to, as we saw in the previous chapter, inventions about their lives. It has also led to interpretations that does not incorporate the fact that our knowledge is incomplete. This might led to a focus on the structures and rules, rather than what would happen in reality. The historiography of elite medieval women has therefore, due to different approaches towards historical work in the face of a lack of sources, focused on either the theoretical and collective, or the practical and individual. The former being how Wemple and McNamara used the sources, whilst Tanner falls into the latter category.

1.5.1 – Exceptionalism

The prevailing paradigm about medieval elite women has, according to Heather J. Tanner, been that they were exceptional, and that their access of power were declining from 1050 and beyond. This Paradigm, she says, was established by Suzanne Fonay Wemple and Jo Ann McNamara in 1973 and has been the standard of the general perception of medieval women, despite there being numerous articles and studies disproving the “exceptional” status.¹⁴

Tanner, and the authors of the individual chapters of *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100-1400* are very focused on the individual achievements of the women

¹⁴ Tanner, 2019, p.3

they are writing about, which is important to highlight that they could be considered influential and powerful. But, they are also part of a hierarchical structure, and as we shall see later on, their relationship with male authority mattered to their ability to exercise power.

This leads to this issue between interpretations of the theoretical power that women had as presented by Wemple and McNamara, and the more practical examples presented by the collaborators of Heather Tanner. Where the focus is not on the larger perceived structure society had. What the “rules” were is not as important as what came to be in reality. If women rose to power, and held authority in a significant number, that is far more compelling evidence for Tanner, and might shape how we view the actualities of medieval society. But, still, Wemple and McNamara’s research into what was seen as the norm, and what was “meant” to be the norm is important when we for example are examining the process of the overall status of women in society.

For example, all the women in this thesis with the notable exception of maybe Margaret of Beverley, who was a peasant, has met reactions, conflict, or consequences due to their gender or norm breaking. Some got accused of murder or adultery, some were deliberately left out of the chronicles, and some were put on a pedestal for their achievements.

Tanner also points out that many women, who her research show to habitually and ordinarily came to positions of governance, was often seen as unremarkable to their contemporaries.¹⁵

This does not conflict with the above statement for the exact reason that this thesis is based on. Since they were unremarkable and gained positions of moral and legal authority that had claim to, they were treated in the way political friends or enemies usually would. In Chapter 7 we will see that the methods by which they were discredited differed with their male counterparts, but the motives and goals were the same.

1.5.2 – Lack of focus on women throughout history

When history is being established with a focus on a sphere in which women at the time largely was excluded, this does shape the narrative. Although as I’ve mentioned above there wasn’t a lack of women wielding power in medieval Europe, the amount of history written about them is lacking.

Sarah Lambert writes in *Gendering the Crusades* that the narratives written about them were written in a literary tradition that sought to masculinize the historical world, and that no one would need reminding of how little women are directly referenced in medieval

¹⁵ Tanner, p 3

literature.¹⁶ And even when they are as with the *Alexiad* written by Anne Komnena, the women are often masculinized or the men feminized to avoid upsetting this universal truth.

The medieval sources are usually charters, intercessions or most commonly, church chronicles. Which again tends to not mention women, male authors were shaped by the political and ecclesiastical concerns of their work rather than giving the women the place they deserved¹⁷, as for example with Odo of Deuil when he excludes Eleanor of Aquitaine due to her divorce for Louis VII.

The ecclesiastical concerns allowed a lot of potential source material concerning women's involved in the period to be forgotten, and even when material was written down, a lot of it was not properly archived, women's letters even to popes, bishops, and kings survive sporadically, but letters between women have rarely been retained."¹⁸This has led to the necessity of disciplined Imagination and is also the reason I will try and use literature to find some examples of notions and attitudes that might contradict the common narrative.

Chapter 2 – Biographies

To identify crucial causal paradigms though comparisons is essential, to do this we need to summarize the lives of the women that the thesis will examine. This will give a general understanding of their placement geographically, chronologically, and genealogically. It will become evident later that this will have a huge effect on their ability to exercise power, particularly in regard to whether they inherited or married into power, as well as how much power comes with said inheritance or marriage.

It is obvious that a countess would have less power than a queen. As we will see in chapter four, a queen who married a king has less power than a princess who became a queen. Therefore, this chapter will introduce these essential facts and focus on immediate family, marriage, children, heirs, and titles or positions of power they held throughout their lifetime.

To avoid stating these facts completely in isolation and since the thesis moving forward will mostly jump between similar situations happening displaced from each other both in time and place, there will also be a quick summary of their lives and political situation.

¹⁶ Lambert,2001, s.2

¹⁷ Tanner,2019, s.3

¹⁸ Tanner,2019, s.4

2.1 – Eleanor of Aquitaine

Eleanor of Aquitaine was Queen of France from 1137 to 1152, and Queen of England from 1154 to 1189. During this time, she also reigned as Duchess of Aquitaine from 1137 to 1204. Eleanor of Aquitaine was born to William X of Aquitaine and Aenor de Chatellerauld In c. 1122 , William X died in April 1137. As his only male child, William Aigret, died at the age of four in 1130, around the same time that Aenor died , it was the oldest living child, Eleanor who succeeded him.

Her guardian had been King Louis VI, and it was his son she married and who would become King Louis VII upon his father's death only a few weeks after the wedding in August 1137. Due to a lack of male children produced by the marriage, they only got the daughters Marie and Alix, and the issue of consanguinity, their marriage got annulled in 1152 . However, the issue of consanguinity did not deter her from marrying her third cousin, King Henry II of England.

With Henry she had Matilda, Joan, Eleanor, Geoffrey II, Richard I Lionheart, William IX, Henry the Young King and John Lackland. In total three daughters, two of which Eleanor and Joan became queens of Castille and Sicilly respectively, and five sons of which three, Richard, Henry and John became Kings of England. Important to note, Henry was never a reigning king, and is therefore not counted in the succession of English kings, but he was crowned whilst this father was alive.

Her marriage to Henry II was not without issues and would hinder her ability to perform active political power. In March 1173 Henry the Young King revolted against his father, and Eleanor joined his revolt alongside her sons Richard and John. She would consequently be arrested by Henry later the same year and imprisoned in various locations in England for the next 16 years. Had it not been for Henry II death in 1189 she would probably have stayed imprisoned longer. Henry had multiple affairs, most famously a scandalous one with Rosamund Clifford I the 1160-70s. This notes Amy Kelly, was a flagrant disregard for the queen's dignity in the hopes of arousing anger enough to seek an annulment of their marriage. She, however, did not seek an annulment and became a widow in 1189, since Henry the Young King had died 28 years old in 1183, it was Richard I Lionheart that became king of England, she would act as regent when Richard joined the second crusade. And after Richard's death in 1199 due to a gangrenous wound , she would oversee her son John Lackland's reign until her own death in 1206.

2.2 – Matilda of Tuscany

Matilda of Tuscany, also known as Matilda of Canossa or Matilda, daughter of Peter was the Margravine of Tuscany from 1055 to 1115, she was born to Margrave Boniface III of Tuscany and Beatrice of Lorraine around the year 1046, although her birthyear is not completely certain. Matilda was the youngest of her siblings, a brother named Fredrick, and a sister named Beatrice who both died shortly after their father in 1052. This meant that it was Matilda who would inherit the margravate, the first three years she was a minor but in 1055 she would join a co-rulership with her mother which lasted until Beatrice of Lorraine's death in 1076. Hay attributes Fredricks suspicious death to the anger of Emperor Henry III due to Beatrice union with Godfrey III the Bearded, a church-sympathiser and one of his enemies. This would be a foreshadowing of Matilda's own reign and struggle against the emperor Henry IV.

Matilda had become betrothed to her stepbrother Godfrey IV the Hunchback about the same time as her joining the co-rulership in 1055. But they would not be married until her stepfather's death in 1069. The marriage would quickly result in a child, whom Matilda named Beatrice after her mother, but the daughter would die shortly after birth. This would be the only child Matilda ever had and is the last member of the line of Canossa. This furthered the animosity between Matilda and Godfrey, and merely a year later they were separated, this separation lasted until 1076 when Godfrey was assassinated in Vlaardingin in 1076.

Matilda would then rule without husband, and without her mother who died later the same year. This would last until 1089, when she was desperate for allies and married Welf V who was a teenager at this point. This sparked the same amount of outrage in Henry IV as her mother's marriage to Godfrey III had, because his father Welf IV, had turned against the emperor and sided with the pope in the investiture controversy, but more on that later. This marriage would also turn sour, Welf shall, according to Cosmas of Prague's *Chronica Boemorum* have feared witchcraft and refused to share a marital bed with Matilda, who on the third day displayed herself for him naked to prove that there was no hidden malice or deceit. His reactions shall not have pleased her, and she called him a "vile thing, viler than a worm or a rotten seaweed" before exclaiming that if he did not desire to suffer a most miserable death, he would keep out of her sight. The extremely bad start to their marriage aside, they did stay together until 1095 when they separated, and although they never where divorced or their marriage annulled, they would never again be considered man and wife.

One of Matilda's nicknames is Daughter of Peter, due to her close friendship with pope Gregory VII, What had begun as informal communication soon developed into a more personal relationship, beyond religion and politics. It became a personal relationship became so close they would refer to each other as daughter and father. And although she claims to have loved and supported the Pope I the same way that Paul did Christ, this was not a sinful or carnal relationship. No source collaborates any rumors of a sexual relationship. And the rumors that we are aware of was allegedly started by her husband Godfrey the Hunchback. The only evidence of such acts would be sources written long after her death and usually have a strong political motive which make them untrustworthy. This relationship would be to the benefit of them both, for example with Henry IV penitential walk to Canossa, until Gregory's death in 1085, Matilda would still continue to serve as an ally to the Papacy beyond his passing. In 1111 she was crowned Vice-Queen of Italy by Henry IV's Successor Henry V and would hold this position until her Death in 1115, which also was the extinction of House Canossa.

2.3 – Melisende of Jerusalem

Melisende of Jerusalem was Queen of Jerusalem from 1131 to 1153, she was during her entire tenure in a co-sovereignty, first with her husband Fulk from 1131 to 1143, and after his death with her son Baldwin III from 1143 to 1153. She was born in 1105 to King Baldwin II of Jerusalem and Morphia of Melitene. Melisende was the eldest of four sisters, of these Alice Princess of Antioch is of particular note, as she also would perform active political power in similarity with her sister, for example to take back control of Antioch after a power struggle with Baldwin II in 1135. Baldwin II never fathered a son, so when he died in 1131 it was Melisende who was the heir presumptive. She had married count Fulk of Anjou in 1129 and as a precaution to a possible marital crisis, Baldwin II had made sure that Fulk, Melisende and Baldwin would inherit equally, therefore making sure that she would remain Queen of Jerusalem even after his death. Fulk and Melisende would therefore ascend the throne as equals.

When King Fulk died on the 10 of November 1142 the royal power would pass to Melisende, and as Baldwin III was only thirteen and Amaury seven, she was for a short time the sole ruler of Jerusalem. She would continue to exercise political power and rule without Baldwin, who up until he was convinced to take a more active part of government in 1152. The then 22-year-old Baldwin would try and force his way into government administration by

getting the archbishop to crown him alone, without his mother. Melisende had already started the preparations for such an eventuality by including her son Amaury in the co-sovereignty established by her father as early as in 1148, as evidenced by his inclusion Amaury in a charter following Baldwin III failed military campaign in Damascus. Still, following a short civil war, Baldwin III who was a far more experienced and superior military commander would emerge victorious in 1153, she would – thanks to the intervention of the church – be granted the city of Nablus to rule, which she would continue to do until her death in 1161.

2.4 – Urraca of Leon

Urraca the Reckless of Leon was queen of Leon and Castile from 1109 to 1126 and queen of Galicia from 1109 to 1111. She would also be the countess of Galicia from 1109 to 1109, She would during her reign style herself as the Empress of all Spain. Born to Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile and Constance of Burgundy in 1081, she had four half-sisters and one half-brother: Sancho, who if he had not predeceased Alfonso VI in the battle of Ucles in 1108 would have inherited the throne.

The throne would instead pass to his eldest daughter Urraca, who together with her husband Raymond had been granted Galicia in 1090, whilst her half-sister Theresa, a woman that would exercise a great deal of political power in her own right was granted the land of Portugal along with her husband Henry in 1094 or 1096. Urraca married Raymond of Burgundy at some point before 1093, as she is referred to in a letter to Hermenegildo Rodriguez as his wife. The exact date of their marriage is unknown, but she would at the writing of the letter have been 12. Raymond died in 1107, leaving the widowed 26-year-old Urraca with the sole responsibility of governing Galicia, a region that would come to consider her son Alfonso Raimunde the king after her contentious re-marriage and of which she had to carefully placate and keep control over to retain her power.

When she succeeded her father in 1108 she needed a new husband and according to the Chronicle of Sahagun and the Historia Compostela she was forced by Leonese aristocrats to marry Alfonso I the Battler, King of Aragon against their will. The marriage would not be a happy one, and they would separate in 1110. With every attempt of reconciliation a failure, Urraca had to attempt to regain the lands that Alfonso I now held dominion over. This would result in Urraca's lover Gomez Gonzales being killed at the battle of Candespina in 1111. And ultimately a truce between Urraca that would give her much of the land she once held, as well as provide the annulment of their marriage due to consanguinity. She would be succeeded by

her son Alfonso VII when she died in 1126, thereby setting a precedent of a Queen not only ruling as a regent in a husband or sons' stead but as a legitimate monarch in her own right.

2.5 – Other women mentioned in this thesis

2.5.1 – Emma de Gauder

Emma De Gauder, also known as Emma de Breteuil or Emma Fitz-Osborn was the countess of Norfolk between 1075 and 1099. She was born to William Fitz-Osborn and Adeliza de Tosny around 1059 and married Ralph de Gael in 1075, a man she would have three children with. She would help defend Norwich Castle against William the Conqueror later the same year. She would join the first Crusade in 1096. Emma would die in 1099 on the road to Palestine.

2.5.2 – Sikelgaita de Salerno

Sikelgaita de Salerno was Duchess of Apulia from 1058 to 1090. She was born to Prince Guaimar IV of Salerno and Gemma of Capua in 1040. She married the Duke of Apulia Robert Guiscard in 1058, together they had eight children. In the conflict against the Byzantines, she is said to have been a commander of troops in her own right. Even being likened to Athena by Anna Komnena. Sikelgaita died at the age of fifty in 1090.

2.5.3 – Alice of Champagne

Alice of champagne was the Queen consort of Jerusalem between 1210 and 1218, the regent of Cyprus from 1218 to 1232 and the regent of Jerusalem from 1243-1246. The great-granddaughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Melisende of Jerusalem, Alice was born to Count Henry II of Champagne and Queen Isabella I of Jerusalem in 1193. She married King Hugh I of Cyprus in the spring of 1210 the marriage would last until his death in 1218, after which she would assume regency for Henry I of Cyprus, their infant son. The widowed Alice then married Bohemond, who was set to inherit Antioch and Tripoli. This marriage would be annulled by Pope Gregory IX in 1227, due to a conflict between herself, the papacy and Emperor Fredrick II. She would attempt to lay claim to the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1229 but fail. She alongside her husband Ralph of Nesle, whom she married in 1241, would however be granted regency over the kingdom due to Conrad's absence in 1243. She would hold this position until her death in 1246.

2.5.4 – Margaret of Beverley

Margaret of Beverley, also referred to as Margaret of Jerusalem is of particular note as she is the only woman in this thesis who was not a noble. Therefore, the biographical information is

far more uncertain. She is believed to have been born sometime around the middle of the 12th century in Jerusalem to Sibil and Hurno, whom were pilgrims to the Holy land at the time of her birth. She partook in the Siege of Jerusalem in 1187 and a battle near Antioch in 1181, before eventually some years after becoming a nun in Montreuil in France. We do not know when Margaret died.

2.5.5 – Countess Theresa of Portugal, Queen Blanche of Castille, and Alice of Antioch

The last remaining three is only mentioned briefly so only the most basic information is needed. Countess Theresa of Portugal was born in 1080 and died in 1130, she was the sister of Urraca of Leon and the countess of Portugal from 1094 or 1096 to 1128. After her husband Henry's death in 1112 she would continue to rule alongside her son until her death.

Blanche of Castille was the Queen consort of France from 1223 to 1226, and then the Queen regent from 1226 to 1234 due to the minority of her son. She was born to Eleanor of England and Alfonso VIII of Castille in 1188 and was the great-great-granddaughter of Urraca of Leon and the granddaughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine. She would resume her regency due to her son being on Crusade between 1248 and 1252, when she died.

Alice of Antioch was the Princess consort of Antioch between 1126 and 1130 and the sister of Melisende of Jerusalem, she was born to Baldwin II of Jerusalem and Morphia of Melitene. She would similarly to Melisende partake in power struggles in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, both with her father Baldwin II but also Melisende and King Fulk, she died sometime after 1151.

2.6 – Why these women?

These women were chosen due to their place in the period of 1050 to 1200 that this thesis covers, except for Queen Blanche and Alice of Champagne whom in Blanches case is only mentioned briefly, or in Alice of Champagnes case serves as an example of the continuation of the precedent set by women in the families of both Eleanor and Melisende.

They are also from distinctly different places of medieval Europe, I count the Kingdom of Jerusalem as a medieval European state due to its organization and heritage of the ruling family, not its geographical location. This spread allows the thesis to assert a general theory regarding the exceptionalism of the elite women in medieval Europe. This is also the reason for the relatively high number of research objects. It seemed prudent to include as many and as varied of a group as was possible within reason. If a conclusion regarding how these women gained power, why they could keep it and whether they could be regarded exceptional was to be reached, there must be enough subjects to confidently claim

that there are trends and similarities.

Already after this shallow inspection in these women's career and life some factors are clear: Elite medieval women's ability to exercise power is tied to the question of whether their power was inherited or married into. As we will see in the next chapter, women such as Matilda, Melisende or Urraca would have more autonomy and be significantly more involved in direct political action due to their inheritance.

Chapter 3 – Difference between married power and inherited power

If we are to determine whether or not these women we have just been introduced to could be considered exceptional, it seemed imperative to examine the difference of how they achieved said power, as it affected their ability to rule.

With the exception of titles being created, like in the case of the reunification of a nation, there is only two ways to become a king or queen. Either the father dies and the power passes to the you, the prince or princess, or you marry the king. For women it was far more common though to achieve power by marriage rather than inheritance, as you would not only have to be the eldest child, but none of your surviving siblings at the time of your fathers passing could be male. There are far too many exceptions and edge cases to claim this to be the way things were always done. Stafford when she writes about the 10th and 11th century inheritance practices of the English royal family, mentions titles going laterally to brothers instead of children or even from nephew to uncle.¹⁹

And due to this, women would inherit, as Matilda of Tuscany, Melisende of Jerusalem and Urraca of Leon all inherited and maintained political power. There's also those in this thesis that went the more traditional path and gained power due to marriage, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Sikelgaita of Salerno, Alice of Champagne, and Emma de Gauder all gained their title through marital means. Neither option was regarded as all that exceptional. What has to be examined in this chapter is: Was there a difference in how they were able to exercise their power? What power did they have in their marriages? What power did they have in their lands? Is there a distinction in how they are treated by posterity?

3.1 – Married Power

Eleanor of Aquitaine a duchess in her own right before she married king Louis VII of France, and throughout her reign as queen of France it is primarily in the capacity of being Duchess of Aquitaine, she is able to exercise power. Her not being able to produce a male heir for Louis

¹⁹ Stafford, 1997, p. 82

VII became an issue which she was becoming desperate to overcome, as we can see when she petitions Bernard of Clairvaux for his help. It would not go much better in her marriage to Henry II, when she would lose most of her autonomy and mostly, again, appear only in matters regarding lands which her hereditary hers. An attempt of furthering her own power through her son Henry the young king would lead to her imprisonment. What we can extract from this is that in Eleanor's case, she had power by means of inheritance, and on behalf of this inheritance she gained power in her marriages, as it pertained to a region both kings where desperate to have control over. She could not however, be said to have exercised power in the same way as Urraca or Melisende, as we will see later

Emma de Gauder's only autonomous action that we are aware of is her defence of Norwich Castle²⁰, which although beneficial when examining the possibility of women fulfilling such a role in time of crisis, it does not enlighten us much about the involvement and autonomy of wives. However, due to the lacklustre presentation of Emma's participation in the siege in Orderic Vitalis chronicle²¹, we can assume that the wife partaking in the defence of a castle in her husband's absence was not considered exceptional enough to mention.

Sikelgaita de Salerno, however, proves to be an interesting case, as she is documented as participating alongside her husband Robert in his military campaign, commanding troops in her own right.²² She would also participate in the political takeover in southern Italy,²³ An interesting difference between her and Eleanor of Aquitaine is that Eleanor married a king that was already powerful. Robert's marriage to Sikelgaita did not only make her powerful, it was also a route into power for Robert.²⁴ Skinner notes that one has to consider the power her late father had in southern Italy, and since that power had transitioned through her into her and Roberts heir, she was an essential political ally for Robert if he was to state and keep his claim as father of the heir apparent.²⁵

That Sikelgaita doesn't not appear in his charters before she granted him a son²⁶ to consolidate his power might be another proof that her presence is due to her legitimizing Roberts power. It also solidifies the point that we saw with Eleanor, and that will become

²⁰ Orderic Vitalis trans. M, Chibnail. Volume II book IV p.317

²¹ She is only alluded to being present rather than explicitly mentioned, because on her husbands return from Denmark right after the siege, he travelled first to Norfolk castle to pick her up. This means she must have been in the castle during the siege, and as count Ralph's representative she would have partaken in the negotiations of surrender.

²² Eads (2005). p 72, Alexiad, I.15.

²³ Skinner, 2001, p 623

²⁴ Skinner, 2001, p 626

²⁵ Skinner, 2001, p 628

²⁶ Ibid.

important also for Urraca, that the elite medieval women's power would be tied to their heir's, and their ability to produce one. However, these factors also implies that Sikelgaita's expanded political presence and ability to autonomously exercise said power is not due to her marriage, but her inheritance.

Alice of Champagne similarly was the daughter of the Queen of Jerusalem and was invested with political power by the virtue of said heritage. Queen Isabella had after Alice's father's death remarried to the King Aimery of Cyprus²⁷ and it was to Aimery's son and her stepbrother Hugh I that Alice married.²⁸ She is not mentioned in Hugh I. charters before 1218, and it is not before her husband's death in 1218 that we see her immerse herself in complex political issues.

Throughout this examination it is clear that the power gained by marriage was limited by the inheritance the elite medieval women had before their marriage. However, as we will explore in chapter 4.2.1, they would achieve far more power in the case of the absence of their husband or other male authority. Absences that happened to every woman in this thesis, be it exile, death, separation, or divorce.

3.2 – Inherited Power

As mentioned above, for a woman to inherit the title due to a lack of male heirs was not that unusual, during a period of roughly fifty years, Matilda of Tuscany, Melisende of Jerusalem and Urraca of Leon all inherited their fathers title due to having no brothers. These are also only some of examples included in this thesis and proves that even if it was considered rare, it was not exceptional.

Matilda of Tuscany serves as one of the crown examples of a woman whose power was gained wholly by her inheritance. After her father death in 1055, she and her mother would rule together until her mother, Beatrice, died in 1076.²⁹ During her life, she would become considered one of the most powerful women in Europe, and crucially she would be the proprietor of her Tuscan estates and could autonomously perform an active political role, which we will examine in detail in chapter 4 and 5. Moreover due to her short marriages to both Godfrey IV and Welf V and their rather swift separations she cannot be reasonably argued to have been influenced by either. Her ability to rule alone for as long as she did was due to her being the legitimate heir to the margravate of Tuscany.

Urraca similarly was the legitimate heir to the throne of Leon, Galicia and Castille,

²⁷ Tyerman 2006, p. 493.

²⁸ Hamilton 2016, p. 226.

²⁹ Goetz, 1995, p. 199

and although the Galicians would come to consider her son Alfonso their rightful king, she could assume a position as his regent and queen mother due to her inheritance. Had she gained the throne by marrying Alfonso I the battler, her position would have been far weaker in the conflict between them. She would also make sure to present herself not only as Queen of all Spain, but also as the legitimate heir of King Alfonso VI, and she would use this position fiercely as she sought to regain dominion over the lands that had been her fathers.³⁰

Countess Theresa of Portugal would similarly style herself Queen of Portugal, doing so in 1117, and as the lands were bequeathed to her by her father Alfonso VI she would be considered doing so rightfully.³¹ In this manner she is quite similar to her sister, and although much of Theresa's political career was tied to her husband Henry of Burgundy, she would continue both his policies and struggles against Urraca after his death in 1112.³²

The main obstacle for Urraca was, according to Reilly, to turn her legal and moral authority into a financial and military one.³³ Meaning that, as the daughter of Alfonso VI she was rightfully the queen, however, she still had to convert this into power which she could utilize to further her goals, she did not need to do as Eleanor with her sons, and use others legal and moral authority to perform an active political role. It can be argued that she did have to do so in Galicia with her son Alfonso Raimundez, but the Galician revolt favouring Alfonso Raimundez was mostly a reaction to her marrying Alfonso I the battler, not her personally.³⁴

Melisende did not only inherit her power, like Matilda and Urraca, but she was also considered her father's heir whilst he was alive and was allowed to partake in political decisions.³⁵ This together with Baldwin II's decision to create the co-rulership between her, her husband Fulk of Anjou and her son Baldwin III gave her moral and legal authority, especially after her husband's death. Authority that she would exploit even beyond what was considered within her means, for example when she introduced her son Amaury I to the co-rulership³⁶ and when she in essence split the kingdom of Jerusalem in two and forced the royal chancery to carefully weigh their words as they served two masters with opposing agendas.³⁷

Of course, it is important to note that beyond her position as King Baldwin II's

³⁰ Ferreria, 2011, p.233

³¹ Ferreria, 2011, p.231

³² Reilly 1982. p79

³³ Reilly, 1982, p. 78

³⁴ Reilly, 1982, p 74

³⁵ Mayer, 1972, 99

³⁶ Mayer, 1972, p 124

³⁷ Mayer, 1972, p 121

daughter, she had also gained considerable favour with the church, and in the examples above the ability to perform such actions was enabled by the fact that the church representatives were willing to either support her or at the very least, look the other way.³⁸ This will be furthered explored in chapter 4.3.4, where we will see just how much the ecclesiastical interests would affect their exercise of power.

Melisende would be considered a wise and clever ruler as we can see by William of Tyre's descriptions from the council of Acre in 1148.³⁹ But in this description we already see that she is demoted to being the "mother" of King Baldwin III, who up until this point had mainly partaken as a military commander and not as a political leader. This meeting, and the consequent failure of the siege of Damascus would mark the beginning of the struggle between them which would lead to Melisende's retirement in 1153.⁴⁰

All these examples show that as long as the legal and moral authority is inherited legitimately by a woman, she is able to exercise said power. Factors which would limit her would be unfortunate, ill-planned marriages, as did happen to some degree to Urraca, as well as the presence of a male heir of age, as happened with Melisende. But in both these cases, Alfonso I was the king of Aragon and Baldwin III was as rightful a king of Jerusalem as Melisende was, their moral and legal authority was challenged. Matilda of Tuscany on the other hand, never suffered such competition and as such never experienced similar issues.

3.3 – Chapter Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the way they achieved their power mattered in their ability to exercise said power, but we also saw that this was not inherently different between genders, Eleanor and Welf or Godfrey was similarly pushed to the side in favour of the rulings of their spouses who had the legitimate claim to the moral and legal authority. This tells us not just that they were unexceptional in their ability to rule no matter if they married or inherited power, but also that their ability to do so was adhering to the same system no matter the sex or gender. Where the difference lies is in the fact that the hereditary system of male primogeniture was patriarchal in nature.

There was, however, ways that one could achieve power also as a spouse, but this is mainly tied to the power of your family or inheritance. Eleanor with Aquitaine of Sikelgaita, are examples of this. Medieval marriages were not primarily for love but to tie political bonds, gain alliances or gain titles. Both Louis VII and Henry II wanted Aquitaine, Matilda wanted

³⁸ Mayer, 1972, 99

³⁹ William of Tyre (1943) volume 2, book 16 p. 185

⁴⁰ Mayer, 1972, p. 170

allies against Henry IV, Urraca needed to placate the Leonese aristocrats. Any wife in such a marriage then is to be considered unexceptional in their exercising of power.

Sikelgaita also proving that the ability to exercise power might be granted due to ability. However, these cases are what would rightly be considered exceptional cases and will therefore not be relevant to this thesis.

Chapter 4 – Political, Soft power of diplomacy and social pressure

When regarding the application and the exceptionalism of female authority in the Middle Ages, there has been the belief that women did not participate, or were completely barred from, the matters of statecraft, religion, and warfare. Even in the cases where we find women as a head of state, or as a military leader, they are usually disregarded as the exceptions rather than the rule.⁴¹ It is due to this misconception that the paradigm of exceptionalism has arisen.

There is, however, a difference between what was assumed and what was the reality, where circumstances might arise to allow for rulership to assume any form. If the King died with the prince still being a minor, the queen might assume regency till he came of age. If the King died and there was no applicable male heir, the princess might inherit. This as we saw on the chapter prior, did happen with frequency. Events would occur that meant the king was indisposed, as would happen when they went to war or on a crusade.⁴² Crusades, which only served to amplify the frequency and distance to which men went to war in the 11th and 12th century. And, when husband went to war or died, it was the wives that were left to defend the land, as exemplified with Emma De Gauder.⁴³

When Emma's husband Ralph had to flee to Denmark in 1075, it is noted in the chronicle by Orderic Vitalis that he left the defence of Norwich castle in the hands of a loyal garrison.⁴⁴ This garrison was, according to Cathcart King, headed by his then 16-year-old wife Emma.⁴⁵ It is important to note that in the primary source by Orderic, Emma is not mentioned by name, and is only referred to as "wife" when Ralph returned to Denmark and brought her to exile in Brittany. There were at least two possible explanations for this. 1) She was somehow regarded as not worthy of mention, like for example how Eleanor of Aquitaine is treated in Odo of Deuil's work.⁴⁶ Or 2) it was not considered exceptional or special enough to specifically mention.

⁴¹ Tanner, 2019, p.3

⁴² Kyriakis, 1974, p.103

⁴³ Kyriakis, 1974, p.110

⁴⁴ Orderic Vitalis trans. M, Chibnail. Volume II book IV p.317

⁴⁵ Cathcart King 1983, pp. 308, 312

⁴⁶ Odo of Deuil, p 11

We will examine the first possibility further in chapter 8, as well as the possible application of hard power that Emma did in organizing the defence. But, before that, we need to examine the application of soft power as demonstrated by charters letters, patronage or, in Emma's case: Diplomacy.⁴⁷ If we are to claim that the second possibility is right, we have to examine and bring evidence to support a claim that she, along with other elite women, could exert soft power in the absence of male authority. Or, is Emma de Gauder's organization of the defence and the subsequent negotiation for their surrender an exception to the rule?

There is only one example from Emma De Gauder's life that shows her military and political acumen. It also only exemplifies a woman's possibilities in the absence of male authority, in the presence of her husband she disappears from the sources. So, if we are to identify the broader political possibilities and reach of noble women's agency. We have to according – to Kathryn Kish Sklar – identify crucial causal paradigms through comparisons.⁴⁸ Therefore, to examine the extent of their political power, we ought to compare different elite medieval women, in different circumstances to find the similarities and differences in their actions.

In the introduction to Erler and Kowaleski's *Women and power in the Middle Ages* they assert that power traditionally have been equated to the gathering and expenditure of public authority. And that the forces of which once can oppose this legitimate and sanctioned power is law and order.⁴⁹ They also assert that in the medieval society of territorial struggles, wars and violence is particularly hostile to female initiative. But does that mean it was impossible?⁵⁰ Today, historians have through close examinations of the records of important women, proven the participation and importance to the political process.⁵¹

Therefore, the questions that have to be answered is: are there comparable women that collected and spent moral and legal authority? Could women exert soft power? Does it matter if there is a presence or absence of male authority? And how much influence does the ecclesiastical interests have? This will help us explore the broader question of the thesis, whether elite medieval women were exceptional, or rather a rare result of primogeniture that could exercise power to the full extent of their moral and legal authority.

⁴⁷ Tanner, 2012, p 2

⁴⁸ Levine, 2014. p 343. Levine quotes Sklar in her defence of comparative history

⁴⁹ Erler and Kowaleski, 1988, p. 1

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lambert, x, s.2

4.2.1 – Political power in the absence of male authority

When Urraca of Leon inherited the crown from her deceased father Alfonso VI⁵², she also inherited a litigious situation; her half-brother, who was groomed to inherit, died unexpectedly in 1108. Of course, with the mystery of Sancho II's death and the advantageous position it gained her, it is no wonder that she was the prime suspect for his death.⁵³ Urraca's husband from her first marriage, Raymond of Anjou, had died only a few years prior, so now that the widowed Urraca was to become "Queen of All Spain" the issue of her marriage became common interest. Leonese aristocrats' thoughts was, according to the chronicles, that a female monarch would be unable to rule and defend the kingdom. To placate the Leonese in this fragile period of transition, she was essentially forced into a marriage with the Aragonese Alfonso I The Battler against her will.⁵⁴ This is one of few mentions of such thoughts being explicitly laid bare. However, it is important to note that it was her ability to rule and defend they were cautious about. They could not imply she was not the rightful ruler.

Her firstborn son, Alfonso Raimundez, would according to the marriage contract only inherit the right to rule Galicia if she and her new husband where to die without an issue. The Galician aristocracy therefore proclaimed Alfonso Raimundez king and revolted against Urraca, whom they meant lost the right to rule Galicia when she married Alfonso I the Battler.⁵⁵ Such a revolt might not have been a problem and could have been swiftly put down if not for the fact that Alfonso was a man Urraca quickly would come to despise⁵⁶ and enter open conflict with.⁵⁷ This was a rather difficult position; she was now at war with the king of Aragon whom many in her lands, in particular in Leon, saw as a more fitting ruler.⁵⁸ This meant that she had to reclaim the authority she had a legitimate claim to, by traveling around and gather support, especially in the lands where Alfonso I was not as popular. She had to act quickly, if not Alfonso could feasibly use this fragile transitory period to claim her lands, Charters places her at the head of an army heading to Zaragoza on the 15 of August 1110, not even a year after her succession.⁵⁹ By December she had gathered support in Castilla, Leon, Rioja, Extramunda and in parts of Galicia. This is support she gathered for herself, as she by then had been separated from her husband for six months. The earliest mention of this is in a

⁵² Sánchez Alonso, *Crónica del Obispo Don Pelayo*, p. 87. Branco and I. B. Dias (2007); M. R. Ferreira (2010) p. 2

⁵³ Ferreira, 2011

⁵⁴ Pallares & Portela 2006, pp. 40–41

⁵⁵ Reilly, 1982, p 74

⁵⁶ Alfonso was known for violence against his spouses. Gordo Molina & Melo Carrasco 2018, pp. 57–58.

⁵⁷ Gordo Molina & Melo Carrasco 2018, pp. 57–58.

⁵⁸ Pallares & Portela 2006, pp. 40–41

⁵⁹ Luciano Serrano, ed., *Cartulario de San Millán de La Coqolla* (Madrid, 1930), p. 298.

letter of grant to the Abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos. In which she proclaims to be “Queen of whole Spain and the daughter of Emperor Alfonso” Thereby disregarding her connection to her husband.⁶⁰

If we compare the cause and consequences of Urraca’s marital conflict with the one experienced by Eleanor of Aquitaine, we find some contrasts regarding the circumstances that is reflected by the differing opportunities they were given by their inherited position. Urraca was a queen by birth, Eleanor was merely a duchess. Eleanor inherited the title of Duchess of Aquitaine when her father William IX died in 1137. She then went on to married King Louis VII later the same year. This was a fortuitous marriage for Louis VII, as the duchy of Aquitaine was in a peculiar position of being quasi-independent.⁶¹ Marrying Eleanor then meant that Louis would gain regency over the region and more closely aligning the region to the rest of France. Eleanor however, still exercised her inherited moral and legal authority in Aquitaine, this is why seventeen of twenty of her charters during this period pertained to the lands that were hers by hereditary right.⁶² But this did not mean that she was able to act independently or autonomously, In fact, in only four of these charters do Eleanor appear alone, and these are only confirming Louis VII’s charters, the rest are jointly issued with “her agreement” or “At her request and with her agreement” or “by her will and with her agreement.”⁶³ This would not have become an issue if not for the marital conflict between her and the king, and with their separation came a more concerted effort by Louis to control Aquitaine on his own.⁶⁴ Eleanor would only truly regain control over her own lands in 1152 when she convinced a council of four bishops, with the approval of Pope Eugene, to annul their marriage on account of consanguinity.⁶⁵

Urraca does similarly regain Galicia and Leon when a truce between her and Alfonso I is brokered, and their marriage is annulled in 1112. This truce also meant that Alfonso I kept a large portion of Castille and could continue his efforts for political control in the region.⁶⁶ The difference between their political ability from the marriage to the annulment seems to be hinged on separation from male authority. Whereas Urraca and Alfonso got separated after

⁶⁰ Reilly, 1982, p 75

⁶¹ Hivernaux, 2003 p.57

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ In charters issued at saint-jean d'angely and at poitiers,1141:and at Saint-Hilaire-sur-l'Autize October 1151 X February 2, 1152

⁶⁴ Hivernaux, 2003 p.57

⁶⁵ Meade, 1977, p. 122.

⁶⁶ Brooke, 1938, p.345

just six months,⁶⁷ Eleanor and Louis VII stayed together until their return from the Second Crusade. Louis had gotten increasingly suspicious and jealous over the affection she showed her uncle Raymond of Antioch, when they visited.⁶⁸ And although that was not the sole factor, consanguinity, and the fact that she had borne him no male heir was equally as pressing. It was rather more amicable than the conflict between Urraca and Alfonso I.

To benefit from separation of male authority, and to be able to exercise soft power autonomously was not limited to Eleanor and Urraca either. This was something Melisende of Jerusalem, who was the daughter of King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, would experience. In 1129 she married Fulk, count of Anjou, as a result of an agreement between Fulk and King Baldwin that according to Mayer would make Fulk Baldwin II's sole heir.⁶⁹ This however is a contested point, as Hamilton points out that this would imply that Baldwin II wanted to prevent Melisende from ruling.⁷⁰ Which, knowing the actions Baldwin II took to ensure the opposite, makes little sense. In fact, Melisende had been considered her father's successor before his death and had been allowed to partake in her father's political decisions long before she married count Fulk.⁷¹ a charter was issued in March 1129 by Baldwin II to the Holy Sepulchre where Melisende, along with the king, gives her consent and endorsement of its contents.⁷² King Baldwin II also made sure to change the arrangement so that both Melisende and her son Baldwin III would be considered co-heirs, and as such prevent a marital crisis from damaging their claim to the throne.⁷³ This was not in Fulk's plan, and soon after his coronation he would attempt to assert his wish to rule alone. Hans E. Mayer theorizes that Fulk might have tried to overrule Baldwin's will, pushing Melisende aside and rule instead of her.⁷⁴ This was easier said than done, for Melisende had gained huge support amongst parts of the nobility of Jerusalem, and together with Count Hugh of Jaffa they proved an opposition too much for him to overcome.⁷⁵

Fulk would then as retaliation start a rumour of an adulterous relationship between Melisende and Hugh to discredit them and hopefully lessen their support. Other cases of discrediting elite women's sexual credit will be more fully explored in chapter 6. This

⁶⁷ Reilly, 1982, p 75

⁶⁸ William of Tyre. 16.27, p 755

⁶⁹ Mayer, 1972, 102

⁷⁰ Hamilton, 1974, p. 143

⁷¹ Mayer, 1972, 99

⁷² Rörhricht, 1893, Regesta regni Hierosolymitani no. 121

⁷³ Mayer, 1972, 103

⁷⁴ Mayer, 1972, 149

⁷⁵ Mayer, 1972, p. 102

however did not work, and according to William of Tyre made Melisende so wrathful that King Fulk would fear for his life.⁷⁶ Mayer does present a hypothesis based on interpretation of William of Tyres descriptions of Melisende's anger that Fulks transgression was more than start a rumour of a secret love affair between her and count Hugh. He theorizes that it was Fulks failed attempt at usurping the throne that deteriorated their relationship. This would explain why Fulk would fear for his life when confronted with Melisende's anger. They would for a short while separate, before reconciling in 1136, but the power dynamic between them was forever changed. By the time of the reconciling Melisende had grown so much in power that Fulk, according to William of Tyre, would not even attempt to take an initiative, however trivial, unless consented by Melisende.⁷⁷

That William of Tyre elects to mention that King Fulk would not dare to act without Queen Melisende's consent implies that the transgressions of the past had made him wary of making any further violations of her will. It also implies that her wrath was something he feared. If Mayers theory is correct, it presents an example of a woman asserting her political dominance even *in* the presence of male authority. Although they would get separated, this conflict differs from the others in the regard that they did not wholly split into two separate ruling administrations. This is essential to prove not only the unexceptional nature of elite medieval women, but also to show that due to Melisende's elevated position she could exert her moral and legal authority even above her husband. However, splitting the kingdom of Jerusalem into two separate entities was something Melisende would attempt during the conflict with her son Baldwin III, but that conflict occurred during in a time where they would still continue to collaborate as co-heirs. And although she did not act wholly independently, she did gain considerable influence over the co-rulership's decisions.

We can also see the absence of a male authority in the form of a father or husband work in the favour of the somewhat later Alice of Champagne, who's ability to exercise soft power grew considerably after husband Hugh I died in 1218.⁷⁸ There are contrasting opinions by contemporary sources on the matter of how this was achieved, as the contemporary lawyer Phillip of Novara claims that Hugh on his deathbed arranged it so that Alice would assume regency, whilst the chronicle by Ernoul claims that she achieved this independently.⁷⁹ There is also an instruction from pope Honorius III to the cardinal Pelagius Galvani to protect Alice

⁷⁶ Mayer, 1972, p. 102

⁷⁷ Mayer, 1972, p. 104

⁷⁸ Hamilton, 2016, p. 229

⁷⁹ Ibid.

from “men inspired with wickedness” that implies that there where opposition for Alice to overcome.⁸⁰ She retained her position, and remained regent of Cyprus for a further 14 years, until 1232.⁸¹

The examples of Urraca and Alice contrasting with Eleanor shows that there was a much greater opportunity for a woman to assert soft power if she was allowed to act independently in the absence of male authority. One could even argue that due to the transgression by King Fulk, Melisende could exploit the moral and legal authority she had to force her independent will upon him. This is also proven by Matilda of Tuscany. She did not lose her influence during either of her two failed marriages.

Matilda of Tuscany became margrave of Tuscany when her brother Frederick died in 1055. She would serve as co-regent with her mother Beatrice of Lorraine until Beatrice's death in 1069. When regarding the ability to exert soft power in the absence of male authority, Matilda is an interesting example. With the exception of the daughter she lost in childbirth, she would mother no children and would therefore be the last marquis of Tuscany from the house of Canossa. Usually elite medieval women would compete with their husbands for regency, even when their title is inherited, as we saw with Urraca. But Matilda did not suffer husbands long. She had married her step-brother Godfrey IV in 1069, but of her charters, only in one does she refer to Godfrey IV as her husband. This was written on the 18. august 1073, they had then been four years married and two years separated. And this separation would last until 1076, when he was assassinated in Vlaardingien.⁸² Landulph of Milan chooses in his account to blame Matilda, due to the marital issues between Matilda and Godfrey.⁸³ But due to the many factual mistakes in Landulphs account as well as his general hostility towards Matilda, it is fair to regard it as evidence when regarding the consequences and reactions towards female political power, rather than an actual historical fact. This however meant that Matilda had no husband to contend with, and no male heir to challenge her.⁸⁴ And even before his death, she had been able to act wholly independently due to their separation. This separation arose because of multiple reasons, her displeasure of Godfrey the Hunchbacks physical deformity was one, and the loss of their daughter was another.⁸⁵ But the biggest reason was arguably the fact that they aligned themselves with different sides in the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Hamilton, 2016, p. 235

⁸² Goetz 2004, 363

⁸³ Reynolds, 2005, p. 16

⁸⁴ Fraser, 1988, p. 140

⁸⁵ Hay, 2008, s. 41

investiture controversy.⁸⁶

The investiture controversy would be the main conflict for most of her reign, and it meant that she was an active participation in war as we will see later, but it also meant that she had to be a shrewd politician. For example, in 1082 she had no ability to stop Henry IV from going to Rome due to defiance and uncooperativeness from her cities. Instead, she made the journey egregious for him by refusing him all aid and shelter on his way through.⁸⁷ Probably the most famous example of Matilda's diplomacy and social manoeuvring is Emperor Henry IV's penitential walk to Canossa in 1076. Henry IV had to shore up the troubled political situation back in Germany that had arisen due to his excommunication, something he hoped Matilda, his distant cousin, could help him do. The emperor therefore hoped that Matilda would be the best way to plead to the pope for his forgiveness, possibly due to them being family, but probably also due to the extremely close relationship between Matilda and Pope Gregory. She would have the ability to do so, intercession was the more traditional tools of soft power a woman could assume⁸⁸, and one that Matilda was well acquainted with.⁸⁹ There is no mention in the primary sources as to why she would appease his pleading. He did, however, title her as cousin when he came to her, so it's possible he hoped the familial connections was enough.⁹⁰ However, we know that Godfrey had been assassinated the same year and that Matilda was suspected of ordering it on account of her repeated requests for a divorce. As well as the consistent attacks from the emperor had left Tuscany war-torn⁹¹ It might therefore have been an attempt to appease the emperor and consolidate her power in Tuscany, giving her time to rebuild.

Regardless of the reason, and despite the pope becoming annoyed at her for taking up the mantle as a mediator rather than commander, her persistent efforts did eventually yield results.⁹² The Emperor was forced to stand outside the gates for three days and nights in the Tuscan winter. Only on the fourth day was the emperor allowed inside, where he threw himself at pope Gregory's feet and received his mercy.⁹³ It is a testament to the political power Matilda wielded and was perceived to wield, that the emperor went to her to speak on his behalf, and that the Pope would not only listen, but come to her castle to meet the emperor.

⁸⁶ Hay 2008, s 44

⁸⁷ Eads, 1985

⁸⁸ Tanner, 2012, p 2

⁸⁹ Fraser, 1988, p. 143

⁹⁰ Fraser, 1988, s 143

⁹¹ Goetz 2004, 363

⁹² Fraser, 1988, s 143

⁹³ Fraser, 1988, s 144

This victory was short-lived, and the conflict would continue beyond pope Gregory's death, but it remains an example of Matilda's ability to exercise soft power. Donizo is joined by fellow contemporary sources in the claim that she was the chief mediator between Henry IV and Gregory VII, Donizo even going as far as to claim that this reconciliation happened due to Matilda's intervention and nothing else.⁹⁴ Donizo's claim might be somewhat exaggerated, there was possibly other avenues for Henry IV to exploit, but the sources collaborate that at least to a considerable extent, Matilda's political influence on both her cousin and her spiritual father could be credited with the outcome.

It is obvious that for a woman to assert herself politically by exerting soft power, she cannot be in competition with a husband. The closest example of someone in a marriage but still being the one issuing charters is Matilda in her second marriage to Welf V. But this marriage was seemingly purely political, he came from a family that had traditionally supported the papacy and she hoped it would prevent a new invasion by Henry IV⁹⁵ Welf V was at the time of their marriage seventeen. He would be mentioned, in the same way that Eleanor was in Louis' charters, until 1095. However, their marriage had soured as early as their wedding night, with Matilda telling the frightful Welf that she would not want to see his face again.⁹⁶ A reconciliation would be attempted, but they too were separated and although they never divorced or got their marriage annulled, they never regarded each other as husband and wife again.⁹⁷

Melisende, Urraca and Alice all had to lose or be in conflict with their husbands. Eleanor only gained political independence in her divorce and during her sons revolt. Even Emma de Gauder, although not separated or in revolt with her husband, was physically alone when she defended Norwich Castle. There is however an interesting difference in how these women procured their titles which might inform us about how they were able to cede power. As we saw in chapter 5 Eleanor was "only" a duchess and married a king, whilst Urraca and Melisende was queens even before their marriage. Matilda whilst "only" a marquis did not marry above her rank, instead marrying two counts. This meant that in a power struggle they would have the upper hand. Urraca had much support in her crownlands due to her being their legitimate ruler, Melisende and Matilda much the same. Eleanor only had Aquitaine.

⁹⁴ Reynolds, 2005, p 17

⁹⁵ Hay, 2008, p.124

⁹⁶ Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Boemorum*, II, ch.32, in B. Bretholz and W. Weinberger, ed., *Die Chronik der Böhmen des Cosmas von Prag*, MGH SS rer Germ NS 2 (Berlin, 1923), pp. 128f.

⁹⁷ Goez, 2004, p 374

4.2.2 – Political power in the presence of male authority

The inherit issue that would arise should a woman succeed to the royal rule was, according to Jessica Koch in her dissertation on Melisende, Urraca and empress Matilda, that the medieval societal norms dictated first and foremost that the wife's duty was to obey her husband.⁹⁸ But when the royal heiress was imbued with the power of sacral rulership, this complicated the relationship. This is why co-rulership was so common, and as we can see later in this chapter, it also meant that it could be a way for lesser noble men to gain power, as we saw exemplified with count Fulk, who swiftly used this opportunity to, albeit unsuccessfully, grab total power.⁹⁹

What can be said of these women's political activity when there where a male regent present? In a harmonious marriage fairly little, they would mainly appear as consenting to a charter akin to how Eleanor appeared in the start of her marriage to Louis VII, or as intercessors, exemplified with Matilda earlier. This is mainly due to the reasons asserted by Koch's dissertation, and it is somewhat telling that all the women in this thesis with political ambition has had a tumultuous marriage that led to divorce or annulment. However, that does not mean that they would never use the presence and power of male authority as a tool to exert soft power.

When Urraca regain physical custody of her son Alfonso Raimundez after the battle of Viadangos, she also gained control over the most potent rallying point for any opposition to her rule.¹⁰⁰ Up until this point, she had not been successful in the field. This however meant little as long as Alfonso I did not have control over his conquered lands in Galicia. These were territories he, as king of Aragon had little claim to, and his only hope to gain control was to placate the Raimundist factions. Factions, who would only accept Alfonso Raimundez as king. Reilly notes that Urraca's main obstacle was to be able to transform her legal and moral authority into a financial and military one.¹⁰¹ By using her son, who gained his legal and moral authority through her, she would resolve the conflict with the Galicians and put further pressure on Alfonso I. This is proved by Urraca and Alfonso I confirming a charter in which count Henry of Portugal granted property in Astorga to Count Froila Díaz, a member of the Raimundist revolt, but also a supporter of the queen. We can therefore interpret that not only had she come to an accord of count Henry, whom she had been in conflict with since he

⁹⁸ Koch, 2018, p. 62

⁹⁹ Mayer, 1972, 149

¹⁰⁰ Reilly, 1982, p 78

¹⁰¹ Reilly, 1982, p. 78

initially sided with Alfonso I.¹⁰² It is also proof that her gaining custody over Alfonso Raimundez worked, and that she was asserting control over the revolt. The next charters are also confirmed by her son, as well as count Henry and his wife and her sister Theresa of Portugal.¹⁰³ The contents of the charter is somewhat important as it concerns her securing financial support from the church of Oviedo, but more importantly, it shows that the coalition against Alfonso was growing.¹⁰⁴ She used her moral and legal authority, paired with controlling the male regent astutely and gradually grew her diplomatic and financial power.

Similarly, Eleanor would manoeuvre her sons in her conflict against Henry II. He had for many years attempted to consolidate a strong monarchy which would include Aquitaine. This did not work, and in 1168 Eleanor would again be the head of Aquitanian administration. Henry had given up on the centralization and instead resorted to redistribute his lands amongst his family.¹⁰⁵ Aquitaine had become rife with constant revolts, but Eleanor's return calmed the region down. In that way, Henry's strategy of using his family to control the realm as tightly as possible had worked. But it did give her the ability to participate and develop political strategies that would enable her and her sons to get the true redistribution of power King Henry II had promised then in 1169.¹⁰⁶ She had, in Aquitaine, just as much power as her sons did in the other domains held by the Plantagenet family. She had also showed considerable political acumen by putting down the revolts. Therefore, when Henry the Young demanded of his father control over either England or Normandy at Limoges in February 1173 and was refused, she became a part of the ensuing revolt in the same way as the rest of her children.¹⁰⁷

Melisende had her power tied to her heir in much the same way as Urraca, but when king Fulk died in 1143, William of Tyre makes express mention of the fact that she did not rule as a guardian of Baldwin III, but also her own virtue, as was willed by her father Baldwin II.¹⁰⁸ This meant that she did not have to relinquish her position two years later and would similarly to Urraca continue her rule even in the presence of an adult male heir. She would rule as a queen, not as a queen mother as Eleanor would do during Richard I's absence during the Third Crusade. The difference being that after Alfonso Raimundez was crowned king of

¹⁰² Azevado, *The medieval Portuguese documents (Documentos Medievais Portugueses)*, 1:37-38

¹⁰³ García Larragueta, *Colección de Oviedo*, pp. 345-347, and Risco, 8:347-349.

¹⁰⁴ Reilly 1982. p79

¹⁰⁵ Hivergneaux, 2003 p.67

¹⁰⁶ Hivergneaux, 2003 p.71

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ William of Tyre, XV, 27

Galicia in 1111, a title he would be content with until his mother's death in 1126.¹⁰⁹ Baldwin III on the other hand, would come into conflict with his mother over the rulership of Jerusalem in 1152.¹¹⁰

In this conflict we see how Melisende contended with an opponent that would have the same moral and legal authority as her. They were both legitimate heirs, they had both been written into the will of Baldwin II as co-regents of Jerusalem. But Baldwin III was male, and discontented barons had been whispering in his ear that he should not be subjected to the command on a woman now that he had reached maturity.¹¹¹ To counter this Melisende would position her second-born son Amaury I to a position of co-rulership, therefore strengthening her own position. She began this process already in 1147 when she included Amaury in a charter¹¹² after Baldwin III's failed military campaign against Damascus.¹¹³ Her motives for doing so, seem rather plain, to consolidate her own position she had to divide any possible favour either of her sons could get against her. Instead of allowing Baldwin III to have uncontested access to the favour of those who would not want a woman on the throne, she introduced an option to either divide the support between them, or to groom a king that would have gained the kingdom on her behest only.¹¹⁴ Therefore, when Baldwin III demanded to be coronated alone in 1152, she had gained the support of Amaury I, whom also would be excluded from this rulership, as well as any who supported him over his brother.¹¹⁵

Melisende had also given lavish gifts to the church which meant that she could rely on their support¹¹⁶. This is important, for Amaury's marriage was not recognized by the church, something that would cause him trouble even after Melisende and Baldwin III's death. We cannot, in the presence of the evidence we have, present a theory that Melisende would secure the church's support as a defence I the eventuality of a revolt by Amaury I. her beginning this process long before he was brought into the co-rulership is evidence enough against such an assertion. But, Melisende would not have dismissed the security the personal support she had with church gave her. As we have seen with her previous actions, she was acutely aware that she would have to protect her position in as many ways as possible. And Melisende's political manoeuvring and ability to exert soft power through diplomacy, coercion and social pressure

¹⁰⁹ Fletcher, 1984, p.133

¹¹⁰ Mayer, 1972, p. 111

¹¹¹ Mayer, 1972, p.95

¹¹² Röhricht, 1893, *Regesta regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 245

¹¹³ William of Tyre (1943) volume 2, book 17 p. 185

¹¹⁴ Mayer, 1972. p. 126

¹¹⁵ Mayer, 1972, p. 111

¹¹⁶ Mayer, 1972, p. 95

worked. In her conflict against Baldwin III, we can see through her charters that she enjoyed the support of archbishops Baldwin of Caesara and Robert of Nazareth, the abbot of the Temple of the Lord, Andreas of Montebarro, whom was the Templar Orders seneschal, and would between 1152-55 become Master of the order.¹¹⁷ Baldwin III, who was a great commander, but as evidenced by his support not as competent at exerting soft power, would not enjoy anywhere near the same support, charters from the period of their conflict would show him in the front of a retinue of assorted nobles, few of which could be considered important, where Melisende had the support of the eventual leader of the Templars, Baldwin II only had the support of the templar Hugh of Bethsan, whom little is known.¹¹⁸

However, as strong politically as Melisende was, when the conflict came to a head in 1153, she would lose out to the militarily superior Baldwin III. This happened after she had established her own administration which in essence split the kingdom in half. Nablus and Jerusalem now under her rule, Acre, and Tyre under Baldwin.¹¹⁹ This escalated the conflict to such a degree that it in essences spelled the end of Melisende's reign, and it would not take long before Baldwin II again had control over the entire country. He did however after intervention from the church, grant her the city of Nablus which she ruled until her death in 1161.¹²⁰ Which, again, proves the value of Melisende's ability to exercise soft power through patronage.

Matilda contrastingly, never had a son, and therefore never had the opportunity to use them as a legitimating factor in her own reign. Her marriage to Welf V however seems to be an attempt at the same thing, as the much younger count would give her a political bond¹²¹, and the marginally chance of an heir.¹²² Had their marriage not been a disaster it is possible there would be more prudent examples of her exploiting a male authority for her own gain. Still, it is clear that there was a political strategy for women that wanted to consolidate their own power by connecting it to a recognized male authority, Urraca, Melisende and Eleanor all did this with their children. Matilda's marriage to Welf V did gain her allies which supported the papacy, but she did also need him to consolidate her power. In a letter to Welf, before he was her husband, she claims to not be a woman of "feminine frivolity or fear" and that he should not consider her bold for being the one to approach him with the marriage proposal, as

¹¹⁷ Mayer, 1972, p. 152

¹¹⁸ Mayer, 1972, p. 152

¹¹⁹ Mayer, 1972, p. 95

¹²⁰ Mayer, 1972, p. 170

¹²¹ Hay 2008 s 124

¹²² Goetz 2004. p. 368

she claims it does not matter if man or woman makes the first move if the approach includes the promise of an indissoluble marriage. She offers him herself and the entire kingdom of Lombardy, as well as castles, cities, and gold.¹²³ In this letter she defends, what she considers to be breaking the norm. As it is in her self-interest to choose and to decide, so she is taking the initiative as to which male authority she is going to connect herself to. This is also proof of Koch's assertion about the medieval societal norms. Matilda saying that she breaks the norm, is a great primary source for what an Italian medieval noblewoman would consider the norm. She also offers an opinion on what she herself believes to be important, the promise of an indissoluble marriage, this will be important when we conclude.

To tie power to oneself as Matilda tried with Welf was something also Urraca and Melisende did. She chose to position herself and constantly remind her peers that she was the late king's daughter and that it was through her as his legitimate heir that the bloodline should be continued. Much of the proof of Urraca's political acumen comes directly from her shrewdness in this regard.¹²⁴ Melisende would often time use Baldwin II's last will as a political tool to prove that she was similarly the rightful heir alongside her husband and son. It is therefore unreasonable to say that women could assume an active political role independent of men, but it is also equally unreasonable to say that they were wholly barred from rulership because of men.

There is a quote about the granddaughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen Blanche of Castille when regarding her son King Louis IX of France written in the *Chronicles of the Crusades* by Joinville and Villehardouin that in particular highlights the notion of gender being secondary to other delimiting factors. In the quote is stressed that King Louis had to rely on God's favour in his youth, because the acting regent whilst he was underage was his Spanish mother. This is important, as the chronicle stresses, she had no relatives or friends in France and was therefore regarded as a foreigner. Displeased with this, and at her refusal to grant the barons extensive pieces of the crownlands, said barons conspired at Corbeil.¹²⁵ The chronicle confirms in this passage that the refusal was hers, not her son's. She held the

¹²³ Cosmae Chronica Boemorum, Bk2, ch32, MGH SS 9 p88; Die Urkunden, 140. "on ego feminea levitate aut temeritate, sed tocius regni mei pro comoditate dirigo tibi has literas, quas cum acceperis me accipe et tocius regnum Longobardiae. Dabo tibi tot civitates, tot castella, tot palacia inclita, murum et argentum nimis infinitum; super omnia haec habebis nomen praeclarum, te si facies mihi carum. Nec tamen me notes audacitatis elogio, quod nunc agredior te prior alloquio. Licet enim tam virili quam femineo sexui legitimum appetere coniugium. Nec differt utrum vir an femina primam amoris lineam tangat; tantummodo indissolubile contingat conubium. Quod aliter non fit, nisi utrorumque per consensum. Vale."

¹²⁴ Koch, 2018, p106

¹²⁵ Joinville and Villehardouin, 2008, p 164

authority to exercise power of his behalf. The issue was not her gender, but her foreignness.¹²⁶ Again, we see the same pattern, as they could discredit her actions but not her position. She had inherited the power as the result of the hereditary system. No one could claim her moral and legal authority illegitimate. Her being from Spain was in contemporary eyes a delimiting factor, her being a woman was not, not as long as the king was still a child. It is not even the last time this issue is brought up. In the very next paragraph, there is talk about a rebellion against the king at the assembly of Corbeil. Together they decided that when count Peter started his rebellion, they should each respond to the king's call to arms with just two knights. "They would do this to see whether the count could get the better of the queen who, as you have heard was a foreigner"¹²⁷ The switch-up in the last sentence is extremely interesting, all through the paragraph the talk is about a rebellion against the king. Then at the end the hidden purpose is revealed. For the power lies not with the king, but with the queen. The foreign queen.

4.2.3 – Political power in the presence of ecclesiastical interests.

There have already been mentions of the political power regarding the presence of ecclesiastical interest, especially in regard to Matilda and Melisende, but as the force that decided much of these women's political possibilities; they decided if a marriage should or should not go ahead, as with Urraca's son. If it did go ahead but soured, as with Matilda and Godfrey they could decide whether they were allowed a divorce. They could also declare the marriage annulled like with Eleanor and Louis VII, common in cases of consanguinity. They could even decide who would be crowned king, as we saw when Baldwin III attempted to be coronated alone, and not with his mother Melisende.¹²⁸

As we saw before, this was in the forefront of medieval women's minds. Melisende was a large patron of the churches of Jerusalem¹²⁹ and could therefore always rely on the church for the assistance and the ecclesiastical support she needed. This meant that when Baldwin III demanded to be crowned without Melisende, he would not get his will.

He had been crowned together with her in 1143.¹³⁰ But in the spring of 1152 he would demand that the Patriarch performed a confirmatory coronation. This coronation should, according to Baldwin III's wish, be done in the holy sepulchre of Easter day, and Melisende

¹²⁶ Joinville and Villehardouin, 2008, p II

¹²⁷ Joinville and Villehardouin, 2008, p 164

¹²⁸ Mayer, 1972, p 164

¹²⁹ Mayer, 1972, p 98

¹³⁰ Mayer, 1972, p 164

would not be present. Such a display would not only mean that he would appear in the most public way imaginable to be crowned as the sole ruler, but it would also but the responsibility of the decision on the Patriarch.¹³¹ The church siding with Melisende meant that Baldwin III was put in an awkward situation, he could not refuse to perform the coronation without a sufficient reason. It was customary to hold a feast-day coronation on this day, so any refusal would break with tradition. Baldwin III would propose a compromise, that he himself would defer the coronation to a later date, as it was better not to be coronated on easter day at all than as a sharer of the rule. But then they day after, he appeared in public, with a crown.¹³² By doing this, Baldwin III outwitted the church, but he only needed to do so because of the dedication they had, not only to follow the late King Baldwin II's will, but also to Melisende. In this example we see the power and symbolism that the church had and could provide. Allying with them, especially as a woman seems to go a long way of legitimizing their rule.

Matilda, as we will explore the military facets of later, had been an ally of the Papacy throughout her reign. What had begun as informal communication soon developed into a more personal relationship, beyond religion and politics. It became a relationship that was so close they would refer to each other as daughter and father.¹³³ And although she claims to have loved and supported the Pope I the same way that Paul did Christ, it remained platonic. No source collaborates the rumours that this was not a sinful or carnal relationship, but instead attributes their origin to a revengeful Godfrey IV the Hunchback.¹³⁴ A letter to Matilda from the Pope clearly states that not only those he considers her as a daughter, but also that she has become someone he can rely upon for both zeal and discretion.¹³⁵ He would also in another letter call upon her for more than mere counsel, but also for military support. Claiming that beyond her words she should give her aid to her creator, to God. And that it is noble to die for once country, but even nobler to die in the service of heaven.¹³⁶ Although not necessarily a call to her personal participation, it does present evidence of Matilda being acknowledged as the commander of the forces at her disposal. As mentioned above Gregory would even appear irritated when she assumed the more traditional role of mediator rather

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Mayer, 1972, p 165

¹³³ Fraser p.131

¹³⁴ Hay 2008, s 44

¹³⁵ Cowdrey, 1972 p.13 'To you my most beloved and loving daughter, I do not hesitate to disclose any of these thoughts, for even you yourself can hardly imagine how greatly I may count upon your zeal and discretion.'

¹³⁶ Cowdrey, 1972 p.13 '(...) do all that you can to give your counsel, and still more your help, to your creator; for if, as some say, it is a noble thing to die for our country, it is a far nobler and a truly praiseworthy thing to give our corruptible flesh.'

than warrior.¹³⁷

The tangible power of the church is one facet of their influence, but as an extension of God, many would fear to anger the church in fear of angering God. Eleanor and Louis VII had partaken in the investiture controversy against the papacy, and when she suffered a miscarriage in 1138, she herself believed that her womb had closed shut.¹³⁸ During the Investiture Controversy against Pope Innocent II in 1147, She cited this as the reason for her harsh words and her rash behaviour. Which had occurred when she urged Bernard of Clairvaux to use his influence with the pope to assist her and King Louis. Bernard told her then to “cease to stir up the king against the church, (..) if you promise to do this, I in return promise to entreat the merciful Lord to grant you offspring.”¹³⁹ She did, and the pope’s candidate, Pierre de la Chatre was installed as the archbishop of Bourges. Bernard seemed to place the onus on Eleanor for this conflict, even going so far as to imply that her machinations was the cause of her barrenness, and his prediction would come true. She would mother her firstborn daughter less than a year later. That this was not more than a mere coincidence, or that she was less frugal on the conjugal interactions with her husband, now that she believed God was pleased with her is likely.

Similarly, the excommunication and consequent penitential walk of Henry IV by Pope Gregory in 1076 proves how the wish to please ecclesiastical interests can empower active political power.¹⁴⁰ Henry IV then did much the same as Eleanor did with archbishop Bernard of Clairvaux, when he urged Matilda to plead with the pope on his behalf. Eleanor and Henry IV’s reason for this where the same, they needed help from someone in good standing with the pope, as they themselves would be incapable to achieve anything by themselves. Furthermore, this proves how highly regarded Matilda was by pope Gregory, As Eleanor would petition an archbishop for help, whilst the Holy Roman Emperor would petition Matilda.

Another example of Eleanor’s considerable political power and subsequent ecclesiastical involvement is a letter composed by Peter of Blois in 1173 at the request of his patron, Rotrou the Archbishop of Rouen. Here he discredits her involment on the charge of breaking the marital oath she has taken. Stating. ‘Before this matter reaches a bad end, you should return with your sons to your husband, whom you have promised to obey and live

¹³⁷ Fraser, 1988, s 143

¹³⁸ Harris-Stoertz, 2012, p. 263–281. She would have been somewhere between 14 to 18 at the time, so her young age might have had something to do with it.

¹³⁹ Weir 1999, p 31

¹⁴⁰ Fraser, 1988, p. 143

with.¹⁴¹ As an examination of Eleanor active political role there is no better source than her being told to stop pursuing said role. The appeal to the fact that she had made a promise during the wedding ceremony to live with and obey her husband is fascinating in the examination of limitations of women's ability to perform active political power. It also continues to show that although there were few limits regarding gender if they were the most legitimate and the highest rank of authority, their gender could be used against them when the hierarchy favoured a male authority. Therefore, it is no wonder why the examples of women performing active political power occurs in situations where there either were an absence, opposition or subordination of male authority.

One of the sources of Matilda of Tuscany, Werner Goez, asserts that after her defeat in 1080, many of her vassals chose to desert her cause and join with Henry IV instead, this Goez says is due to a long-simmering resentment over Matilda's gender, due to a verse written in 1096 where the author explains that the citizens of Lucca long had "conspired to remove the female yoke"¹⁴² However, in Reynolds dissertation which examines this anomaly, she states that this 1096 text is exceptional in its gendered language and is the only evidence of her sex being used against her.

Lastly, it is fair to mention that even if one could enjoy the church's support, it would not always be enough. For all of Melisende's lavish grants and acquired ecclesiastical support, she did encounter one issue regarding the church. Her son Amaury I, who she would try and manoeuvre to be the king instead of the currently rebelling Baldwin II in hope that she would be able to retain more of her own power this way, had married uncanonically.¹⁴³ This meant that when she extended the will of Baldwin II to extend over both her sons, there was another obstacle put in Amaury's place. She managed to get the baron's onside with the clergy's help and mediation, but to do so Amaury's marriage had to be annulled.¹⁴⁴ However, that she could pass this hurdle with such apparent ease seems to be due to her good standing with the church.

As powerful as the church was during the Middle Ages, and particularly during the Crusades, few could appear in opposition long and win. We saw that Eleanor had to yield, so did Emperor Henry IV and even Melisende when it came to Amaury's marriage. Urraca however, would succeed. She is by the chronicles said to have attempted, and succeeded, in subduing the ecclesiastical power that the archbishop of Compostela had. This is recorded

¹⁴¹ Letter from Peter of Blois: Letter 154 1173

¹⁴² Reynolds, 2005, p. 2

¹⁴³ Mayer, 1988, p 124

¹⁴⁴ Mayer, 1988, p 125

rather differently in the two sources we have of her, the *Cronica Anominas de Sahagun* supported Urraca openly, whilst the *Historia Compostela* was written by fierce opponents of both her sovereignty and her subduing of their Archbishops power.¹⁴⁵ Still it does praise her for her effective political actions and presents her strategies her treacheries and intrigues as making her a worthy adversary. They even praise her cunning in feigning false repentance for these misdeeds¹⁴⁶ This rare example of the ecclesiastical interests losing is both due to the great cunning and ability to exert soft power that Urraca had, but also due to the general unpopularity of the Archbishop of Compostela. And through her gaining the support of those that also wanted to see his power diminished, she could more easily achieve such a goal.

4.3 – Chapter Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen that women could collect and spend moral and legal authority, this was dependent on if it was inherited or if it was granted due to marriage, as we saw in the last chapter. However, what was evidenced there was the granting of power, not the exertion. Here we do see that sex and gender matters, even in the cases where it is the man who has been granted power due to marriage he could attempt to exert himself over his wife. This we saw evidenced with King Fulk who got his power as a result of his marriage and had therefore no legitimate claim over his wife other than the will of Baldwin II. Of the women examined we see Eleanor partake in a revolt against her husband, however, this is not to further her own claim, like Fulk, but her son. That Fulk felt able to usurp his wife directly in such a manner is due to the preference of the male authority between two equal candidates. If Baldwin II had not created a co-rulership Fulk could not have attempted such a plot. That there was a preference of male authority we saw evidenced when Louis VII convinced Baldwin III that he should not be ruled by a woman.

With this in mind, the conclusion is that it was important for the exercising of autonomous female power that there was an absence of male authority. There are examples of women exerting power in the presence of male authority, like Eleanor, like Urraca. However, this is often on the behalf of, or as a necessity. Urraca had to use her son to placate her subjects in Galicia, a kingdom he inherited as soon as he was of age.

This does not mean that these women were exceptional, as we have seen there is many reasons for the absence of male authority, and some, like Matilda, did spend a few years married to husbands that was almost entirely absent from her dealings. They could also

¹⁴⁵ Ferreira, 2011, p 236

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

intercede, something that is only briefly mentioned with Matilda, but which was a tool medieval noblewomen were accustomed to use. An absence of male authority enabled them to exert autonomous power, but there are examples even in the presence of such authority that shows women exerting soft power.

Lastly, we can see that the relationship with the church and the presence of ecclesiastical interest greatly mattered to these elite medieval women. It did not however hinder or aid the in exerting power but could aid the exertion. Meaning, Melisende's gifts to the church helped her in her political ambitions, but it was not necessary for her to be able to exert moral and legal authority. This is the same for all the women exemplified. One could claim that their allowance of annulment and divorced helped to create the absence of male authority necessary. However, this only restored their position back to what it was before the marriage and did not invest them with any power beyond what they had already inherited.

Chapter 5 – Military, Hard power

One of the most important facets of the paradigm of the exceptionalism of elite medieval women is that they were not exercising hard power to the same degree as men, even if they were in the same position. This is why it is crucial to figure out if women could exert hard power, but also the reactions and contemporary conception of female military participation.

Tanner describes any exerting of power through military action as “Hard power”.¹⁴⁷ A term she defines as the ability to direct and command soldiers, militia, and armies, summarized as wielding martial authority. Exertion of this form of power is mostly usually attributed to male knights and kings. This because the role of soldiering or military command was limited to men. We can see this exemplified in the very act of mentioning the unusuality of female soldiers that Anne Komnena and Imad Ad-Din al-Isfahan does.¹⁴⁸ That women did or did not don armour and participate as soldiers, something we will explore more fully in chapter 8, does not wholly exclude them from exerting “hard power.” Participation by the regent in the battle itself, which rarely, if ever happened was not the only way to exert such power. This, and the regent taking commando over the tactical and strategic movements and attacks of the army, which was far more common, are both examples of direct military power.

There is also the case of exerting indirect military power, which for many rulers, men and women alike was a far safer and more reasonable approach. The main difference being

¹⁴⁷ Tanner, 2012, p 2 It

¹⁴⁸ Gedbehere, 2010, p.8; for the mention by Imad Ad-Din al-Isfahan. Alexiad IV. 6 for the mention by Anne Komnena

that indirect power implies that the regent was not actively involved in the outcome of a battle or war other than in the entering and delegation of such conflict. Urraca as we will see relied on a trusted archbishop in her battles, something that is best defined as her exerting indirect hard power, whilst Matilda, who is said to have been present and multiple of her battles, exerted direct military power.

5.1 – Direct Military Power

Eleanor of Aquitaine and Matilda of Tuscany are both women that acquired huge political influence, and they did it, as we saw in chapter 3, through marriage or inheritance.¹⁴⁹ Eleanor married the king of France and then the king of England, and Matilda became the countess of Tuscany through inheritance when her father died without a male heir. But as we have seen in the chapter above, there was a huge difference in how they were able to exercise that power. Matilda in lieu of having neither husband or son, could act wholly in her own interest and with her own means. Whilst Eleanor used the power she acquired in the marriage to a king or by having custody of the heirs to the throne of England. How does this translate to their military efforts?

There are multiple mentions of women as soldiers and commanders in this time period. The peasant woman Margaret of Beverley is said to have partaken in the siege of Jerusalem in a story written by her brother Thomas of Beverley.¹⁵⁰ The byzantine historian Anna Komnena writes of the Lombard princess Sikelgaita, who conducted a siege on Trani in 1080 and took the field of the battle of Dyrrachium, clad in armour.¹⁵¹

Even Matilda of Tuscany is portrayed as arriving upon the field of battle in 1061, when she at the age of fifteen is said to have defeated the troops of antipope Honorius III and pursued him all the way from the borders of Tuscany to Rome.¹⁵² As an asserter of direct hard power, Matilda will serve as the most forefront example of an elite medieval female performant. Her biographer Donizo wrote of her that: ‘Were we to recount all her noble deeds of arms our verses would outnumber the stars.’¹⁵³ We are also aware of stories that she was trained by the general Arduino della Paluda to ride like a lancer, to wield both sword and axe, as well as use a pike like a foot soldier. The seventeenth century historian Vedriani even

¹⁴⁹ Blythe, 2001, p. 245

¹⁵⁰ Morrison, 2016, p 65

¹⁵¹ Stuard, 1987, p. 157

¹⁵² Duff (1-21), p117, Fraser, p. 139, 1988 and Gillis, p. 235, 1924.

¹⁵³ “Sigula si fingam quae fecit nobilis ista Carmina sic crescent, sunt un numero sine stellae.” (Donizo.) Villemain, Hist. Greg. VII. P. 269

claims to know of a suit of her armour sold on a market in Reggio in 1622.¹⁵⁴ Donzio's claim of her turning up on a battlefield, and Vedriani claiming to find armour she has worn is most likely an exaggeration of Matilda's direct involvement. The reasonable assumption would be that as the sole heir to the margravate of Tuscany and without children of herself, she would not be risking herself on the front lines. However, that does not mean that she was not an accomplished military commander, or that she was not performing an active military role.

Her tomb bears an inscription that both attest to this, and that confirms her importance to the investiture controversy. 'This warrior-woman disposed her troops as the Amazonian Penthesilea is accustomed to do. Thanks to her – through so many contests of horrid war – man was never able to conquer the rights of God.'¹⁵⁵The word "disposed" here carries a lot of meaning, it does not claim that she led or ran in front of, but that she disposed, or strategically planned the movements of her armies so that she could protect the passage down to Rome. And we see proof of these contest of horrid war in the sources.

She would foil Henry IV's attempts to entrap the pope in the marches of Po in 1077, suffer a defeat at Volta in 1080, then spent the next four years harassing the Emperors army on his flanks. And when hard enough pressed, she would retreat to the fortress of Canossa who with its three layers of walls were more than capable to withstand the German onslaught.¹⁵⁶Then came the battle of Sorbara in 1084, where she would defeat the army that had spent four years trying to destroy Canossa.¹⁵⁷ She did so, attacking at dawn, when the enemy was asleep. Again, we see Donizo claiming that Matilda took a far more hands-on approach. As the soldiers cried "For Matilda and St. Peter" and stormed the Germans, Matilda is, according to Donizo, said to have carried 'the terrible sword of Boniface' as she massacred the enemy, standing in her stirrups before her troops.¹⁵⁸

The possible apocryphal nature of such a statement will be further explored in chapter 8, but that the battle of Sorbara in 1084 happened with the outcome of a Tuscan victory is certain. This victory would lead to her being rid the harassment of the Germans for four years. However, when she married Welf V, she also angered Henry IV. As mentioned above, Welf V's family were allies and supporters of the papacy, it was for this reason that she chose him as her future husband. Henry IV, who was content with leaving Matilda alone, did not appreciate her gaining a powerful ally. According to Donizo Henry IV vowed to send armed

¹⁵⁴ Fraser, 1988. p 135

¹⁵⁵ Fraser, 1988 p. 269

¹⁵⁶ Gillis, 1924, p. 238

¹⁵⁷ Gillis, 1924, p. 239

¹⁵⁸ Fraser, p 146, 1988

men and horses and remain seven years in Matilda's lands without giving a thought to peace.¹⁵⁹ He was rather successful in this campaign and after capturing Mantua, the marches of Po and many of its towns, he did spare a thought to peace and offered a compromise that was too good for the now war-torn Tuscany not to consider. If Matilda wanted the opportunity to reclaim the territory that Henry IV had occupied and give time for Gregory's reform to survive past infancy, she would have to wield her wit as a peaceful politician as skilfully as she had commanded armies. She turned to the church for support, and after a speech by the abbot John of Canossa, the Council of Carpineta of 1091 would in unison exclaim "Death, rather than a peace so ignominious."¹⁶⁰ Therefore rejecting the peace offer and gamble on victory instead. With neutrality of peace negotiations now broken, Henry, after making a feint of attacking Parma would turn towards Canossa in a surprise attack.¹⁶¹ According to Donizo, standing barefoot in the snow outside Canossa again, he felt it was time to avenge his wrongs.¹⁶² It is here we find the most famous of Matilda's battles, from Canossa a sortie was dispatched under the cover of fog, which threw the entire German camp into confusion. Then as they struggled to retaliate, Matilda would attack from the rear which would turn confusion into a rout.¹⁶³

This thesis is however not an examination of whether these women were good military commanders, but rather if they were able to exceed what we believe to be the norm and act as a military commander at all. In that regard Matilda of Tuscany who is stated to be an excellent commander by the sources on multiple occasions is not the example we are looking for. As it can be argued that the power of competency overruled her gender. For this purpose, it would be pertinent to examine someone who retain the responsibility of exercising hard power despite lack of proficiency.

Urraca of Leon was, as mentioned above, an excellent politician. Something she had to be, for in the struggle against her husband Alfonso I she regularly came up short militarily. She would lose the battle of Candespina in 1111.¹⁶⁴ Then, Together with Henry of Portugal she would unsuccessfully attempt to siege the fortress of Peñafiel.¹⁶⁵ And this in turn would mean that she had to surrender the cities of Palencia and Leon when she fled to the mountains

¹⁵⁹ Donizo, *Vita Mathildis*. Lib. 2, c. 4

¹⁶⁰ Gillies, 1924, 241

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Donizo, *lib. 2, c. 7*

¹⁶³ Gillies, 1924, 241

¹⁶⁴ Reilly, 1982, p 74

¹⁶⁵ Reilly, 1982, p 75

of Galicia.¹⁶⁶ And although the battle of Viadangos did turn sour, it did gain her the advantage of custody of her son, which marked a turn in military fortune for Urraca. What did Urraca do differently after Viadangos, that made her gather victories against Alfonso I? First of all, she now had custody of her son, so the Galicians would support him. The last attempt of reconciliation between Urraca and her husband in 1112 had been a failure, and their marriage was for all intents and purposes over. This meant that she would have to reclaim the areas Alfonso I had laid claim to. She could not and would not attempt do this alone¹⁶⁷

As seen above, unaided she would struggle against Alfonso, but as she had already shown by securing the support of Count Henry of Portugal, she was shrewd in gaining allies. Besides the Galicians, she had also garnered great support in Castilla, where Alfonso did not enjoy much hospitality.¹⁶⁸ This meant that she was able to regain much of the territory, and when it came to spring 1113 she would plan to take the fortress of Burgos.

To do so she would solicit aid from anywhere she could. It was not specified to who it was targeted towards, but when Pope Paschal on April 13. 1113 sent a letter threatening excommunication to those who plundered ecclesiastical treasures, Reilly claims it to be highly likely due to Urraca accusing Alfonso of doing just that.¹⁶⁹ She would also gain military support from bishop Gelmirez, and after long negotiations did the magnates of Galicia also rally to her cause.¹⁷⁰ They would besiege the fortress of Burgos and halt the reinforcements for long enough to force a surrender, taking what by that time was the last stronghold Alfonso I had left in Castilla.¹⁷¹

5.2 – Indirect Military Power

The difference shown between Matilda and Urraca is that Urraca to a larger degree had to rely on support to further her cause. But this also shows that she was still expected and a performant of active military commandeering, even in the face of a force who for the most part seemed superior.

Melisende similarly allied herself with Count Hugh of Anjou, although never militarily, it shows the same inclinations. And when she divided the administration of Jerusalem into two entities, it was upon her the onus of military leadership fell.¹⁷² She applied

¹⁶⁶ Reilly, 1982, p 78

¹⁶⁷ Reilly, 1974, p. 87

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Reilly, 1974, p. 91

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Reilly, 1974, p. 93

¹⁷² Mayer, 1972, p. 95

the same strategy as Urraca of gaining powerful allies in the face of an opponent that had proven to be a superior commander, something that is evidenced by the contrast of supporters confirming hers and Baldwin III's charters.¹⁷³ This indirect use of power is clearly seen in the fact that in 1134 the reported lover of Melisende, Count Hugh of Jaffa.¹⁷⁴ was in revolt against King Fulk due to him not respecting the will of Baldwin II, and had proven himself to be a competent commander.¹⁷⁵ However Hugh made some diplomatic decisions, namely allying with the Egyptians, which lost him the support of his vassals in Jaffa. This meant that the revolt would not be successful, but for Melisende a great victory had been won. Throughout it had been clear that Fulk was trying to sidestep Baldwin II's will and appear as the sole ruler of Jerusalem, something her anger at Fulks attempted assassination of Hugh shows.¹⁷⁶

Mayer assumes that this anger that forced Hugh to become uxorious and placating before Melisende is a result of him attempting to rule alone, not due to the fate of count Hugh. I, however, would like to pronounce the theory that it might have been both, and that this is an example of Melisende using indirect military power to influence count Hugh to revolt against her husband. As we saw in her conflict with Baldwin II, she was not a great military commander, but she was excellent at building alliances and defences against attacks of her rulership. This does not need to imply a romantic relationship between them, it could even explain why Fulk thought they spent altogether too much time together.¹⁷⁷ Maybe it was merely a plot against the king. Anyways, it cannot be denied that she greatly benefitted from this revolt. The start of Melisende's time as an active political participant can be dated to the end of Hugh's revolt.¹⁷⁸

Someone who would not benefit from the use of indirect military power is Matilda. In most of the sources and recounting of battles she is either mentioned as the commander or no commander is mentioned at all. Usually, according to Valerie Eads, leading in battle was something that she did herself, not relying on her husband, a bishop, or any male substitute. Matilda herself was the commander, and she had to make sure morale was kept high.¹⁷⁹

In one of the few battles she is expressly mentioned to not be participating, an ill-fated attack at what was presumed an ill-prepared German camp ensued. She had heard that Henry IV had crossed the river Adige and reassured that he would not be able to recross. This

¹⁷³ Mayer, 1972, p. 152

¹⁷⁴ Mayer, 1972, p. 102

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Mayer, 1972, p.182

¹⁷⁷ Mayer, 1972, p. 102

¹⁷⁸ Mayer. P 182

¹⁷⁹ Eads, 1984, p 355

information led to her halting the order to attack, something that gave Henry IV enough time to gain reinforcements. This also meant that she considered did an easy raid and delegated the responsibility of the attack, which led to most of the Tuscan soldiers were killed or captured¹⁸⁰

All three of these examples places the role of instigating the indirect military action on the women, but that does not necessarily need to be the case. When Henry the Young king rebelled against his father it was due to some of Eleanor's positioning, she had recently gone home to Aquitaine to govern, but the instigator is claimed to have been Eleanor's ex-husband, Louis VII.¹⁸¹ He had already decided to rebel, when he went to his mother in Aquitaine. But William of Newburgh is clear to attribute much of the revolt and its beginning¹⁸² to her connivance. Her involvement is also proven by the sixteen years she would spend imprisoned after the failure of the revolt.¹⁸³ In William of Newburgh's account of the revolt he, as most chroniclers did, focuses of the male authority, on Henry the Young. How he gathered soldiers from every corner of the Plantagenet realm and marched on King Henry II, Eleanor is not mentioned again in context of the revolt itself, but at the conclusion of the revolt, Henry II is said to have been kind in the punishment of two nobles named as betrayers and traitors.¹⁸⁴ What is of import here is rather plainly evidencing that he was prepared to punish those who opposed him, and that he considered traitors and betrayers, so that when we present Eleanor's imprisonment it is read in this context. Of course, as with Matilda, this did not ultimately benefit Eleanor, but it does evidence her use of indirect military power by helping and supporting her son In furthering a goal that would have, if the revolt had been successful, have been beneficial to herself.

To assist is a fairly obvious use of indirect military power: to give supplies, aid and succour to an ally is indirectly helping yourself. However, Melisende shows that there is a complete opposite use of indirect military power, by sabotage. After the council meeting in 1148 it was clear that if Baldwin III would succeed in his siege on Damascus, he would gain popularity and renown that would make it difficult for Melisende to politically assert herself over her son. However, if he failed she could continue to push him behind herself. The way

¹⁸⁰ Eads. 1984, p. 356

¹⁸¹ William of Newburgh, Book II, Chapter 27, paragraph 3

¹⁸² William of Newburgh, Book II, Chapter 27, paragraph 4

¹⁸³ Hivergneaux, 2003 p.71, McAuliffe. 2012 p. 12

¹⁸⁴ William of Newburgh, Book II, Chapter 29: *However, they were treated by him with very much more clemency than they deserved, though for a time they were confined in chains; but the two nobles above mentioned, who seemed more distinguished among the captives, after having satisfied the king that they would observe their fealty, obtained their release. In this business the clemency of so great a prince towards most treacherous betrayers and most atrocious enemies is beyond a doubt to be justly admired and applauded.*

she did this, by creating obstacles, delays, and interruptions with the help of the barons of Jerusalem, was using indirect military power.¹⁸⁵ In fact, she transformed her use of soft power, diplomacy, and social pressure into hard power, by disrupting supply and limiting the reinforcement.

That this is an expression of hard power instead of soft is purely down to the goal achieved, the manner of which it was achieved, and why it was instigated. Melisende's fabrication of the failure of the siege of Damascus was a military victory, even though she never deployed a single soldier. These uses of indirect power all show that even though, as explored above, the lack of military education held them back against far more skilled commanders they were able to exert themselves militarily. The exception being Matilda who had the fortune to be considered the sole heir and was given a military education. Interestingly enough also, the failure is in most cases down to competency, not lack of opportunity. Melisende and Urraca both tried to command in their conflicts with son and husband respectively, because it was to them that role befell, Eleanor did not against Henry II, but she had also not inherited the power in the same way Melisende and Urraca had. However, she did put down several revolts in Aquitaine.¹⁸⁶

5.3 – Did the women participate in the Crusades?

The participation of women as a result of their position is one thing, but the Crusades was an invention that would transcend the norms, therefore it seems pertinent to examine briefly what this means for elite medieval women in the form of pope Urban II's speech, as that combined with the next chapter will give us an understanding of what was psychologically true about women's participation in war.

In November 1095, a few months after the Byzantine Emperor Alexius II pleaded the need of soldiers to defend Constantinople from the Turks, Pope Urban II answered by calling the First Crusade.¹⁸⁷ Our sources of this speech is limited to accounts made after the events, but all three, Fulcher of Chartres, Robert the Monk and Baldric of Dol is believed to have been present, and that the records we have today were based of earlier records about the same event written by the same authors. Fulcher, after Urban II has informed of the reason for the crusades, quotes the pope as beseeching *all* people of whatsoever rank, to carry need to the Christians in need.¹⁸⁸ Robert The Munk includes no such line, He records Urbans speech as

¹⁸⁵ Meyer, 1972, p. 18

¹⁸⁶ Hivergneaux, 2003 p.71

¹⁸⁷ Allen & Amt, 2003, p.39

¹⁸⁸ Thatcher and McNeal, 1905, p. 514

one that evokes hatred towards the enemy with horrific examples of cruelty, before he appeals that there is no one better to avenge such deeds than those before him. The reason this is different from Fulcher's account is not the line itself, this could just as well mean all Christians, but a later line where he proclaims that none should be kept back by their love for children, relatives, or wives.¹⁸⁹ As has already been pointed out in chapter 1.4.2 that there is no mention of loss of husbands is not surprising, and it does in theory disqualify women from Urban II's intention although perhaps not interpretation. Roberts recording of the speech has Urban II utilize bible quotes, he presents Matt 19:29¹⁹⁰ as proof to why they should not be afraid of losing loved ones. Similarly claims Baldric of Dol that Urban II shall have proclaimed that every one of them should be valiant *sons*, and that neither property nor the enticing charms of their wives should keep them from going.¹⁹¹ Here to we see the reduction of female participation to the honeypot that keeps the soldier home.

Still, this speech is recorded in such different ways that it is impossible to say what, word-for-word was actually said, but the general notions we can see. That this was an appeal to all Christians, and then first and foremost on those with experience of war. All three chroniclers have a variation of the same topic: All the effort spent on fighting each other, on fellow Christians would be far better used to defeat heretics.¹⁹²

It is also a promise. All three agree on this, the speech is a promise of total absolution to any who performs the pilgrimage to aid those in need in the Holy Land, this is especially targeted towards those who in the act of war have committed sins and spilled Christian blood, but it would also include, for example, those who had married consanguineously, those who had murdered kin, or forged evidence to push claims.

When we also consider the crusades as a huge pilgrimage as well as military expedition, it is clear that there was need for more than just those who could fight. In Albert of Aachen's chronicle about the first crusade he describes his eyewitness account of large frivolous crowds from different countries and cities gathered together, who used the pretext of the crusade to partake in illicit sexual intercourse. There was, according to Albert "Unbridled contact with women and young girls, who with utter rashness had departed with the intention of frivolity"¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Allen & Amt, 2003, p.41

¹⁹⁰ Matt 19:29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

¹⁹¹ Krey, 1921, p. 33

¹⁹² Allen & Amt, p.39-42

¹⁹³ Albert of Aachen, trans. Connor Kostic i.25 (48): *Hiis itaque per turmas ex diuersis regnis et ciuitatibus in unum collectis, sed nequaquam ab illicitis et fornicariis commixtionibus auersis, imoderata erat commessatio*

Albert here clearly displays displeasure as these women who have uprooted their respectable lives to join the crusade and be debaucherous. This has, according to Connor Kostick, led to many historians believing women's role in the crusades as being prostitutes.¹⁹⁴ However, Albert of Aachen's descriptions might have been inflated, or even invented, due to his displeasure towards these women that have used the crusades to leave their lives behind.¹⁹⁵

Somewhat similarly we see with comments about Eleanor of Aquitaine's reasoning to join the crusades, Moshe Lazar wrote as late as 1976 that Eleanor's enthusiasm to join her husband in the Second Crusade was not due to any inherent religious fervour, but because she was bored.¹⁹⁶ This Lazar states even though there is no charters or letter that are credible supporting his's claims. It is therefore most likely based on a continuation of the idea established by Albert that women left perfectly reasonable lives behind due to a wish for change.

Most likely was the women's role in the crusades as different as their social standard. The already mentioned Eleanor was Queen of France and had most likely a completely different experience than for example Margaret of Beverley, who partook in the siege of Jerusalem, got captured, lived in slavery, and barely got home alive.¹⁹⁷ Some, like countess Emma de Gauder, even died on the way.¹⁹⁸ Orderic Vitalis notes that there was consensus amongst those traveling to help others, and that this determination was something seen in both rich and poor, men and women and those of the cloth and the earth alike. And that although many stayed behind, it was begrudgingly as they much desired to travel with their husbands or sons.¹⁹⁹ Fulcher of Chartres also records an incident in which four hundred individuals of both sexes drowned.²⁰⁰

However, women as military participants are rare. The above-mentioned Margaret of Beverley is one, but there is no source beyond her brothers recounting of her story. Beyond in this there mentions from both Christian and Muslim sources, with for example Anne Komnena²⁰¹ and Imad Ad-Din al-Isfahan²⁰² both reporting soldiers who after their death were

cum mulieribus et puellis, sub eiusdem leuitatis intentione egressis, assidua delectatio, et in omni temeritate sub huius uie occasione gloriatio.

¹⁹⁴ Kostic, 2008, p. 271

¹⁹⁵ Kostic, 2008, p. 272

¹⁹⁶ Lazar, 1976. P. 39

¹⁹⁷ Morrison, 2016, p 65

¹⁹⁸ Orderic Vitalis, Vol. II, Book IV, p. 319.

¹⁹⁹ Kostic, 2008, p 3

²⁰⁰ Fulcher of Chartres 1. VIII. 2 p. 169

²⁰¹ Alexiad, IV.6.

²⁰² Gedbehere, 2010, p.8

identified as women. These accounts are for the reason that will be more thoroughly explored in chapter 7, untrustworthy and a possible attempt at feminization and othering the Frankish men.

The women most clearly benefitted from the Crusades, however, were those who “begrudgingly” stayed behind, as they would be able to assume regency and control over the lands now vacated of male authority.

It would seem easy to conclude – on the basis of Pope Urban’s speech – that women were not included in the call to arms, and they were not. However, if they did not feel compelled by the speech or if they were barred from participation, why is there so many examples of female participation? Because even though only one of the sources above claims that Pope Urban besought *all* people, none makes explicit mention of forbiddance of female participation. We will examine this further in chapter 6, but this is evidence that although it was not the norm, it was also not exceptional and there exist philological evidence of the idea of female participation being considered psychologically true by contemporaries.

5.4 – Chapter Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen that not only could women exert hard power, but they could also do so even when their ability to do so was lacking. This is crucial, for an examination of Matilda in isolation could be concluded with her exertion of hard power being an exceptional case due to her great ability. However, with the examples of Urraca and Melisende it is clear that a woman who inherits the moral and legal authority was not only allowed but also expected to exert hard power.

This was not restricted to indirect use of said power either, Matilda did, according to the sources, directly involve herself in the battles against Henry IV, so did Sikelgaita against her enemies. However, these cases are rarer than the others, although it might plainly be explained with a lack of education. Great emphasis was made by Donizo about Matilda’s martial education. Such an education was not often given to women and can be seen as exceptional.

It is important to note in the face of such an assertion that, as we will see in chapter 7, that female participation in war was accepted as something that could happen and did happen. It is also not the case that this means they could not exert direct hard power, only that they did not gain a martial education. Both Urraca and Melisende performed direct hard power despite lack of such an education.

Chapter 6 – Discrediting women’s political and military power

As we have seen so far in chapter 4 and 5 is that these women could exercise their moral and legal authority to exert soft and hard power, making them powerful. The clearest evidence of any person being powerful is opposition and attempts at discrediting said power. Being powerful meant acquiring opponents, rivals, and enemies. When we speak of opposition, of enemies, we often speak of open conflict or war. But in the case of proving someone’s power we have to examine the more insidious ways of diminishing someone’s power and impact.

The methods we will examine here are discrediting, erasure, and the attacks on female honour, their sexual credit. What is meant by attack on their sexual credit is best exemplified with the late medieval rumour about Eleanor’s supposed infidelity and adultery with her uncle Raymond of Antioch, escalated to a myth about her being a demon.²⁰³

Such rumours are examples of constructions made to damage the women of which they concern. These constructions are not surprising in their nature, as Reynolds writes in her dissertation on Matilda, there is no wonder why her enemies would write about her with animosity and hatred, whilst her friends and allies would she and write about a noble woman who are heroic, even saintly.²⁰⁴ This is not unusual for any that achieve power, but in Matilda and Eleanor’s case they would employ misogynistic rhetoric.

What is interesting, and as will be evidenced later on in the chapter, whilst the rhetoric might be misogynistic they could only employ such rhetoric to discredit them as rulers, as they could not claim them not to be the legitimate holder of the moral and legal authority.

6.1 – Sexual Credit

As the most conclusive evidence for these women’s considerable power was the fact that it was an obvious strategy from their rivals to try and discredit their person, we have to examine the ways in which they did it. Which, as mentioned in the chapter introduction was often by attacking their so called “Sexual credit.” In the book *Heart and Stomach of a King* by Carole Levin she claims that “for a woman her only source of honour is her sexual credit”²⁰⁵ Meaning that, in difference to what a male ruler might experience, chastity and fidelity are what constitutes an honourable ruler. Levin writes about Elizabeth the first, and although she is a ruled England almost 400 years after Eleanor’s death, this notion of preservation of their honour by promoting chaste behaviour is shared. Elizabeth famously was called “The Virgin Queen” and proclaimed herself as the wife and mother of England and its people. This did not

²⁰³ Evans, 2014, p.19

²⁰⁴ Reynolds, 2005, p. 9

²⁰⁵ Levin, 1994, p. 26

mean that she was spared sordid rumours about her sexual life. Her love of the game of courting, as well as a close personal friendship with Robert Dudley was some of the causes of these. But it is not to be overlooked that had she been a man these rumours would have been of far less interest. Her father, after all, was Henry VIII.

All the women mentioned above have suffered such attempts at discrediting of their sexual credit. Matilda was accused of a carnal relationship with Pope Gregory, a rumour started by her disgruntled husband²⁰⁶, and was accused of murder by Landulph of Milan.²⁰⁷ Sikelgaita was accused of poisoning her stepson to avoid him becoming a threat to her children, Orderic Vitalis even stating that she had studied the use of poisons amongst doctors in Salernitania.²⁰⁸ Melisende was accused of having a relationship with count Hugh of Anjou.²⁰⁹ Eleanor of Aquitaine the same with her uncle Raymond of Antioch²¹⁰, Helinand of Friodmont going so far as to write that Eleanor. “Behaved not like a queen but more like a whore”²¹¹ Urraca’s dignity was also called in question by bishops Juan de Soria and Rodrigo de Rada after her death by evidence of her sexual misconduct.²¹² The reality of the alleged adulterous relationships to counts Pedro de Lara and Gomez de Candespina is questions, but the allegations were real. According to Levin that this could only happen to women, for in contrast to the kings and lords of their time, who regularly had lovers and extramarital affairs, women had only their sexual credit. The men could rely on keeping their honour by being brave, generous, pious, and loyal to their word. They could therefore indulge in sexual misconduct without being alleged of being in league with the devil like Eleanor would by Matthew Paris in the mid-thirteenth century.²¹³

Another more obtuse example of this method of discrediting is the depiction of Margaret of Beverley as using a cauldron for a helmet during the siege of Jerusalem²¹⁴, which might have been an attempt to effeminate the masculine role she is inhabiting. This would be a reversal of a common trope of removing a woman that performs a traditional masculine role of her femininity. That her brother might be doing so might be him wanting to preserve his sister’s femininity, or rather her “sexual credit” even though she tried “to play the role of a

²⁰⁶ Hay 2008, p. 44

²⁰⁷ Reynolds, 2005, p. 16

²⁰⁸ Loud, 1999, p. 828

²⁰⁹ Mayer, 1972, p. 102

²¹⁰ Evans, 2014, s.19

²¹¹ Morrison, 2016, p. 65.

²¹² Ferreira, 2011. P12

²¹³ Levin, 1994, p76

²¹⁴ Morrison, 2016, p 76

man.”

Rachel Gibbons in her book about Isebeau of Bavaria mentioned the same as she points out that if a historian wishes to discredit a woman, he need only to criticise her looks and lack of chastity. “An ugly, adulterous woman who also neglects her children thus being totally beyond redemption.”²¹⁵ In their lifetime it was possible to endure consequences for their exercise of power if this proved to be unpopular. And with the rumours swirling around Urraca, she and the bishop Gelmirez was in 1117 forced to seek shelter from an angry mob. Gelmirez managed to flee whilst Urraca was seized by the crowd.²¹⁶ The *Historia Compostelana* notes the events thus. ‘After receiving a guarantee of safety from the attackers the queen left the tower. When the rabble saw her leave, they rushed her, took her and threw her to the muddy ground.’ The passage continues to describe how they tore of her clothes and left her there to be stoned by the crowd.²¹⁷ Although they stopped themselves before they could do serious harm to the queen, this was according to Heath Dillard, the equivalent to murder or rape when it came to seriousness of crime.²¹⁸ Koch asserts that this would not likely happen to a male king, as it was a unique and specific punishment designed to debase and dehumanise women. Even though she was crowned and consecrated as a queen, Koch writes, the consequences of her failures were different than those of a man. Especially when it came to the peasantry.

6.2 – Erasure

The only one present in this thesis that has no clear evidence of having any attacks on her sexual credit happen to her is Emma de Gauder, but there is little mention of her involvement in the primary sources, which is another consequence. Erasure. This affected not her, but also far more powerful women. Urraca and her sister Theresa were both turned to shadows of their former self In the *Chronicon Mundi* from 1236. The writer, Lucas de Tuy jumps directly to writing about how Alfonso VII became king of Galicia after describing in detail the circumstances of Alfonso VI’s death. As such completely erasing Urraca’s reign and creating the illusion that it was a direct succession.²¹⁹ Lucas de Tuy even styling Urraca as “Urraca Reginae” a title he would also use on multitudes of other princesses who was never crowned, thus diminishing her status in an deliberate attempt to erase the fact that Spain had

²¹⁵ Gibbons, 1996, p. 57.

²¹⁶ Koch, 2018, p. 107

²¹⁷ Falque Rey, ed., *Historia Compostellana*, bk. 1, no. 114, pp. 202-03

²¹⁸ Dillard, 1989, p 174.

²¹⁹ Ferreira, 2010, p 238

been ruled by a woman.²²⁰The slightly later Juan de Soria did not completely erase her from the line of kings, he just described her rule as incompetent.²²¹ Rodrigo of Toledo similarly does acknowledge her rule, but he shrinks it to four years, and would proceed to systematically disqualify Urraca's performance as a ruler.²²²

Eleanor suffered much the same. Odo of Deuils chronicle of the second crusade does not mention her or the kings mother involvement in it besides mentioning that they that "nearly perished because of their tears and the heat."²²³ Odo was devoted to King Louis, and therefore, when describing the aftermath of the battle of Antioch – a battle that would have happened after the rumours of Eleanor and Raymond's affair started. That this is the direct cause is difficult to prove, but he chooses to put her in the group of people he deemed not important enough to be mentioned by name.²²⁴

During the second crusade, many of the crusading kings met at a council in Acre in 1147²²⁵ to consider, according to William of Tyre "(...)The results of this great pilgrimage, the completion of such great labours, and also the enlargement of the realm.(...)"²²⁶ William of Tyre mentions Melisende, not by name but as Baldwins mother.²²⁷ when he lists the participants from the kingdom of Jerusalem, but when recording the participants of France he mentions king Louis VII, most pious king of all the Franks, but Eleanor is placed in the list of other important nobles that although worthy of remembrance, was omitted.²²⁸ William of Tyre was born in Jerusalem and notes the participants "from our own lands."²²⁹ He would become Archbishop of Tyre in 1175, a culmination of a ecclesiastical career in large part furthered by his great relationship with the royal family of Jerusalem²³⁰. Melisende. as mentioned above was a large contributor to the wealth of the churches of Jerusalem and enjoy great support from them.²³¹ These two factors explain why Melisende was noted as participating, although by familial title only, whilst Eleanor, who was in Louis VII, entourage was easier omitted. It is also fair to clarify that Melisende was Queen in co-sovereignty with Baldwin III and he until

²²⁰ Ferreira, 2010, p 238

²²¹ Ferreira, 2010, p 239

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Odo of Deuil, p 19

²²⁴ Odo of Deuil, p 11

²²⁵ Meyer, 1972, p 126

²²⁶ William of Tyre (1943) volume 2, book 16 p. 183

²²⁷ William of Tyre (1943) volume 2, book 17 p. 185

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Edbury and Rowe, 1988, pp. 15–16. Referring to him achieving the seat of Archdeacon with the support of King Alamric

²³¹ Mayer, 1972, p 98

recently, Baldwin III, born 1129 had just turned 18 in 1147 and had not yet established himself as the sole ruler that he would later become.

6.3 – Discrediting

Urraca was not regarded as a virtuous woman and she is therefore not burdened by the genre norms of hagiographical writing. When regarding the way the Compostela chronicle notes her vices as results of her female nature, it never attempted to question or undermine her or her sisters right to their respective thrones. This is fascinating and plays into the idea that although of the medieval society of the European 11th century was patriarchal, it mattered more that an individual conformed to the role they have begotten in this hierarchy, than the individuals gender as exemplified in the chapters above.

The Compostela chronicle proves this not by performing a role, but rather in referencing the role that was performed. It never states that Urraca should not be queen, only that Urraca's female nature made her a queen of vices. The labels of illegitimacy Ferreira notes Urraca and Theresa as being marked by are all at their ability or their performance, not at their rightfulness.

Eleanor of Aquitaine has in posterity been twisted into a wicked woman who would turn sons against father or as the murderer of her husband's lover. This had the outspring in her alleged infidelity and is noted thusly by William of Tyre "(...) an imprudent woman (...) the law of marriage was neglected, and the fidelity of the conjugal bed forgotten." and as mentioned before Odo of Deuil who reduced her role in the crusades to a line about her crying in the desert heat. Again, both of these remarks follow the same pattern as the Compostela chronicle, Odo regards Eleanor as unimportant to the "book of life" and William of Tyre thinks her a foolish woman but neither can deny the rightful legitimate moral authority she wields. All they can do, and all anyone has been able to do since is to attack her nature and discredit her performance and ability.

6.4 – Chapter Conclusion

As stated in the introduction not this thesis, and reiterated in this chapter, these are all consequences of elite medieval women being considered powerful by their contemporaries. If they were not, no one could bother expending effort to erase or discredit them. This happened to all those who achieve power. There was, of course, a difference in method to discredit a man, it would not rely on sexual credit, but perhaps their honour or bravery. However, when answering the question of whether elite medieval women were exceptional or had their power limited after 1050, this does not matter.

However, it is again important to understand that whilst there were attempts of erasure posthumously or contemporary discrediting. They could only attack their personality, actions, or ability, not their legitimacy. The inventions of adulterous rumours despite lack of evidence are repeated as a method purely because it is now of the few ways they could attempt to discredit these elite medieval women. Had they been exceptional they could have used the abnormality and the unprecedented nature of a female ruler to try and deny or moral and legal authority on such grounds. They did not, because they could not.

Where this becomes in complex is the posthumous erasure, however in the example of Urraca we have to remember her conflicts with the church, especially in Compostela, who did not like her. It was also dependent on whom the chronicler favoured, which explains why Odo of Deuil erases Eleanor's presence, whilst Matilda is the very focus of Donzio's work.

It would however be too far to claim that misogyny was not also a reason for this erasure. William of Tyre mentions Queen Melisende by her relation to her son, not by her name despite her being in favour with both William and the church. From this we can read that although these women were not exceptional, they were sometimes deemed unworthy of remembrance.

Chapter 7 – Are stories of 'women clad in armour' apocryphal?

The imagery of the armoured woman appearing like a knight has thus far in this thesis not been made note of, although it presents a most valid discussion: Are stories of 'women clad in armour' apocryphal? And does this reflect their ability to exercise hard power?

One of the first mentions we have in the primary sources of countess Matilda of Tuscany is that she appeared next to her mother on the borders of Tuscany in 1061 "clad in armour." Together they defeated antipope Honorius III and forced him to retreat to his diocese.²³² When she defeated Henry IV's forces at Sorbrara in 1084, she is said to have carried her father's sword as she massacred the enemy and standing in her stirrups before her troops.²³³ When the Mantuans chose to rebel in 1113, the ill Matilda shall have said. "The time has come at length when Mantua must perish. This iniquitous city shall pay the price of the affronts it has affronted me."²³⁴ Merely the appearance of the nearly seventy-year-old Matilda is said to have been enough to make the Mantuans surrender.²³⁵

Margret of Beverley is said to have tried to play the role of a man and fought like a

²³² Fraser, 1988, p 139

²³³ Fraser, 1988, p 146

²³⁴ Donizo, lib.2. c14.

²³⁵ Gillies, 1924, p 243

fierce virago. She is described as wearing a breastplate and using a cauldron for a helmet. Not dissimilarly can we read in Imad Ad-Din al-Isfahan's account of the second crusade and Eleanor of Aquitaine's participation, where he notes that there were women among them that wore "Armor like men and fought like men".²³⁶

Sikelgaita is by the contemporary Anna Komnena described to be wearing armour when she joined her husband and their army on the way to Brindisi.²³⁷ Furthermore in another passage describing her as a second Athena, and when she saw the army flee shall have shouted: 'How far will ye run? Halt! Be men!'²³⁸ Patricia Skinner describes in her book a woman that according to the primary sources appeared like a gender-role-defying Valkyrie almost twenty years before the crusades made warlike women a more visible phenomenon.²³⁹

Firth Godbehere writes that these female soldiers that couldn't be separated from the men until they were stripped from their armour was either a masculinisation of women to therefore demonize the Franks further, or to effeminate the male knights.²⁴⁰ Anna Komnena does exactly this. When she describes the wife and warrior that was Sikelgaita, she is also creating the image of an army of effeminate Normans led by a woman.²⁴¹ This claims Skinner is a reversal of the trope most commonly used by western authors towards Anna's native Byzantium. To use Sikelgaita, who was not Norman – would only rub salt in the wound.²⁴² If Skinner is right, and her theories are backed by Godbehere's assessment of this trope, it would mean that most of these stories are apocryphal, their truthfulness is dubious. It is however interesting to examine why stories of gender-defying women appeared and were circulated, even if they might not mirror the real past. Was every example listed above meant to emasculate these women and effeminate the men who served under them?

When we examine Matilda of Tuscany, it is hard to make such assumptions. The primary source of her life is written by the biographer Donizo, who was in her service. Throughout the work he praises his patron, even claiming at one point that: "She is sometimes loved, sometimes hated, by the German kings, But the German people serve her willingly, wherever she is."²⁴³ He continues to list all the people who flock to her service, be it those

²³⁶ Godbehere, 2010, p.8

²³⁷ Alexiad, I.15. 'There he stayed for a few days waiting for his wife Gaita (she went on campaign with her husband and when she donned armour she was indeed a formidable sight).'

²³⁸ Alexiad, IV.6.

²³⁹ Skinner, 2000. p 623

²⁴⁰ Godbehere, 2010, p 8

²⁴¹ Skinner, 2000. p 623

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Creber, p.1. Donizo of Canossa's Vita Mathildis in the 33rd and 34th line.

from Auvergne, Lotharingians, Franks, Frisians, Russians, Saxons gascons or even the brits. The great Matilda, he claims, have knights from all these people.²⁴⁴ Because of Donzio's likely bias we cannot trust his word explicitly, he might have conflated or exaggerated statements like this. However, what he most likely would not have done, is wrote something meant to effeminate the people who Matilda ruled in the way that Anna Komnena did.

The Muslim author Imad ad-din al-Isfahani writes that in late autumn 1189, a woman of high rank came to the Holy Land, she was accompanied by a escort of about five hundred knights who each had their retinues. Al-Isfahani grants this noblewoman far greater autonomy than Odo of Deuil did with Eleanor some forty years prior, as he writes of a woman who leads these troops in raids on the Muslim lands. There is no other contemporary Christian source to collaborate the Al-isfahani's claim, Most likely did this woman never exist. That he then went on to write that there were many female knights among the Christians, further dilutes the truthfulness of his story. The women, he claims wore armor and fought like men in battle. They could not be told apart from the men until they were killed and they were released from their armor.²⁴⁵

The theory that Godbehere presents here is the same as with Anne Komnena. The women not being recognized as such until after the battle was over implies a similarity of stature and ability of the soldiers. This could either be a masculinisation of the women to demonize the Christian forces, but it could also be a form of mockery of the male knights by effeminizing. As mentioned above, there is no collaborating contemporary source of this noble woman and her female knights, however a byzantine courtier by the name of Niketas Choniates wrote in his *Historia* a reference to a woman called Goldfoot who visited Constantinople in 1147. This was long before 1189 and almost fifty years before Choniates time, regardless his tale of a remarkable woman evoking the image of Penthesilea leading a group of women similarly evoking the image as Amazons. They rode astride the horse, not side-saddle, was dressed in men's garb and bore lances and swords.²⁴⁶ He does not claim them to be literally dressed as amazons, neither does he mention the name Eleanor of Aquitaine or that this woman was a queen. The army she is at the head of is by Choniates identified as a German army, although he does attributed victories by Louis French army to the Germans, so he has a penchant for confusing these western nations.²⁴⁷ The fact that this woman has been

²⁴⁴ Creber, p.7

²⁴⁵ Gedbehere, 2010, p.8

²⁴⁶ Choniates, 1984, p.35

²⁴⁷ Evans, 2009, p 23

identified as Eleanor is due to her being on crusade in 1147 and that she would be considered high enough rank to conceivably command enough authority to appear in such a manner.

This is disputed by Michael Evans, and he claims that modern historians refer back to sources that identify Goldfoot as Eleanor like Steven Runciman who does not cite a source of his own to why this Goldfoot must be Eleanor, simply stating that is extrapolated information from Choniates.²⁴⁸ Another Byzantine historian named John Zonaros, similarly, described women Persian warriors as a way to discredit the enemy. By way of using the imagery of a female warrior of show the difference and otherness of their cultures.²⁴⁹ For these reasons it does not actually matter to this thesis if this woman was meant to be Eleanor, as it is highly likely she never existed and was merely a trope of propaganda. Still for the question of whether the women clad in armor is apocryphal or not, it does matter, regardless of whom this woman actually was meant to be.

Goldfoot, like Sikelgaita, like the Persian warrior women, perhaps even as Matilda are all examples of the trope of a woman performing a masculine role used as a means of belittling an enemy. When Donizo proudly proclaims of Matilda's deeds clad in armor in the stirrups of her horse²⁵⁰, he might have done it – unconsciously or consciously – in the same matter, though reversed, as she was victorious. She too, like Goldfoot, was compared to Penthesilea on her tomb.²⁵¹

7.1 – Hagiographical writing

Most of this thesis have utilized chronicles and annals to examine the lives and accomplishment of the active political women. Some of these have used the literary devices and genre tropes of hagiographical writing, and as such it is important to highlight the influence it has had on the primary sources.

It is first and foremost important to clarify that none of the above are in fact examples of hagiography, since none of the women have been canonized as saints. However. Gail Ashton defines a practice of exaltation of any who performs *Imitatio Christi*. The emphasis lies on the individual's voluntary and involuntary devotion to the Passion, and imitations of his suffering, ascetism, fleshly mortification or miracles.²⁵² James Head defines is as “writing about the saints” or more directly translated from its original Greek: Holy Writing.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Evans, 2009, p 24

²⁴⁹ Evans, 2009, p 25

²⁵⁰ Fraser, p 146, 1988

²⁵¹ Fraser, p 146, 1988

²⁵² Asthon, 2000, p.2

²⁵³ Head, 2000, p 3

Similarly to Ashton he describes the characters in these narratives as key members of the Christian communities, who were wise, chaste or martyrs.²⁵⁴ Not all who exhibits these qualities or performs these actions become saints, they had to be recognized and canonized. Something that could differ from region to region. Hagiographical texts helped create this recognition.²⁵⁵ There are also cases where people would appear as side-characters in hagiographical works of other saints and through them be instilled with some of the same virtues, as Reynolds notes of Matilda of Tuscany appearing in the hagiographical text of a Gregorian bishop-saint.²⁵⁶

Because hagiographical texts became a way to commemorate especially virtuous women, it is not unreasonable to assume that its genre features appear in descriptors of the women this thesis has worked with. This is especially clear in the story of Margaret of Beverley, who after the siege of Jerusalem was captured and forced into a fifteen-month long slavery.²⁵⁷ She tells of humiliating work, torments, and punishment for disobedience, but also that she survived because of her faith. It is not entirely *Imitatio Christi* but the imagery of someone having to suffer as a test of their faith is a common biblical narrative device. For example, in Job's book. Were the pious Job is made to suffer because God wanted to see if he only was pious because of all he had. Margarets slavery is then ended by a pious Tyrian whose joy over a newborn son caused their liberty.²⁵⁸ Again God is credited with her fortune, and one can interpret the son as a gift from God as a reward for Margaret's faith. The imagery of ascetism continue when she in the next passages avoids towns and settlements and was garbed only in a sack, with her only possession being a psalter. This would be taken from her by a Turk at the edge of a forest. Filled with sorrow she walked away, but then he called to her and repented, returning her book, and throwing himself at her feet.²⁵⁹ This passage ends with Margaret asking the question why. But the narrative in its explicit mention of the psalter, a book of psalms does hint at it being due to him reading the word of God.

In Goodich article about 13th century hagiography, he mentions Jacqueline of Rome and Hugolina of Vercelli who fled the prospect of marriage by dressing as a man. Saint Tecla,

²⁵⁴ Head, 2000, p 4

²⁵⁵ Head, 2000, p 5

²⁵⁶ Reynolds, 2005, p 9

²⁵⁷ Bibliothèque des Croisades, ed. Michaud (Paris: Ducollet, 1829), III.569-575

²⁵⁸ Bibliothèque des Croisades, ed. Michaud (Paris: Ducollet, 1829), III.569-575

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

he writes, would spend many years walking about dressed as a man after renouncing her family.²⁶⁰ These stories occur in similarity of other tales of women having to dress as a man to escape male pursuers through history,²⁶¹ If we are to view this as more metaphorical it is a trope in which women to escape either societal pressure, prosecution or prejudice has to take on a male visage. The suggestion of the religious meaning is according to Goodich an androgynous identification with the saviour, regardless of gender or sex.²⁶² We could therefore see any attempt, as with Margaret of Beverley's proclamation that she wore a breastplate and fought like a man.²⁶³ Of the other pious women in this thesis, we can count Matilda of Tuscany and Sikelgaita of Salerno as being represented in some way as dressing as a man, they all is said to have worn armor and male clothing, with the exception of Matilda whom only is mentioned as having owned armor by Vedriani, whom claims her armour was sold on a market he attended in 1622.²⁶⁴

7.2 – The warrior queens of the past

Contrastingly to being a part of a trope of dressing as a man, both Sikelgaita²⁶⁵ and Matilda²⁶⁶ are compared to the warrior queen Penthesilea. There is a recurring theme in the Middle Ages that women had been fighting in the past, and that this is not altogether impossible. In a letter to Heloise Peter the Venerable mentions that it is not exceptional that women should be commanding men²⁶⁷, we have seen this with Melisende, Urraca, Margaret and Matilda. The latter two with rather more success than the former two, but that they could command even when their ability was not exceptional is interesting.

Peter the Venerable continues to explain that it is not even unprecedented that women would take up arms and follow men to war, using again the reference of the Amazon warrior queen Penthesilea who is said to have fought in the Trojan war. The frequent use of a fictional person is probably twofold, on one hand she is a larger-than-life persona that becomes an ideal to ascribe to, but on another she was well known enough that a reference to her would be understood. Of real women fighting or commanding troops there is rather few instances, some

²⁶⁰ Goodich, 1981, p 25

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Morrison, 2016, p 76

²⁶⁴ Fraser, p 135, 1988

²⁶⁵ Kyriakis, 1974, s.103

²⁶⁶ Inscription of Matilda's tomb at St. Peter's Basilica, translated 'This warrior-woman disposed her troops as the Amazonian Penthesilea is accustomed to do. Thanks to her – through so many contests of horrid war – man was never able to conquer the rights of God.'

²⁶⁷ Blythe, 2001, s. 245

are mentioned here, and of these are Sikelgaita of Salerno the most famous. However there is a reason why these stories have survived. It was, according to Blythe, seen as 'Believe-it-or-not' marvels. This serve as proof that even though there might have been that many actual women commanding troops or participating in battle. The fascination with women who did was widespread and prove that it was something that was considered both commendable and noteworthy.²⁶⁸

When talking about the apocryphal nature of women clad in armour one have to consider the difference between what is factually true and what is psychologically. In the paragraph above we see that even though the reality of female military participation was rather scarce, Blythe claims that the concept was widespread and caused fascination. Should we completely disregard anything that cannot factually be proven? This thesis is examining the possibility as much as it is examining the performing. A fictional story can't be used to understand what happened or when, they can if analyzed correctly say why or how. Literature commonly does one of two things, reflect the society it was written in, or attacks it.

Although his quote is particularly directed towards oral history, these words from Portelli ring as true when we are examining fiction as it is also a reflection of a persons inner psychology.

*"Once we have checked their factual credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consist in the fact that *wrong* statements are still psychologically 'true' and this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts."*²⁶⁹

When Christine de Pizan wrote *The City of Ladies*, she attacks the common didactics that were used to describe women in her time (and also before) The book can't be used to tell us anything about the women she writes about directly, it is primarily fiction. But it does tell us a lot about what was written about women, descriptions of their duplicitous nature, as well as small mindedness and lust. These are all traits de Pizan finds issue with. Whilst it's easy to understand for a modern person to see why, it tells us about how deep-seated some of these views of the feminine nature was, just by the effort she makes to disprove them. And at the same time, the way in which she praises these women, by being good Christians, pure and

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Portelli, s.37

unspoiled etc.

This tells us a lot about which limits someone that could be thought of as radical in their time had. So, what then above the women participating in the military? The sources do not, in most cases, support the notion that this was a factual reality. What we have of Donizo about Matilda of Tuscany or of Anne Komnena about Sikelgaita is colored by their political afflictions and cannot be evidence alone. When Imad Ad-Din al-Isfahan writes above soldiers who were unmasked as men²⁷⁰ its much the same, his religious motivations for a feminization and othering of the enemy means that he is unreliable. However, the possibility can be proven by accounts such as these. In Portelli's word, although it might be actually true, it might have been psychologically true and therefore have been accepted as such. If the notion that Matilda of Tuscany would stand in her stirrups in front of the opposing army²⁷¹ was unheard of no one would have believed Donizo. If the stories of women dressed in armour is not apocryphal, something only the past known for sure, it was made possible due to stories, legends and myths depicting female military participation.

7.3 – Chapter Conclusion

The matter of the apocryphal nature of 'women clad in armour' is impossible to completely affirm by the nature of the question. Yes it is doubtful that women donned armour and participated in battles, especially in the capacity of hundreds like Al-Isfahan or Komnena. However, that individuals like Sikelgaita or Matilda did once or twice might be true.

It is therefore the nature of such imagery that matters because the imagery will tell us what was perceived to be true even if it did not happen in reality. In this case we could argue that female warriors are not apocryphal, not only because of their appearance in the sources, but also these sources belief that they could include such imagery and still be deemed credible by their contemporaries. Had the intended audience not be perceptible to believe the notion that women could don armour – even if the thought it effeminized the men in the same army – they would not write it.

The hagiographical implications of women participating militarily should not be ignored either. The idea of your faith being tested through hardship is exemplified with the writings about Margaret of Beverley, and that she suffered as a result of a siege in the holy land is not coincidental either. Similarly, Matilda being mentioned with the "by the grace of God" epithet is no coincidence either. Her successes against Henry IV are written about as a

²⁷⁰ Gedbehere, 2010, p.8

²⁷¹ Fraser, p 146, 1988

direct result of her support of the papacy.

In difference to the other chapter conclusions in this thesis, what is obvious is that any case of a woman donning armour and participating in the battle itself have to be considered exceptional. Even in Matilda's case it is mentioned only once that she stood in the stirrups before her troops, the other time she is mentioned as present but not on the frontline. Sikelgaita too is mentioned in armour once but is mostly referred to as a commander, not soldier. This, however, does not denote or detract from these elite medieval women's ability to exercise hard power as their participation in such exercise beyond frontline fighting is not exceptional. Especially as male equivalents did not often put their life on the line in such a manner. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude with the fact that although the stories of women in armour are apocryphal, they still could exercise hard power.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The main focus of this thesis is to attempt to disprove the Wemple and McNamara paradigm which assumed that elite women's access to power declined after 1050 by comparing multiple examples from throughout Europe in this period in which their access to power had declined. The necessity of the broad selection of research objects was to disprove that any of these could be considered exceptional. This means that when the assertion that they were not exceptional is made, it is made with enough empirical evidence to back such an assertion.

This conclusion occurs mainly due to the difference between this thesis appliance of source material and Wemple and McNamara. They asserted the theoretical possibilities due to what was considered the norms in the chronicles annals and letters they had. For example, they would assert that due to the rise of primogeniture, women's access to power declined. The hereditary system of male primogeniture did primarily favor men. But in the cases were for example a king died without a son, or the son was not yet of age. The eldest daughter, the king's sister or his wife might assume regency. This was an accepted and expected result if such circumstances did arise. In theory, they are correct the path to power was more clearly defined to not favor women but in the cases were they were the legitimate ruler, favored by the system, they would exercise soft and hard power to the extent that would have been accepted of them if they were a man.

Tanner asks how many of these examples of exceptional women must we have before they can no longer be considered exceptional. And in the book in which she is the editor *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power* there is many examples of elite medieval women who in the paradigm of "beyond exceptionalism" would prove that women could gain

power also after 1050. However, there are not made comparisons in this book, neither have many of the sources used in this thesis. Koch's comparative study of Urraca, Melisende and Matilda of England is the only one who achieves this goal. This is why this thesis has thoroughly applied comparative methods to prove the unexceptionalism. Because by comparing examples and show the similarities we can assume that these trends also apply to examples outside of the framework of this thesis.

We could assert through comparisons of their biographies alone that the way they achieved their power mattered in their ability to exercise said power, Inheriting power, which in turn meant gaining legitimate legal and moral authority, meant that you could not be pushed aside by a spouse. There are examples of this happening to both men and women, Eleanor and Welf bot experienced this. To some regard also King Fulk was pushed aside by Melisende. This did not mean that they could not exercise power at all, but rather that such power would be far more limited. We also see that the wives of male rulers still could perform soft power, like Margaret of Beverley, and hard power, like Sikelgaita. They could further their own political agenda, defend their lands or even revolt against their spouse. This they did much in the same way as the male spouses did. Eleanor and Alfonso I is comparative examples of this.

This is because their system of inheritance would sometimes favor a woman, something their subjects acknowledged and accepted. Their ability to autonomously exercise power however must be concludes as being affected in the presence of male authority. This we have clear examples of, both King Fulk and Baldwin III was a limiting factor on Melisende, Alfonso I on Urraca, and in her marriages Eleanor would struggle to exert power outside of Aquitaine. This is because they often had spouses of similar or higher standing. Fulk and Baldwin II was coruler, Alfonso I was a king, Matilda however married counts and did not suffer such a struggle.

This was not limited to soft power either. Their position demanded they would wield hard power, and they did. There were differences in how they exercised the hard power associated with it due to ability, but it is clear that it was expected of them to delegate or take part in military action. Still, to rule was to wield hard power, as we can see I the example of Melisende that her inability to do so sufficiently lost her much of the power she had, even though she was excellent at exercising her soft power. These were not isolated examples sporadically found in exceptional women but rather a clear trend amongst female rulers. Had they only been able to exercise hard power in the cases were their ability to do so was great, as the case was with Matilda, one could reasonably argue that she was exceptional. However,

when we repeatedly find examples of women having to exert hard power even when their ability is lacking, we have to conclude that this was expected, unexceptional, and part of what it meant to be an elite medieval woman who has inherited her title.

That their power was expected and affirmed by their subjects is evidenced by the reactions to their rule. Of course, misogyny was present in the Middle Ages, but to claim a woman could not rule due to her gender was not done. It could be implied by attacking vices most commonly associated in women, but it was restricted to allusions. The only example in this text of someone expressly being told they should not be ruled by a woman was Baldwin III. But it is important to note that this happened in private conversations and meetings and were not feelings expressed to the public.

They would gain rivals and enemies who would attempt to discredit their rule. But to receive a negative reaction is to be powerful enough to illicit such a reaction, any case of erasure, defamation or discrediting is merely evidence of these women's power. This also proves that the power in fact considered legitimate by contemporaries. Had they considered the presence of a woman on the throne impossible and not just a rare but normal occurrence, their means of discrediting would not have been limited to attacking vices, ability, or honor. Proving the unexceptionalism of these women is proving that contemporaries would not think a female ruler unreasonable. They did not claw their way to the top but were privileged by birthright. Allegations of adultery was a way to discredit them as rulers by attacking sexual honor, which was in their eyes the most important honor a woman had, it would be comparable to calling a male ruler a coward or an oath breaker, and they would only do so because they had no other way to attack her legitimacy. That they had people who wished to discredit them is not unique to their gender and is, again, merely a testament to them being unexceptional and powerful.

There are also evidence in the fictional narratives and inventions about these women present in contemporary writing to say that a female soldier or military leader was possible. Even if the sources do not collaborate the existence of female soldiers, there was acceptance for such an idea. This meant that although it might not have been true in actuality, it was true mentally. Contemporary writers and scholars accepted histories of female military leaders as fact, not fiction. There are many reasons for why it was not often the case in reality, although Sikelgaita and Matilda is claimed to be two such cases. Lack of Military education was one of them, the fact that they did not need to prove their bravery another. However, that they could have, if presented the right opportunities and circumstances seems likely when examining the contemporary sources.

These women were not exceptions to the proposed fact that centralized government and primogeniture made women's access to power decline substantially. This was true theoretically, but not practically. In fact, because of the more rigid hereditary system being introduced, there was great acceptance for the outcome of a female ruler. Matilda was never questioned, the revolts against Urraca were because of displeasure with her husband, and Melisende was groomed to be an heir long before her father's death. What mattered to their subjects was not necessarily the gender of the heir, although the ruler might go to great lengths to secure a male heir, but that they were invested with legitimate moral and legal authority due to adherence to the hereditary system of primogeniture.

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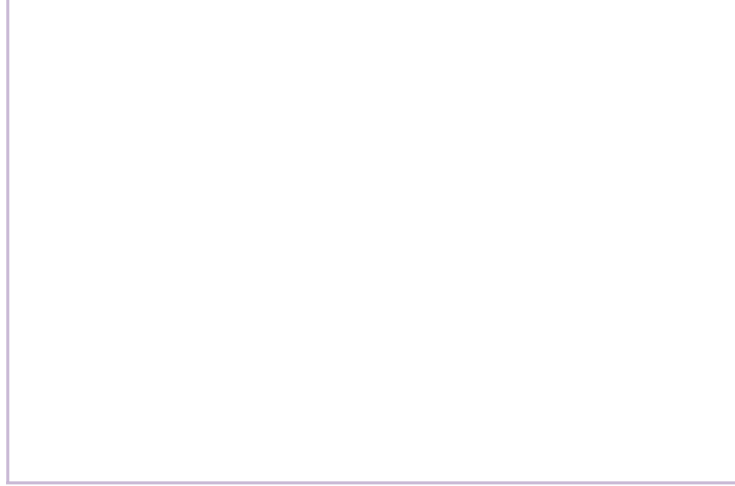
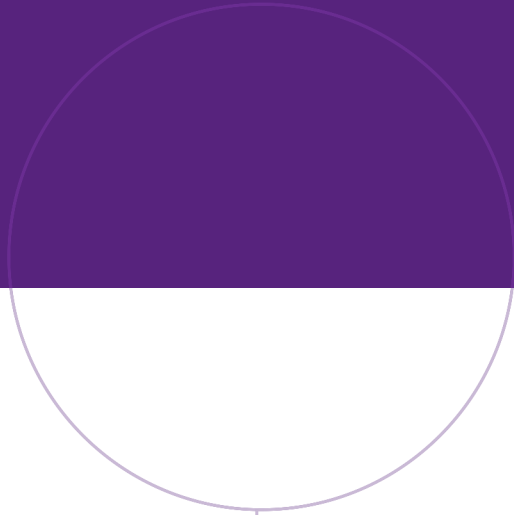
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